



Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

A Hidden Common Ground Report

By David Schleifer, Will Friedman and Erin McNally
November 2021

Executive Summary

This Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground report focuses on affective polarization, meaning negative feelings towards people whose political views differ from one's own. Findings from this nationally representative survey of American adults, fielded in September 2021, include:

- 1. Americans are united in thinking that partisan hostility and divisiveness harm the country and want a less contentious nation.** Across the political spectrum and demographic groups, Americans believe that partisan hostility among ordinary people and among politicians are both very serious problems. Most agree that partisanship has made it more difficult to conduct elections and deal with the economic and health impacts of the pandemic. Half of Americans also say partisan divisiveness has made solving problems in their community more difficult and one-third say it has strained personal relationships. A growing share of people worries that Americans do not know how to disagree constructively and have too many fundamental disagreements and conflicting values. Few Americans are optimistic that partisan hostility will decrease in the next ten years, though most wish it would, and many believe there are viable ways to bridge our divides.
- 2. Most Americans actually do not have strongly unfavorable feelings towards either Democratic or Republican voters.** Across the political spectrum, only 30 percent of Americans have very unfavorable feelings towards either Democratic or Republican voters. Those who feel the most unfavorably, whether towards Democratic or Republican voters, are especially likely to feel that divisiveness negatively impacts their lives and the nation. However, 20 percent of Americans feel just moderately unfavorably toward Democratic or Republican voters and another 23 percent feel only a little unfavorably towards voters on either side. People who feel the least unfavorably, whether towards Democratic or Republican voters, are especially likely to have friends with different political viewpoints, to believe that differences of opinion are good for our country, and to believe that they can learn something by talking to people with opposing views. Eleven percent of Americans actually feel favorably toward both Democratic and Republican voters and 16 percent do not know how they feel.

3. **Most Americans believe in the value of differences of opinion and dialogue, and many are trying to connect across partisan lines.** Most Americans say they can learn something by talking to people with opposing views, and almost half say they have had constructive conversations about politics with people with opposing views. A modest majority of Americans, including a substantial majority of Democrats, think that organized community dialogue would bring the country together.
4. **A strong cross-partisan majority of Americans believe that the federal government should ensure voting rights for all, and a more modest majority believe that doing so would actually bring the country together. By contrast, partisan differences of opinion emerge starkly when people are asked about federal policies directly aimed at combating racism.** An 86 percent majority of Americans, including a large majority of Republicans, believe that the federal government should ensure voting rights, and a 57 percent majority believes that doing so would bring the country together. Nearly half of Americans believe that each state creating its own voting rules would actually drive the country further apart. When it comes to federal efforts to combat racism, twice as many Democrats as Republicans believe that such policies would help unify the country. Moreover, far fewer Republicans than people of other political affiliations believe that it would be good for the country to continue becoming more diverse.
5. **To bring the country together, Americans agree on the need for better news and information; and, most want social media to stop amplifying divisiveness.** When asked about thirteen measures that might help bring the country together, Americans see the greatest potential in more accurate, trustworthy news and information. Cross-partisan majorities specifically emphasize the potential of solutions-focused, non-partisan news. Most social media users have felt fed up with how people talk about politics online, and half of them say they have posted about Americans' common ground in the past year.
6. **Across partisan lines, most Americans agree that reducing the influence of money in politics would help bring the country together. Many people also believe that educational approaches would help unify the country.** Democrats especially believe that teaching students to deal with conflicts constructively, making higher education affordable, and national service would help unify the country. Majorities or pluralities of Americans across political affiliations support teaching students about both the nation's shortcomings and its achievements.

The report concludes with reflections on the findings and implications for addressing affective polarization.

Methodology in Brief

This report summarizes findings from a nationally representative survey of 2,345 adult Americans 18 years and older. The survey was designed by Public Agenda and fielded September 20 to 28, 2021 by Ipsos. Respondents completed the survey in English. When referencing this report, please cite Public Agenda.

The sample was randomly drawn from Ipsos' online panel, partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling. Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2018 American Community Survey data. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, and education. Unfortunately, the sample size of this survey was not large enough to compare the views of Asian Americans to those of Black, Latino and white Americans.

For a complete methodology, including a topline with full question wording and cross tabulations by political affiliation, please go to <https://www.publicagenda.org/reports/partisan-animosity/> or email research@publicagenda.org.

The Kettering Foundation served as a collaborator in this research. This research is supported in part by the Charles Koch Institute and Civic Health Project.

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About the Hidden Common Ground® Initiative

This Public Agenda/USA TODAY report is part of the Hidden Common Ground initiative, spearheaded by Public Agenda and USA TODAY, with the National Issues Forums Institute, the America Amplified public media consortium, and America Talks. Through research, journalism and public engagement, Hidden Common Ground is designed to help Americans identify and strengthen their common ground, productively navigate their differences, and help create fair and effective solutions to the challenges of our time.

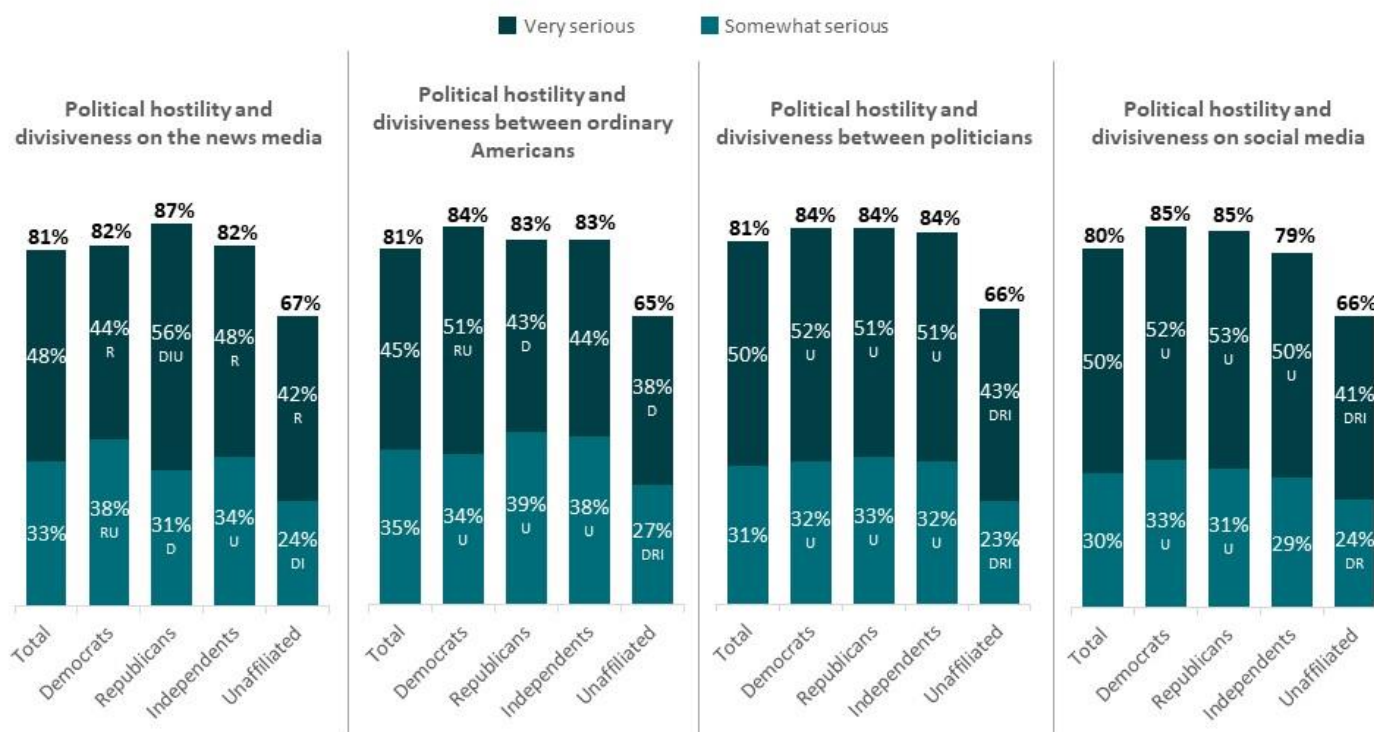
FINDING 1. AMERICANS ARE UNITED IN THINKING THAT PARTISAN HOSTILITY AND DIVISIVENESS HARM THE COUNTRY AND WANT A LESS CONTENTIOUS NATION.

Majorities of Americans across the political spectrum and regardless of race, age, gender and geography believe that political hostility and divisiveness between ordinary Americans is a serious problem. Roughly equal shares of Americans feel partisan hostility between ordinary people, between politicians, in the news media, and on social media are serious problems; see Figure 1.

Nearly three-quarters of Americans (72 percent) think it would be a good thing for our country if the American people reject political hostility and divisiveness and focus more on their common ground. But only nine percent of Americans think that political hostility and divisiveness between ordinary Americans will decrease in the next ten years. Instead, a 42 percent plurality thinks it will increase; see Figure 2.

Americans believe that partisan hostility among ordinary people, among politicians, in the news media and on social media are all serious problems.

Figure 1. Percent who say each of the following are a serious problem, by political affiliation:



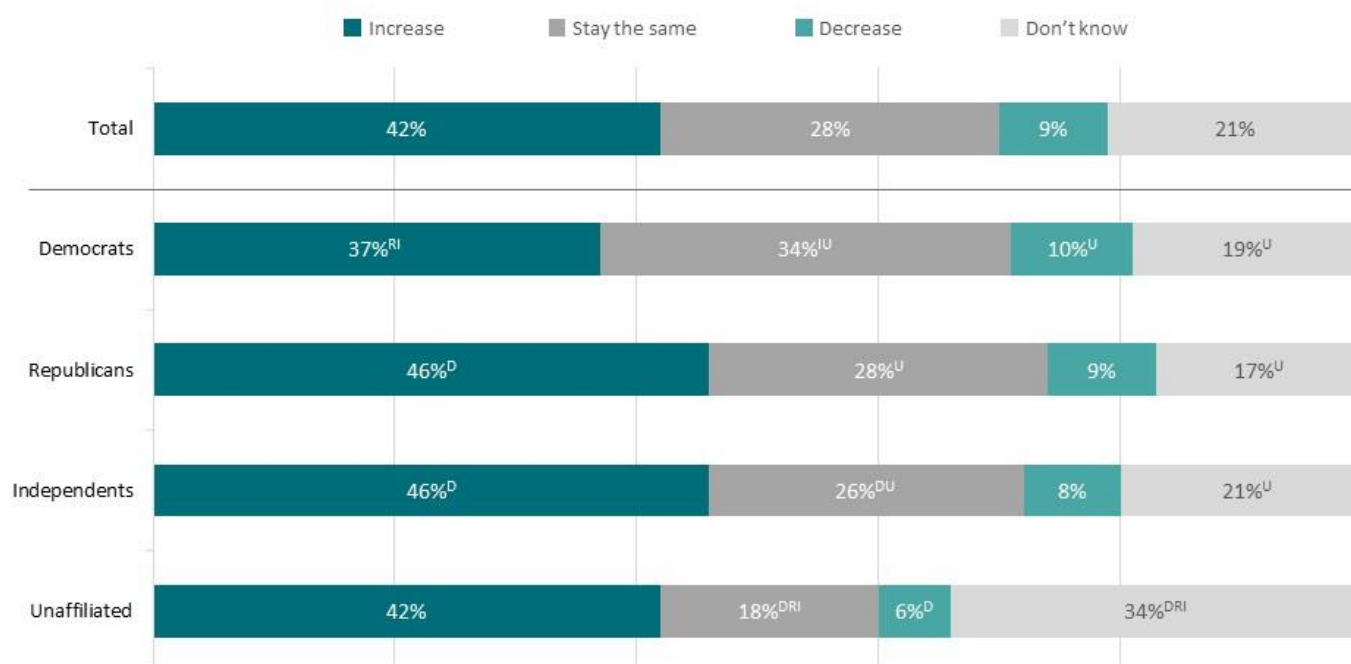
Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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Few Americans think that political hostility and divisiveness between ordinary Americans will decrease in the next decade.

Figure 2. Percent who say whether political hostility and divisiveness between ordinary Americans will increase, decrease, stay the same in the next ten years, or that they do not know, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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TWO-THIRDS OF AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT DIVISIVENESS HAS MADE DEALING WITH THE PANDEMIC AND CONDUCTING ELECTIONS MORE DIFFICULT, AND ONE-THIRD SAY IT HAS STRAINED PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

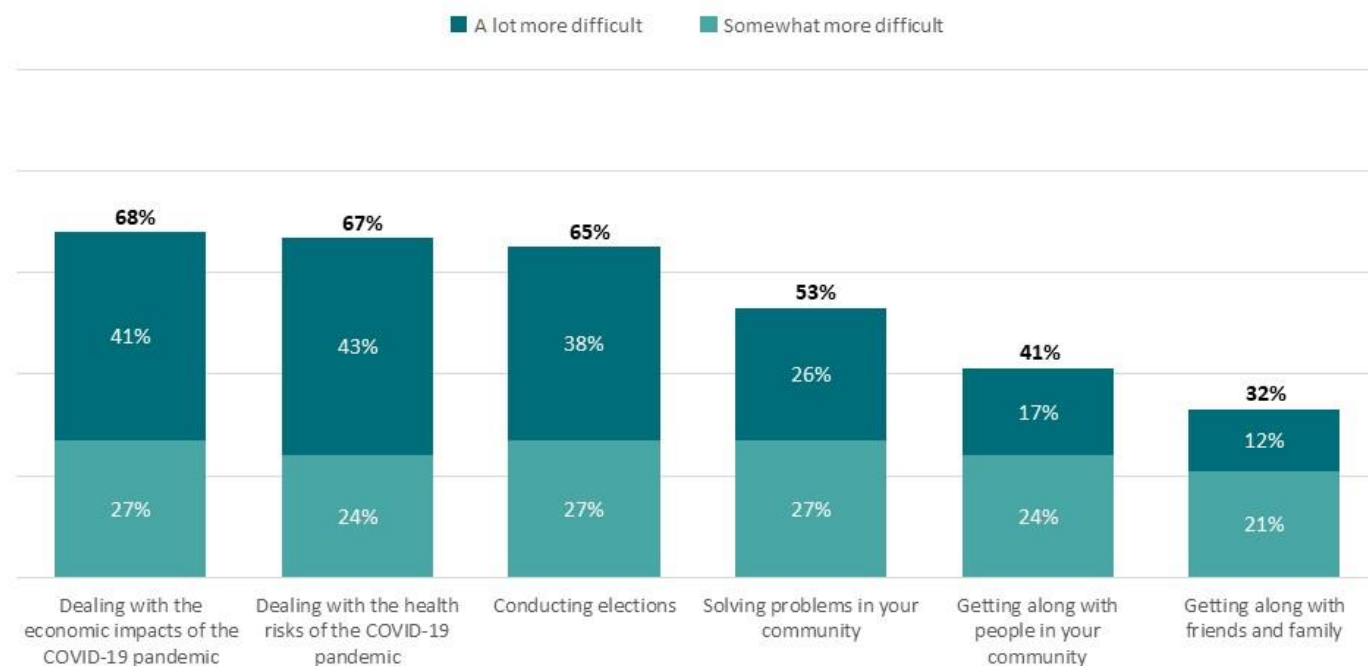
Most Americans believe political divisiveness has made dealing with both the economic impacts and health risks of the COVID-19 pandemic a lot or somewhat more difficult. Most also believe that such divisiveness has made conducting elections more difficult, including similar proportions of Democrats, Republicans and Independents. Half say it has made solving problems in their community more difficult, again with little difference between Democrats, Republicans and Independents; see Figure 3.¹

¹ The Independent subgroup includes those who self-identify as Independents, without respect to whether they “lean” Democratic or Republican. The “politically unaffiliated” subgroup includes those who have no preference towards political affiliation with the three dominant categories of political affiliations (Republican, Democrat, or Independent) or skipped the question, “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as...”. In previous Hidden

Political divisiveness also takes a personal toll. One-third of Americans say divisiveness has made getting along with friends or family more difficult, with only minor differences between Democrats, Republicans and Independents; see Figure 3. Two previous Public Agenda Hidden Common Ground surveys, conducted earlier in 2021 and 2019, also found that about one-third of Americans said that destructive partisan disagreements and divisiveness had affected their personal lives.²

Most Americans believe that partisanship has made dealing with the pandemic and conducting elections more difficult, and one-third say it has strained personal relationships.

Figure 3. Percent who say how much more difficult political divisiveness has made the following:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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Common Ground surveys, we referred to political unaffiliated people as “apolitical.” It is likely that a small number of unaffiliated respondents actually are affiliated with small political parties.

² Public Agenda, 2021, [“America’s Hidden Common Ground on Overcoming Divisiveness;”](#) Public Agenda, 2019, [“Divisiveness and Collaboration in American Public Life.”](#)

A GROWING SHARE OF AMERICANS WORRY THAT PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW HOW TO CONSTRUCTIVELY DISAGREE AND THAT OUR COUNTRY HAS TOO MANY FUNDAMENTAL DISAGREEMENTS AND CONFLICTING VALUES.

A 50 percent plurality of Americans worry equally that people have fundamental disagreements and conflicting values and that people don't know how to talk about their disagreements and conflicts in constructive ways, with only minor differences between Democrats, Republicans and Independents; see Figure 4.

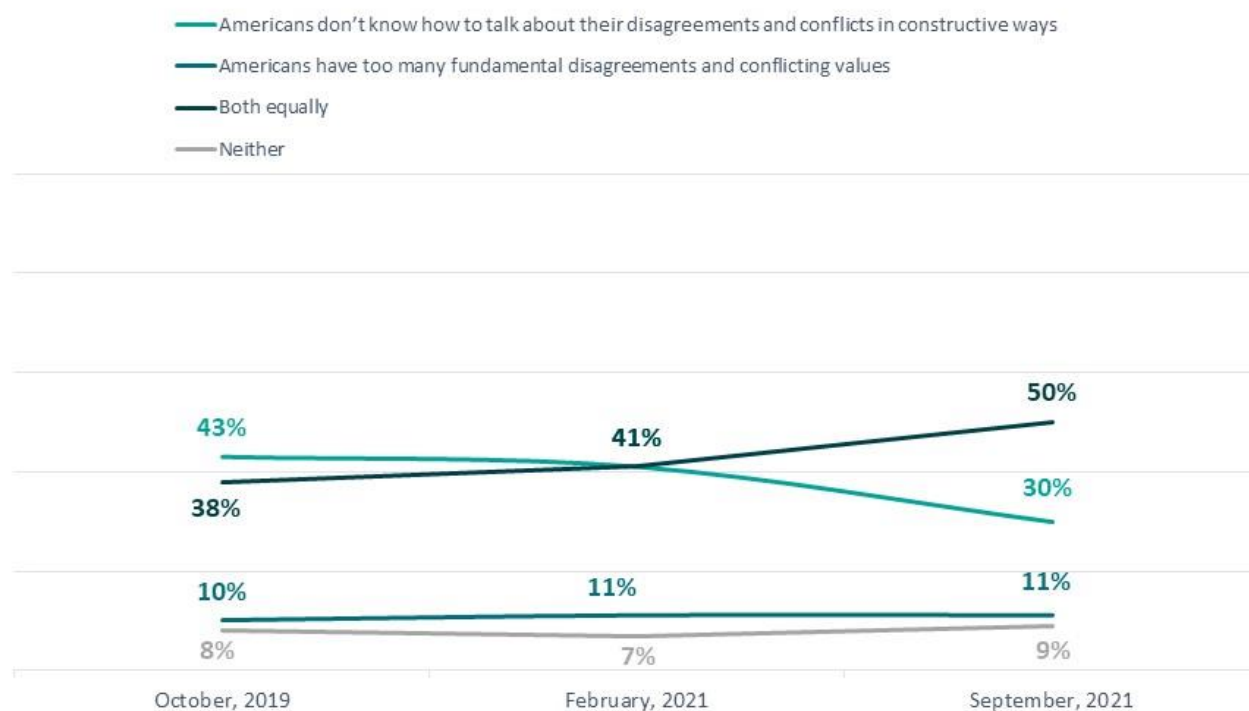
Compared to previous Public Agenda surveys, this represents a growing share of people who say they worry about *both* of these issues.³ Only one-third say they mostly worry that Americans don't know how to talk about their disagreements and conflicts in constructive ways. Relatively few people (11 percent) say they mostly worry about Americans having too many fundamental disagreements and conflicting values. Worry about both of these issues grew among Democrats, Republicans and Independents; see Figure 4.

This growing concern about fundamental disagreements and conflicting values could reflect a response to anti-democratic extremism, which might be leading fewer Americans to believe that the nation's divisiveness problem is solely a matter of an inability to deal with differences constructively. Instead, more people may now be thinking that America's disagreements are more profound than they had realized and perhaps even that they are irreconcilable.

³ *ibid.*

A growing share of Americans worry that people do not know how to constructively disagree and that our country has too many fundamental disagreements and conflicting values.

Figure 4. Percent of Americans who worry more about each of the following, October 2019, February 2021, and September 2021 surveys:



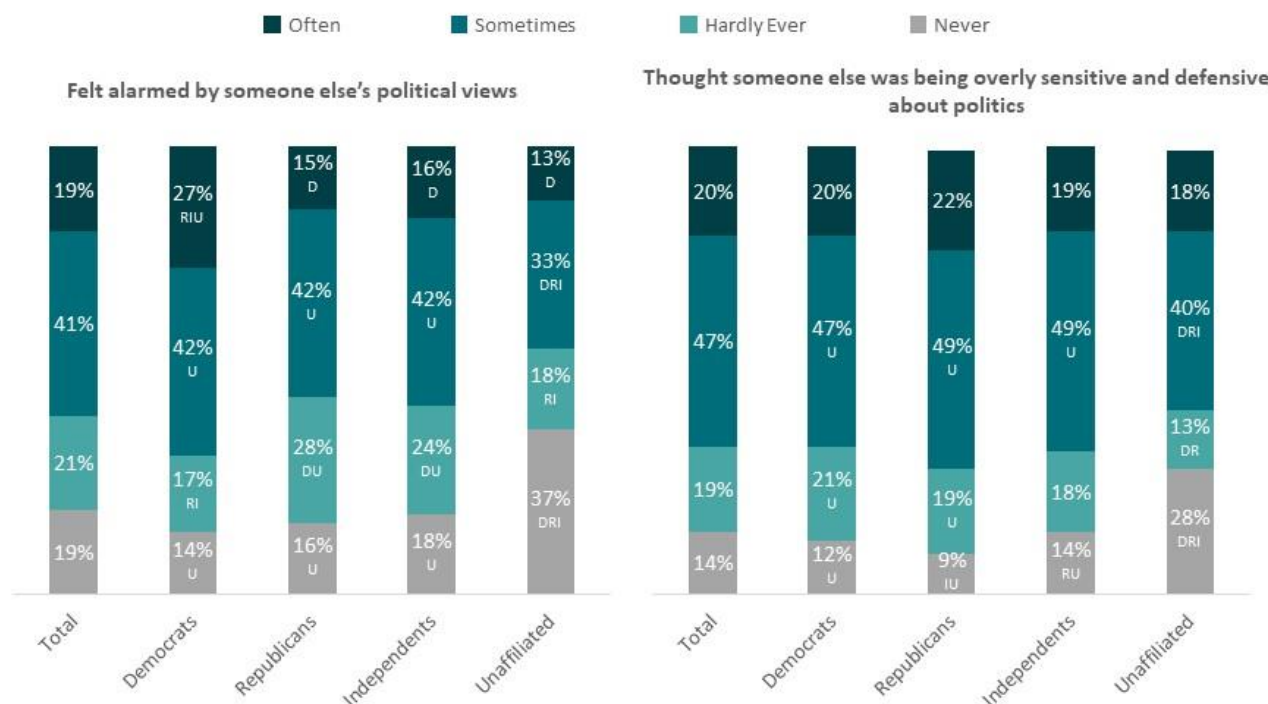
Base: September 2021: All respondents, n=2,345; February 2021: All respondents, n=1,283; October 2019: All respondents, n=1,548

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Nearly as many Americans say they have felt alarmed by someone else's political views in the last twelve months as say they have thought someone was being overly sensitive and defensive about politics; see Figure 5. Compared to people of other political affiliations, slightly more Democrats than people of other political affiliations have felt alarmed by someone's views over the last twelve months.

Nearly as many Americans have felt alarmed by someone's political views as have thought someone was being overly sensitive about politics.

Figure 5. Percent of Americans who say how often, if at all, they have done the following in the last twelve months, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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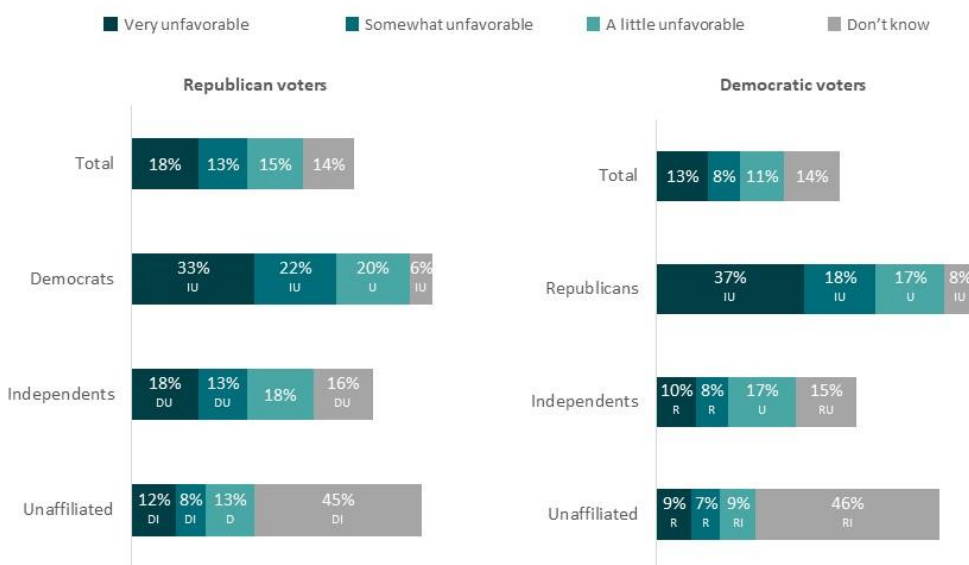
FINDING 2. MOST AMERICANS ACTUALLY DO NOT HAVE STRONGLY UNFAVORABLE FEELINGS TOWARDS EITHER DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN VOTERS.

Not surprisingly, most Democrats and most Republicans feel at least a little unfavorably towards voters from the other political party. Democrats and Republicans feel even more negatively toward each other's politicians than toward voters of the opposing party; see Figures 6 and 7.

But a substantial number of Americans do not align themselves with either party, and instead identify as either Independents or are politically unaffiliated. Independents tend to feel more unfavorably towards Republican voters than Democratic voters. They also tend to feel more unfavorably towards Republican politicians than Democratic ones. Politically unaffiliated people stand out for how many say they are unsure about their feelings towards voters or politicians on either side; see Figures 6 and 7.

More Independents feel unfavorably towards Republican voters than towards Democratic voters.

Figure 6. Percent who say how they feel toward the following types of voters, by political affiliation:



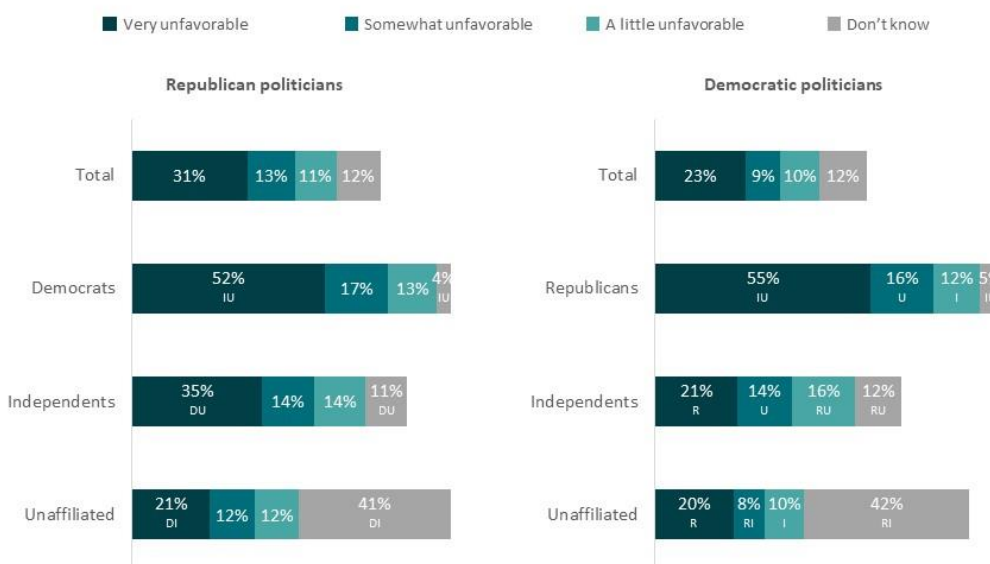
Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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Americans tend to feel especially unfavorably towards Democratic and Republican politicians.

Figure 7. Percent who say how they feel toward the following types of politicians, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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OVERALL, ONLY ONE-THIRD OF AMERICANS FEEL VERY UNFAVORABLY TOWARDS EITHER DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN VOTERS. MORE THAN 4 IN 10 AMERICANS FEEL JUST MODERATELY OR ONLY A LITTLE UNFAVORABLY TOWARD VOTERS FROM EITHER SIDE.

Across the political spectrum, just 30 percent of all Americans have very unfavorable feelings towards either Republican or Democratic voters. This includes 18 percent of Americans who feel very unfavorably towards Republican voters, 13 percent who feel very unfavorably towards Democratic voters and one percent who feel very unfavorably towards both sides; see Figure 8.

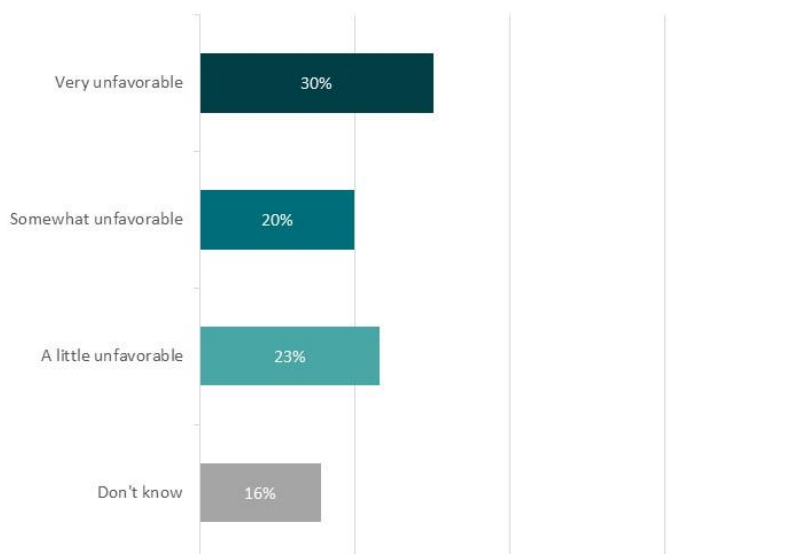
Twenty percent of Americans feel somewhat unfavorably towards either Democratic or Republican voters. This includes 13 percent of Americans who feel somewhat unfavorably towards Republican voters, eight percent who feel somewhat unfavorably towards Democratic voters and one percent who feel somewhat unfavorably towards both sides; see Figure 8.

Another 23 percent of Americans feel only a little unfavorably towards either Democratic or Republican voters. This includes 15 percent of Americans who feel a little unfavorably towards Republican voters, 11 percent who feel a little unfavorably towards Democratic voters, and three percent feeling a little unfavorably towards both sides; see Figure 8.

Eleven percent of Americans feel some degree of favorability towards Democratic and Republican voters, while 16 percent of Americans do not know how they feel towards voters on either side.

Only one-third of Americans feel very unfavorably towards either Democratic or Republican voters. More than 4 in 10 Americans feel only moderately or just a little unfavorably toward voters from either side.

Figure 8. Percent who say how unfavorably they feel toward either Democratic or Republican voters:



Base: All respondents n=2,345

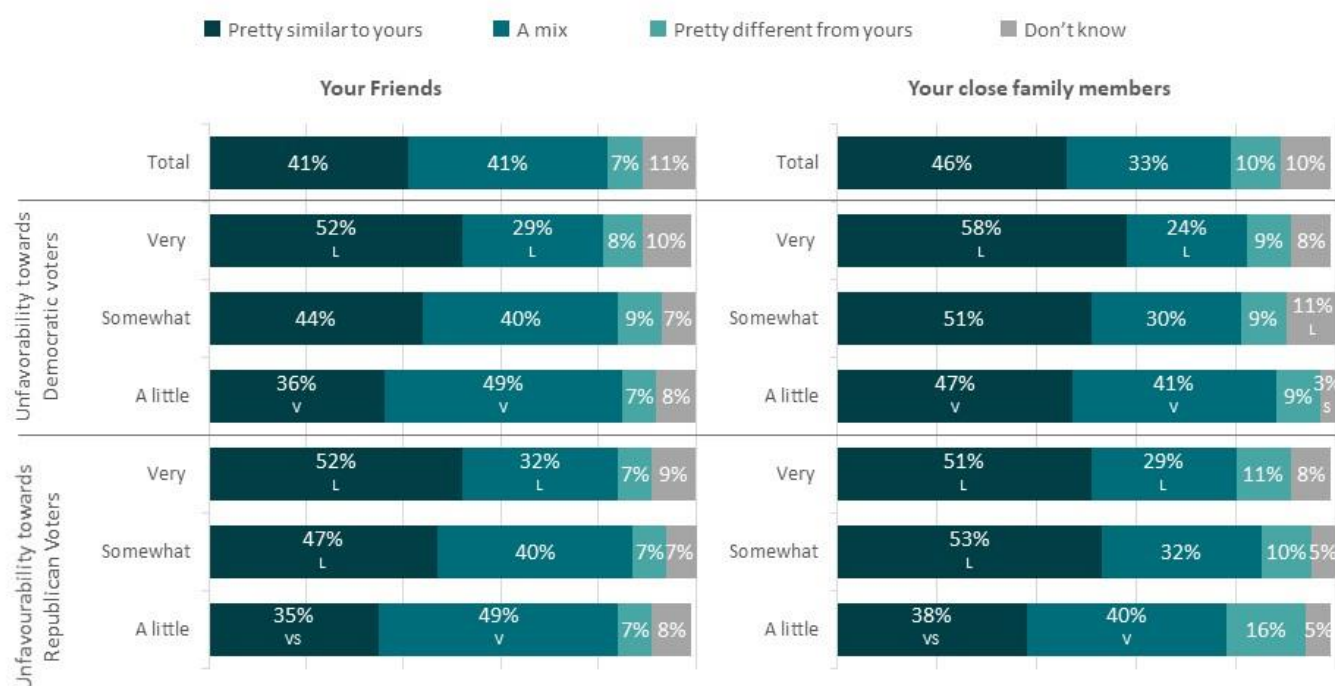
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PEOPLE WHO FEEL THE LEAST UNFAVORABLY TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN VOTERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE FRIENDS WITH DIFFERENT POLITICAL VIEWPOINTS AND TO THINK THAT DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ARE A GOOD THING.

People who feel only a little unfavorably toward Democratic or Republican voters are especially likely to say that they have friends with a mix of different political viewpoints. By contrast, people with more unfavorable feelings towards voters on either side are more likely to say that their friends' political views are pretty similar to their own; see Figure 9.

People who feel the least unfavorably towards Democratic or Republican voters are more likely to have friends with a mix of different political views.

Figure 9. Percent who say if each of the following about the political views of their friends and their family members, by degree of partisanship:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Unfavorability toward Democratic voters: very, n=324; somewhat, n=202; a little, n=274; Unfavorability toward Republican voters: very, n=416; somewhat, n=273; a little, n=334

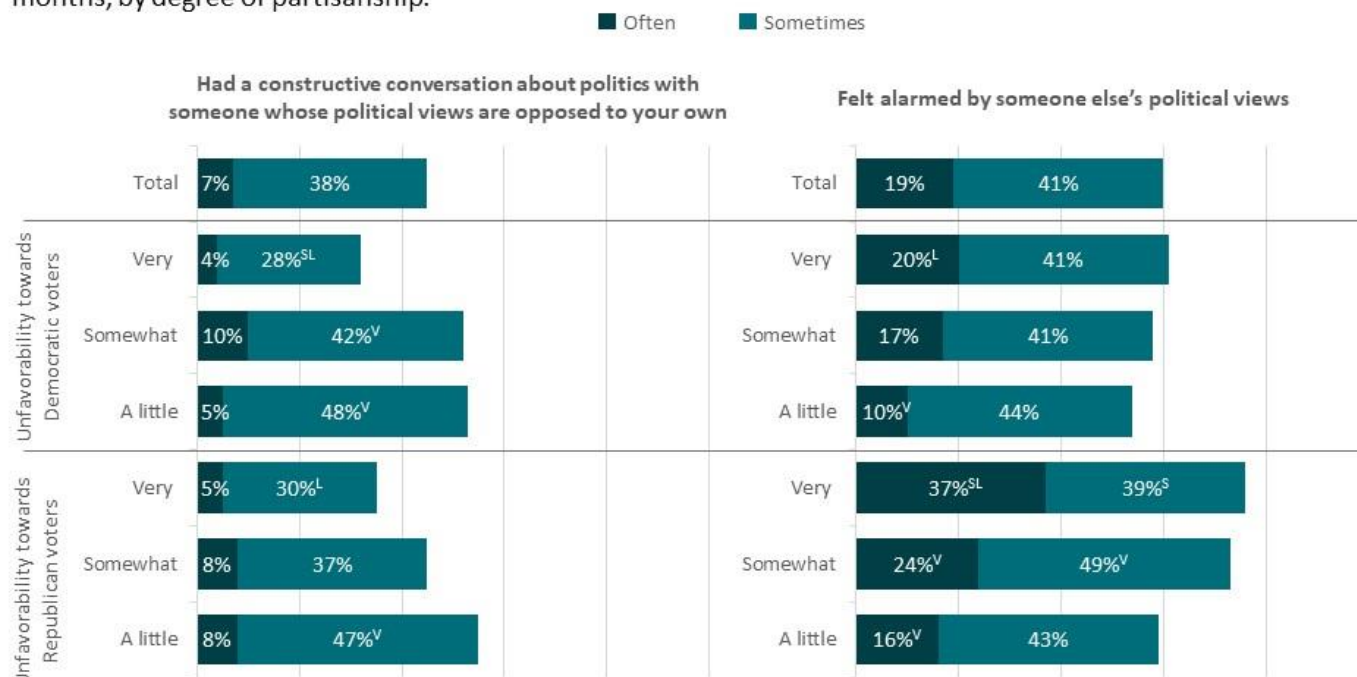
Estimates indicated with a ^V are statistically significant from the 'very unfavorable' estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^S are statistically significant from the 'somewhat unfavorable' estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^L are statistically significant from the 'a little unfavorable' estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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People who have the least unfavorable feelings towards Democratic or Republican voters are more likely to say they have sometimes had constructive conversations about politics with people whose political views are different than their own in the last twelve months; see Figure 10.

People who feel the least unfavorably towards Democratic or Republican voters are more likely to have had a constructive conversation about politics with someone with opposing views and less likely to have felt alarmed by someone else's views.

Figure 10. Percent of Americans who say how often, if at all, they have done the following in the last twelve months, by degree of partisanship:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Unfavorability toward Democratic voters: very, n=324; somewhat, n=202; a little, n=274; Unfavorability toward Republican voters: very, n=416; somewhat, n=273; a little, n=334

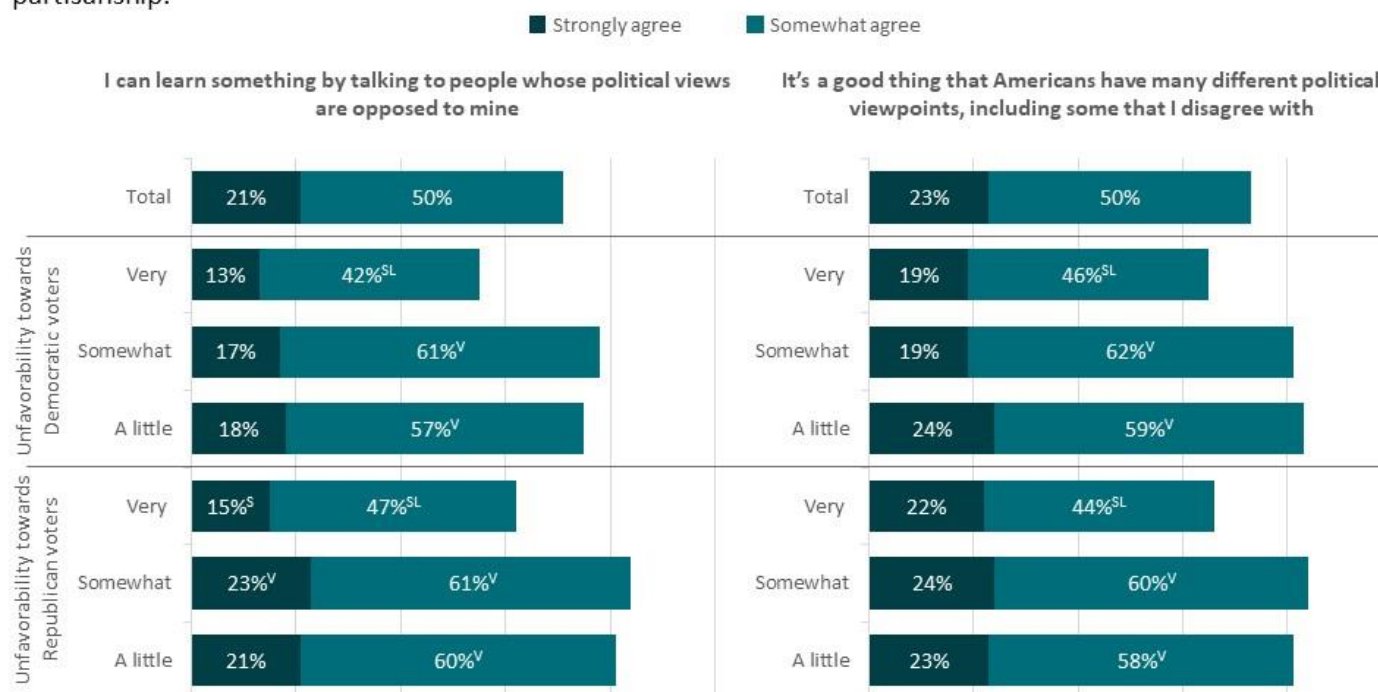
Estimates indicated with a ^V are statistically significant from the 'very unfavorable' estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^S are statistically significant from the 'somewhat unfavorable' estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^L are statistically significant from the 'a little unfavorable' estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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As discussed later in this report, 73 percent of Americans overall believe it's a good thing that Americans hold many different political viewpoints, including those that they disagree with. People who have the least unfavorable feelings toward Democratic or Republican voters are especially likely to believe that differences of opinion are a good thing. They are also especially likely to feel that they can learn something by talking to people with opposing views; see Figure 11.

People who feel the least unfavorably towards Democratic or Republican voters are more likely to feel that differences of opinion are a good thing and that they can learn something by talking to someone with opposing views.

Figure 11. Percent of Americans who say how much they agree with the following statements, by degree of partisanship:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Unfavorability toward Democratic voters: very, n=324; somewhat, n=202; a little, n=274; Unfavorability toward Republican voters: very, n=416; somewhat, n=273; a little, n=334

Estimates indicated with a ^V are statistically significant from the 'very unfavorable' estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^S are statistically significant from the 'somewhat unfavorable' estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^L are statistically significant from the 'a little unfavorable' estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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PEOPLE WHO FEEL THE MOST UNFAVORABLY, WHETHER TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN VOTERS, ARE MORE LIKELY TO FEEL THAT DIVISIVENESS NEGATIVELY IMPACTS THEIR LIVES AND THE NATION.

People who feel very unfavorably towards Democratic or Republican voters are especially likely to think that partisanship between ordinary Americans is a very serious problem; see Figure 12. They are also especially likely to think that partisanship between politicians, in the news media and on social media are serious problems.

In other words, the approximately one-third of Americans who feel the most animosity towards either Democratic or Republican voters are also the most likely to view partisan animosity as a problem. Presumably, people who hold the most negative feelings are concerned most about what they see as the hostility of their perceived opponents than about their own feelings of hostility. However, it is

possible that some are aware that their own negative feelings are contributing to the larger problem of divisiveness.

People who feel the most unfavorably, whether towards Democratic or Republican voters, are more likely to think that partisanship between ordinary Americans is a serious problem.

Figure 12. Percent who say how serious of a problem political hostility and divisiveness is between ordinary Americans, by degree of partisanship:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Unfavorability toward Democratic voters: very, n=324; somewhat, n=202; a little, n=274; Unfavorability toward Republican voters: very, n=416; somewhat, n=273; a little, n=334

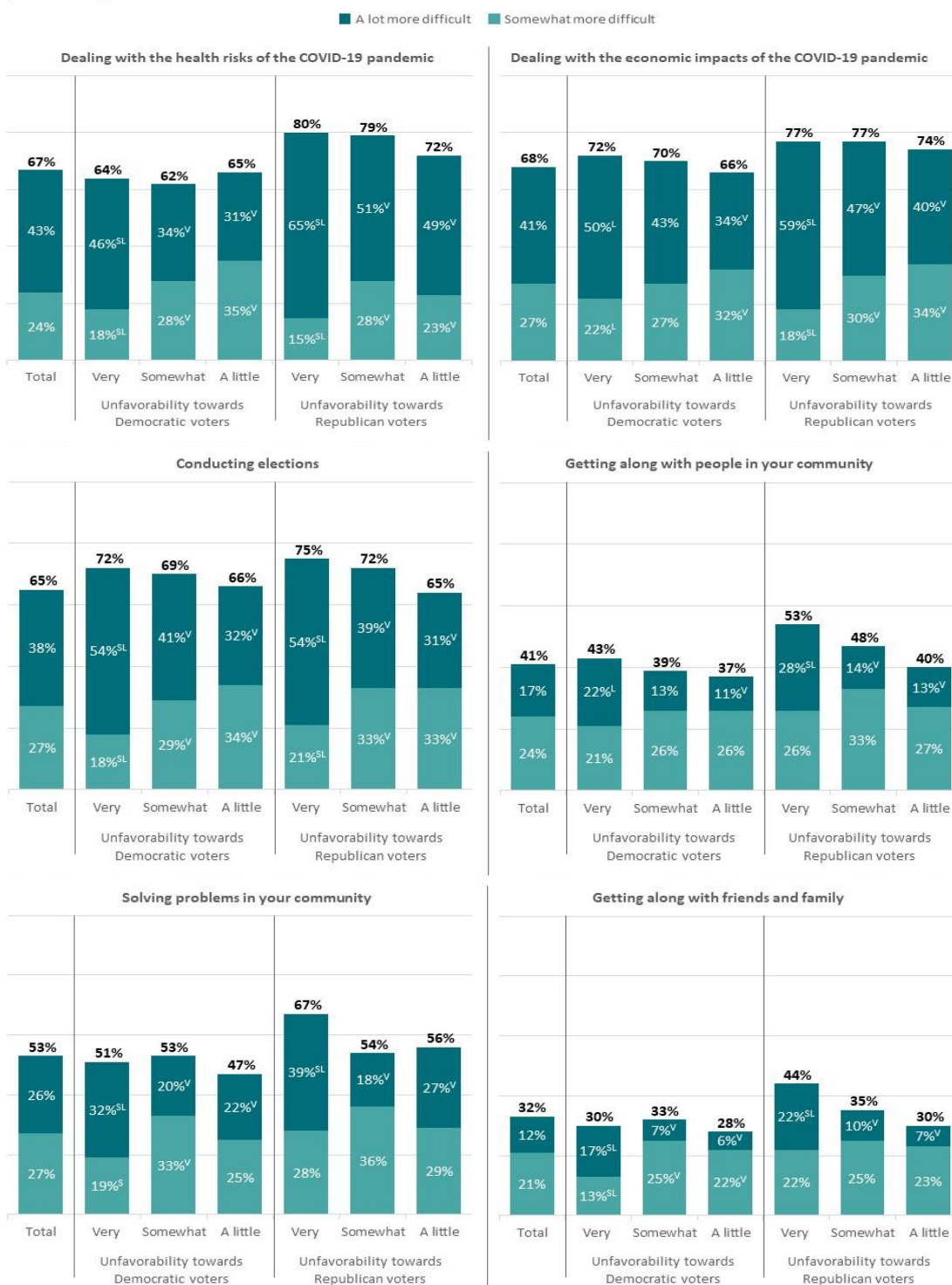
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People who feel very unfavorably towards Democratic voters or Republican voters are also especially likely to believe that political divisiveness has made dealing with the economic impacts and health risks of the COVID-19 pandemic more difficult. They are also more likely to feel that it has made conducting elections, solving problems in their community and getting along with friends or family more difficult; see Figure 13.

People who feel the most unfavorably, whether towards Democratic or Republican voters, are more likely to think that partisanship very negatively impacts their lives and the nation.

Figure 13. Percent who say how much more difficult political divisiveness has made the following, by degree of partisanship:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Unfavorability toward Democratic voters: very, n=324; somewhat, n=202; a little, n=274; Unfavorability toward Republican voters: very, n=416; somewhat, n=273; a little, n=334
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FINDING 3. MOST AMERICANS BELIEVE IN THE VALUE OF DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AND DIALOGUE, AND MANY ARE TRYING TO CONNECT ACROSS PARTISAN LINES.

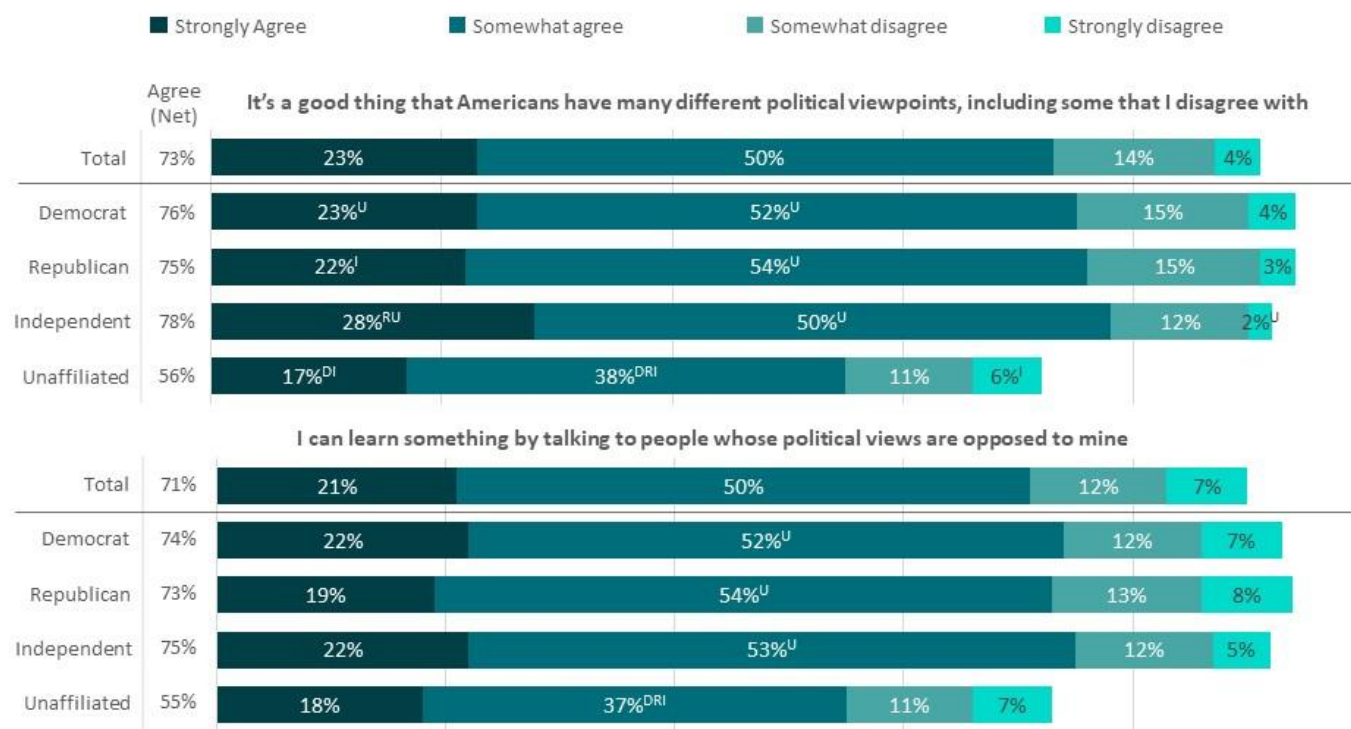
Given the partisan gridlock on daily display in government; events like the January 6th, 2021, attack on the United States Capitol; and the plurality belief that divisiveness will get worse over the next ten years, it is not surprising that the question of whether the country should actually split apart has been raised. But that idea remains a non-starter for a cross-partisan majority of Americans who say it would be very bad (51 percent) or somewhat bad (19 percent) if Democratic and Republican states split off into two separate countries.⁴

In fact, about three-quarters each of Democrats, Republicans and Independents agree that it's a good thing that Americans have many different political viewpoints, including some that they disagree with. Most also feel that they can learn something by talking to people whose political views are different than their own; see Figure 14. As noted above, people who feel less unfavorably towards Democratic or Republican voters are especially likely to believe that differing political viewpoints are a good thing and to feel that they can learn something by talking to people with opposing views; see Figure 11 above.

⁴ Other researchers have found an association between support for the country breaking up and believing in conspiracy theories and authoritarianism. See the University of Virginia Center for Politics/Project Home Fire, 2021 "Support for Secession Linked to Conspiracy Belief" <https://centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/support-for-secession-linked-to-conspiracy-belief/>

Most Americans believe that differences of opinion are a good thing and that they can learn something by talking to people with opposing views.

Figure 14. Percent of Americans who agree or disagree with the following statements, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

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ALMOST HALF OF AMERICANS HAVE HAD CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT POLITICS WITH PEOPLE WITH OPPOSING POLITICAL VIEWS OR HAVE GOTTEN TO KNOW SOMEONE WITH OPPOSING VIEWS.

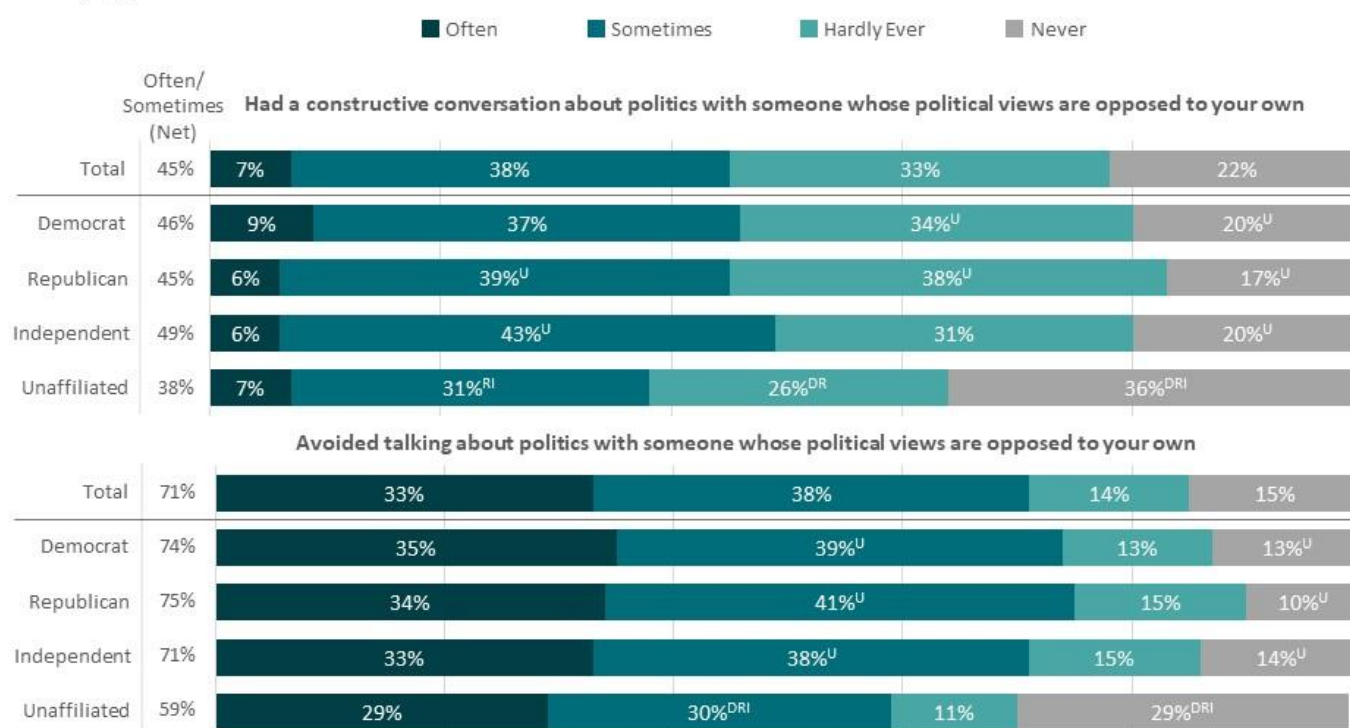
Americans do not just value diverse perspectives in the abstract. Many report having had a positive exchange with others from across partisan lines in the past year. Close to half (45 percent) of Americans say that, in the last twelve months, they have often or sometimes had a constructive conversation about politics with someone whose political views differ from their own. Democrats, Republicans and Independents report having had such constructive conversations with similar frequency; see Figure 15. As noted previously, people who feel less unfavorably towards Democratic or Republican voters are more likely to say that they have had constructive conversations about politics with people whose political views are opposed to their own; see Figure 10 above.

Far more Americans (58 percent) say they have gotten to know someone whose political views are different than theirs in the last year than say they have ended such a relationship in that same time frame (just 25 percent); see Figure 16.

Yet avoiding politics in conversation is more common than discussing it. Most Americans (71 percent) say they have avoided talking about politics with someone whose views are opposed to theirs in the last twelve months, including similarly high proportions of Democrats, Republicans and Independents; see Figure 15. Avoiding discussing politics may be motivated by a desire to stay above the partisan fray, steer clear of conflict, maintain relationships, or form new relationships that have nothing to do with politics.

Nearly half of Americans have had constructive conversations about politics with someone with opposing views in the last twelve months. More have avoided talking about politics.

Figure 15. Percent of Americans who say how often, if at all, they have done the following in the last twelve months, by political affiliation:



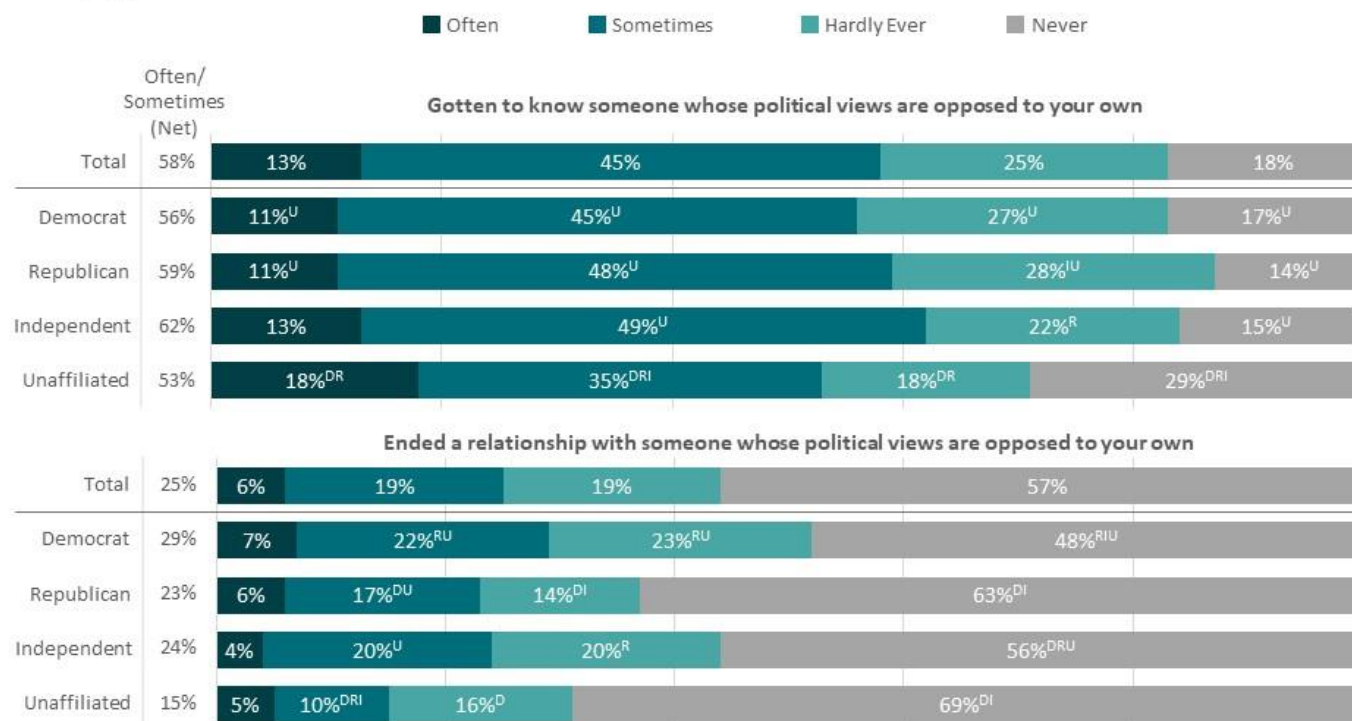
Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

More Americans have gotten to know someone than have ended a relationship with someone with opposing views in the last twelve months.

Figure 16. Percent of Americans who say how often, if at all, they have done the following in the last twelve months, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

A MODEST MAJORITY OF AMERICANS, INCLUDING A LARGER MAJORITY OF DEMOCRATS, THINK THAT COMMUNITY DIALOGUES WOULD HELP BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER.

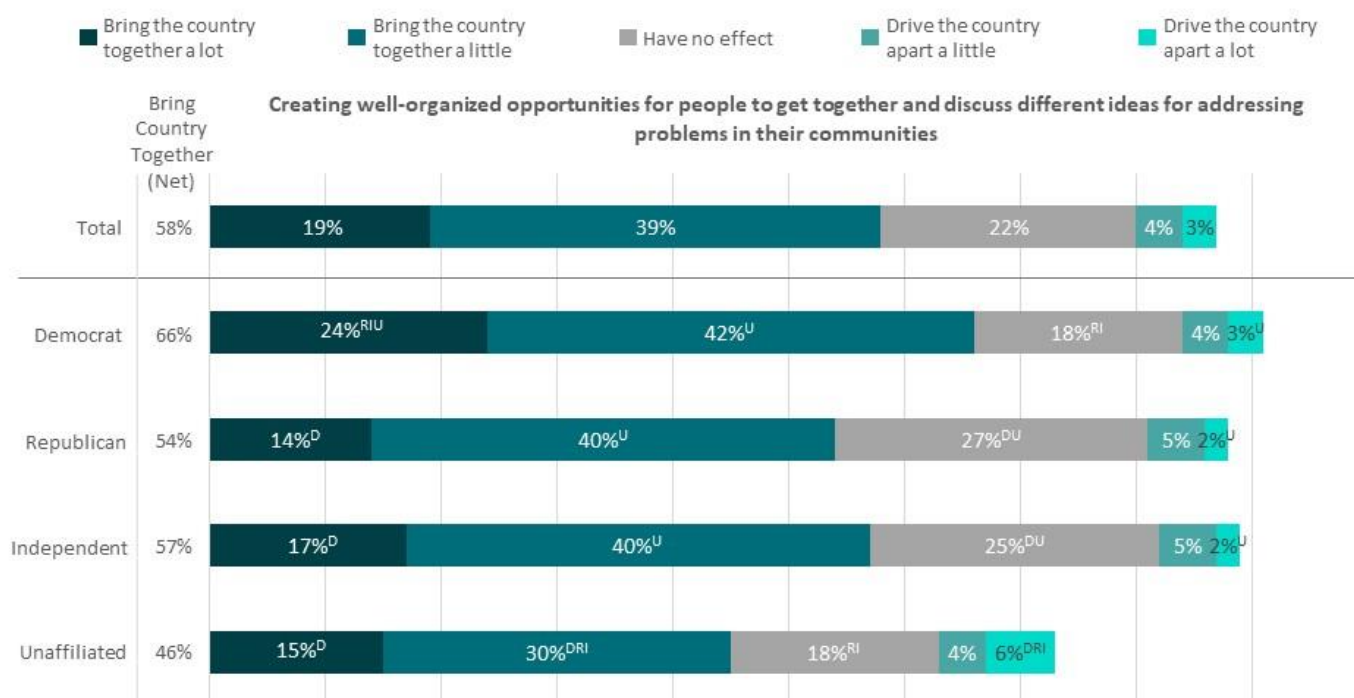
A 58 percent majority of Americans believe that creating well-organized opportunities for people to get together and discuss ideas for addressing problems in their communities would help bring the country together. Hardly anyone (7 percent) thinks that doing so would drive the country apart, with the rest saying that it would have no effect or that they do not know. Democrats are most likely to think that community dialogue would help bring the country together. Meanwhile, substantial minorities of Republicans and Independents think that doing so would have no effect either way, and substantial minorities of politically unaffiliated people don't know what impact it would have; see Figure 17.

This tendency toward greater optimism among Democrats, as opposed to the greater ambivalence or uncertainty among Republicans, Independents and politically unaffiliated people shows up in responses

to several of the potential approaches to unifying the country that were included in this survey, as discussed in later sections of this report.

Most Americans think community dialogues would help bring the country together, especially Democrats.

Figure 17. Percent of Americans who say how much the following would bring the country together, drive the country apart, or have no effect, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USATODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey—Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

WHAT KIND OF DIALOGUE WOULD HELP BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER?

Among the 58 percent of Americans who say that creating opportunities for dialogue would help bring the country together a little or a lot:

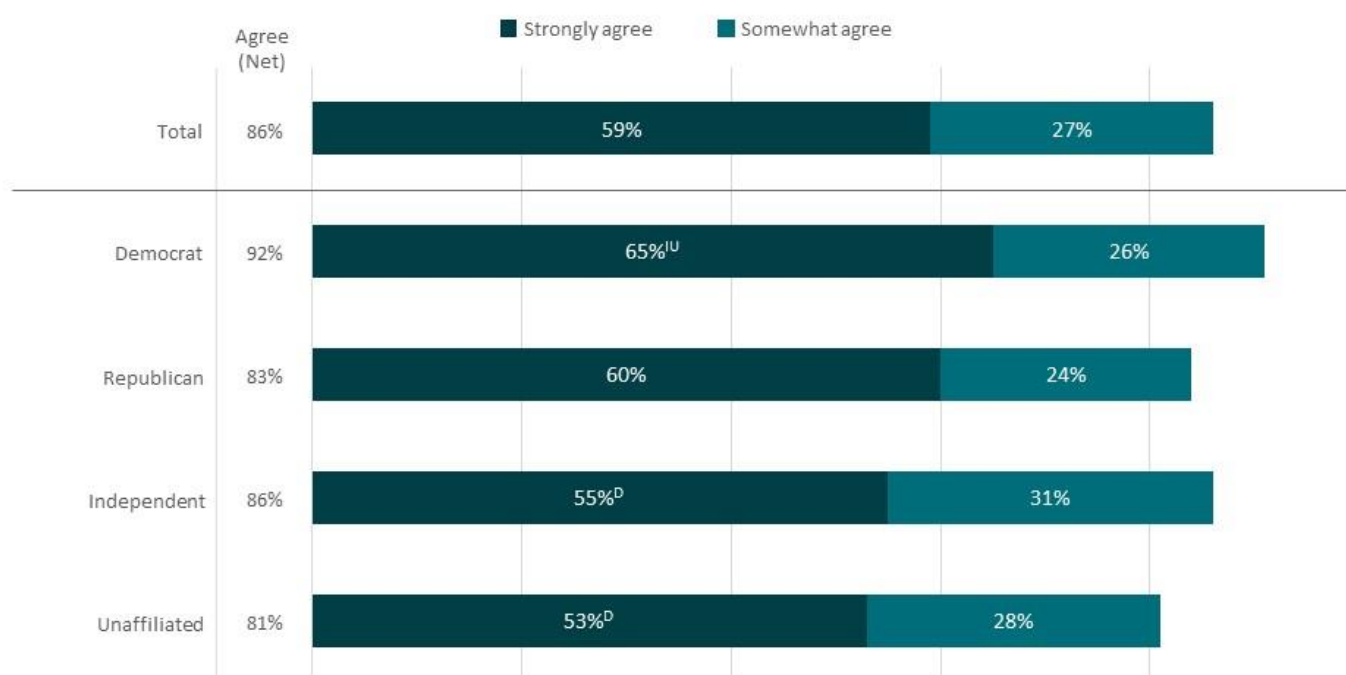
- A 46 percent plurality say they would prefer those discussions to be with people who have a range of different political views.
- A 48 percent plurality say they would prefer those discussions to take place in small groups -- once the COVID-19 pandemic is over.
- A 45 percent plurality say that either online or in-person discussion would be fine with them -- once the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

FINDING 4. A STRONG CROSS-PARTISAN MAJORITY OF AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENSURE VOTING RIGHTS FOR ALL, AND A MORE MODEST MAJORITY BELIEVE THAT DOING SO WOULD ACTUALLY BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER. BY CONTRAST, PARTISAN DIFFERENCES OF OPINION EMERGE STARKLY WHEN PEOPLE ARE ASKED ABOUT FEDERAL POLICIES DIRECTLY AIMED AT COMBATING RACISM.

A Hidden Common Ground survey released earlier in 2021 found that 86 percent of Americans believe that the federal government should make sure that voting is simple, convenient and hassle-free for everyone in every state. This includes strong majorities of Democrats, Republicans, Independents, and politically unaffiliated people; see Figure 18.⁵

Americans across the political spectrum agree that the federal government should make sure that voting is simple, convenient and hassle-free for everyone in every state.

Figure 18. Percent of Americans who agree that the federal government should make sure that voting is simple, convenient and hassle-free for everyone in every state, by political affiliation, May 2021 survey:



Base: All respondents, n=1,260; Democrat, n=405; Republican, n=306; Independent, n=307; Politically Unaffiliated, n=242

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey—Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

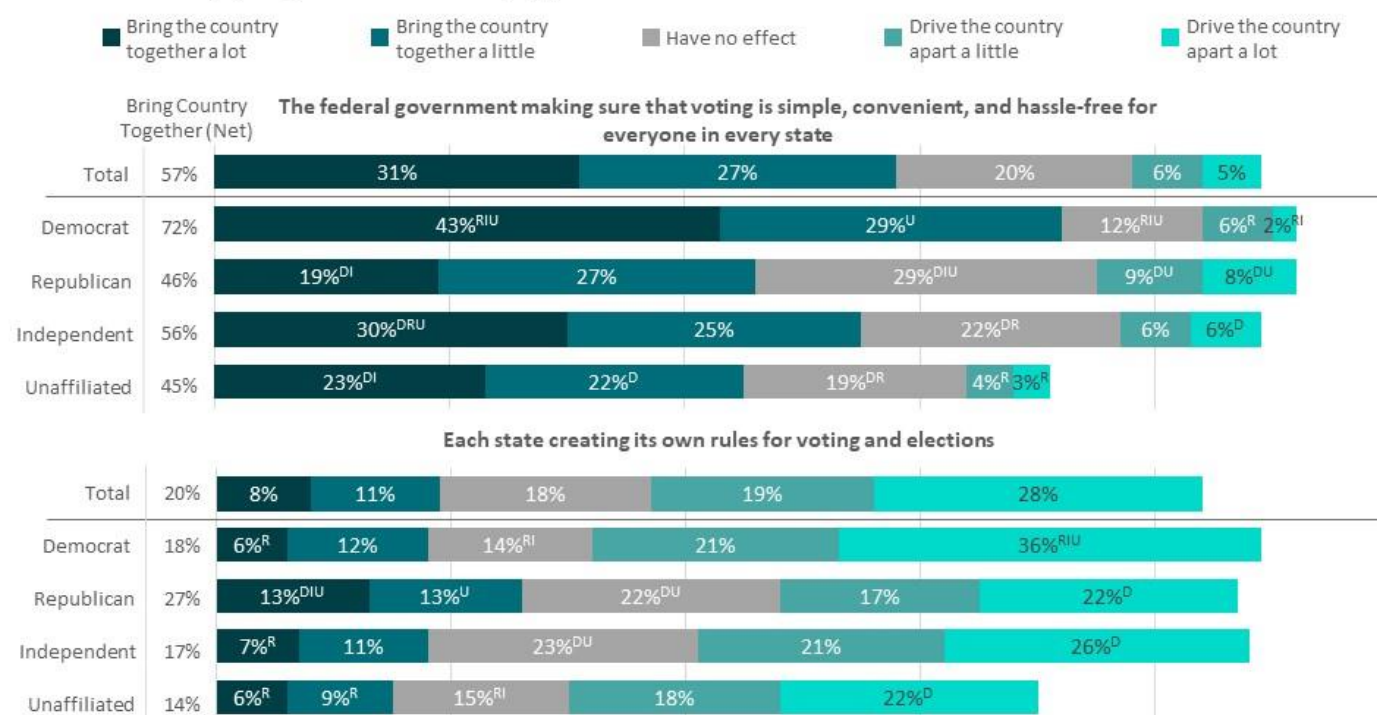
⁵ Public Agenda, 2021, "[America's Hidden Common Ground on Renewing Democracy.](#)"

In short, a very strong cross-partisan majority of Americans believe that the federal government should ensure voting rights for all Americans. A modest majority (57 percent) believes that it would also help bring the country together if the federal government made sure that voting is simple, convenient, and hassle-free for everyone in every state. This includes majorities of Democrats and Independents, and pluralities of Republicans and politically unaffiliated people. Very few Americans think that a federal role in voting rights would actually drive the country apart. Substantial minorities think that doing so would have no effect either way; see Figure 19. There are no significant differences by race in response to this question.

Furthermore, 47 percent of Americans think that each state deciding its own voting rules would actually drive the country apart. In fact, there was no other item in this survey that more Americans said would drive the country apart than letting each state decide its own voting rules. There are only modest differences by partisan affiliation in this view; see Figure 19. There are no significant differences by race in response to this question.

More Americans believe that federal rather than state leadership on voting rights would help bring the country together.

Figure 19. Percent of Americans who say how much each of the following would help bring the country together, drive the country apart, or have no effect, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USATODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey—Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

Together, these findings point toward a strong cross-partisan consensus that the federal government should ensure voting rights for all Americans. While there is less certainty that the federal government playing this role will help bring the country together, very few Americans see a federal role in voting as divisive. But a large majority sees leaving voting rules entirely up to states as potentially divisive.

TWO-THIRDS OF DEMOCRATS AND ONLY ONE-THIRD OF REPUBLICANS THINK THAT CHANGING FEDERAL LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS TO ROOT OUT RACISM WOULD HELP BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER.

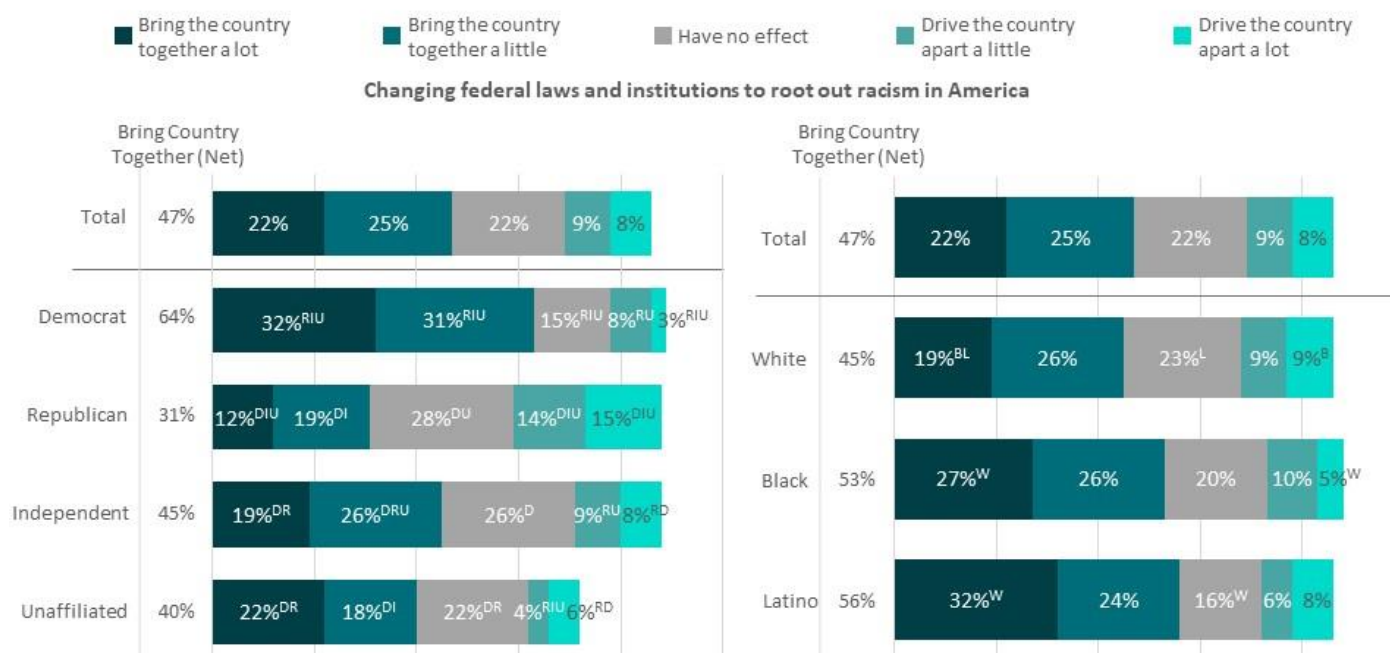
While there is majority cross-partisan support for a federal role in ensuring voting rights for all, partisan differences of opinion emerge when survey questions specifically mention systemic approaches to addressing racism.⁶

For example, two-thirds of Democrats believe that changing federal laws and institutions to root out racism would help bring the country together. By contrast, only about one-third of Republicans think that doing so would help bring the country together, while nearly as many Republicans believe that it would actually drive the country apart. Independents and politically unaffiliated people fall in between Democrats and Republicans on this question. There are few differences by race in views on this question; see Figure 20.

⁶ Unfortunately, the sample sizes of this survey were not large enough to analyze the views of Asian Americans separately.

More Democrats than people of other political affiliations think rooting out racism would bring the country together, with only minor differences in views by race/ethnicity.

Figure 20. Percent of Americans who say how much the following would help bring the country together, drive the country apart, or have no effect, by political affiliation and by race/ethnicity:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437; White, n=1,663; Black, n=256; Latino, n=226

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^W are statistically significant from the white estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^B are statistically significant from the Black estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^L are statistically significant from the Latino estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

When, in a Hidden Common Ground survey released earlier in 2021, Americans were asked whether “overcoming racism requires more than changing people’s attitudes, it requires fundamental changes in our laws and institutions,” most Democrats (88 percent), Independents (67 percent) and politically unaffiliated people (70 percent) agreed, compared to just under half of Republicans (46 percent). There were far smaller differences by race in views on this question, with 82 percent of Black Americans, 73 percent of Latino Americans and 65 percent of white Americans saying that overcoming racism requires fundamental changes to our laws and institutions.⁷

Similarly, a Hidden Common Ground survey fielded in June 2020 found that a plurality of Republicans said racism is mostly a problem of how individuals treat each other. Modest majorities of Democrats and Independents said racism is both a problem of individual treatment and of how society functions; see

⁷ Public Agenda, 2021, “[America’s Hidden Common Ground on Renewing Democracy.](#)”

Figure 21.⁸ Most Black Americans (56 percent), Latino Americans (58 percent), and a plurality of white Americans (44 percent) also said racism is both a problem of individual treatment and of how society functions.

More Republicans see racism as an interpersonal problem, while more Democrats and Independents see it as both an interpersonal and a societal problem.

Figure 21. Percent of Americans who say whether they think each of the following about racism, by political affiliation, June 2020 survey:



Base: All respondents, n=1,113; Democrat, n=492; Republican, n=409; Independent, n=123

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

FAR MORE DEMOCRATS THAN REPUBLICANS BELIEVE IT WOULD BE GOOD FOR THE COUNTRY TO BECOME MORE DIVERSE, WITH ONLY MINOR DIFFERENCES OF OPINION BY RACE.

Substantial partisan differences of opinion again emerge on critical questions about America's increasing racial and ethnic diversity. Sixty-nine percent of Democrats believe it would be good for the country to continue to become more racially and ethnically diverse over the next ten years, with 50 percent of Democrats saying it would be very good; see Figure 22.

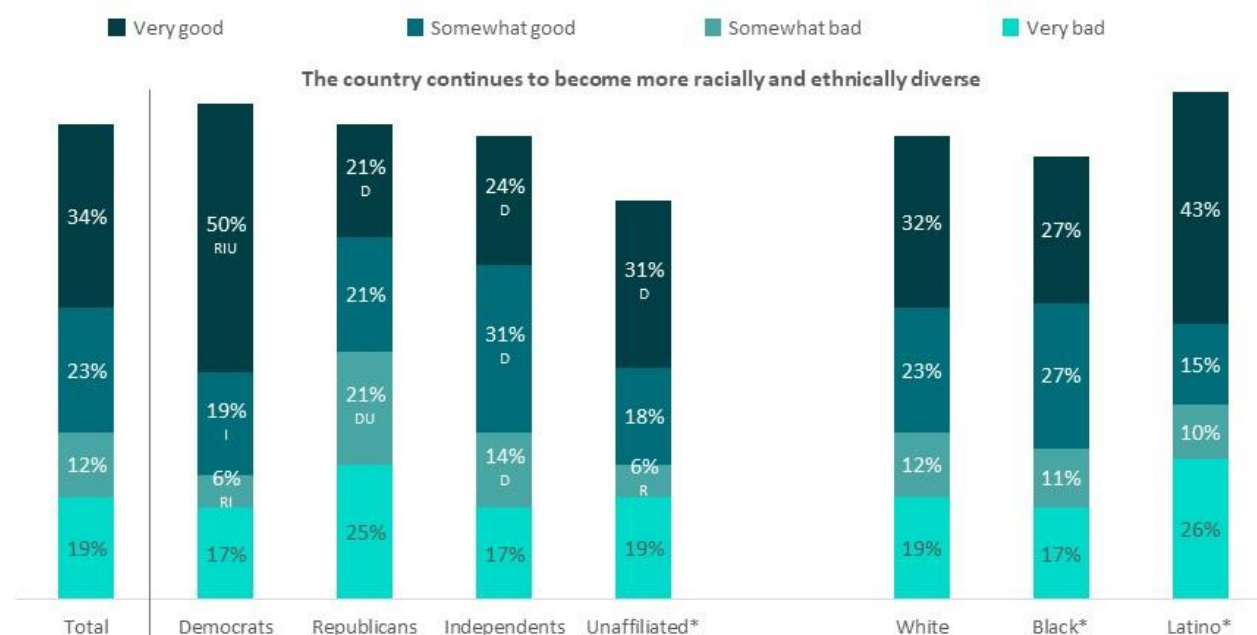
⁸ Public Agenda, 2020, "[America's Hidden Common Ground on Racism and Police Reform](#)." That survey did not include the option for people to categorize themselves as politically unaffiliated.

Republicans are split on this question, with 42 percent saying that increasing diversity would be good for the country and 46 percent saying it would be bad, including 25 percent who say it would be very bad. There are no significant differences of opinion by race on this question; see Figure 22.

While Americans disagree across partisan lines about whether increasing diversity would be good for the country, they agree that it is likely to happen. Most Democrats (85 percent), Republicans (83 percent) and Independents (80 percent) concur that such change is likely over the next ten years. A lesser majority of unaffiliated Americans say this is likely (58 percent), with a relatively large share of them (23 percent) saying they do not know.

Far more Democrats than Republicans believe it would be good for the country to become more diverse, with only minor differences of opinion by race/ethnicity.

Figure 22. Percent of Americans who say how good or bad it would be for our country to continue to become more racially and ethnically diverse, by political affiliation and by race/ethnicity:



Base: : One-fifth of respondents, n=468; Democrat, n=150; Republican, n=119; Independent, n=116; Politically Unaffiliated, n=83; White, n= 325; Black, n=53; Latino, n=50

*Small base sizes

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^W are statistically significant from the white estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^B are statistically significant from the Black estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^L are statistically significant from the Latino estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USATODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey—Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

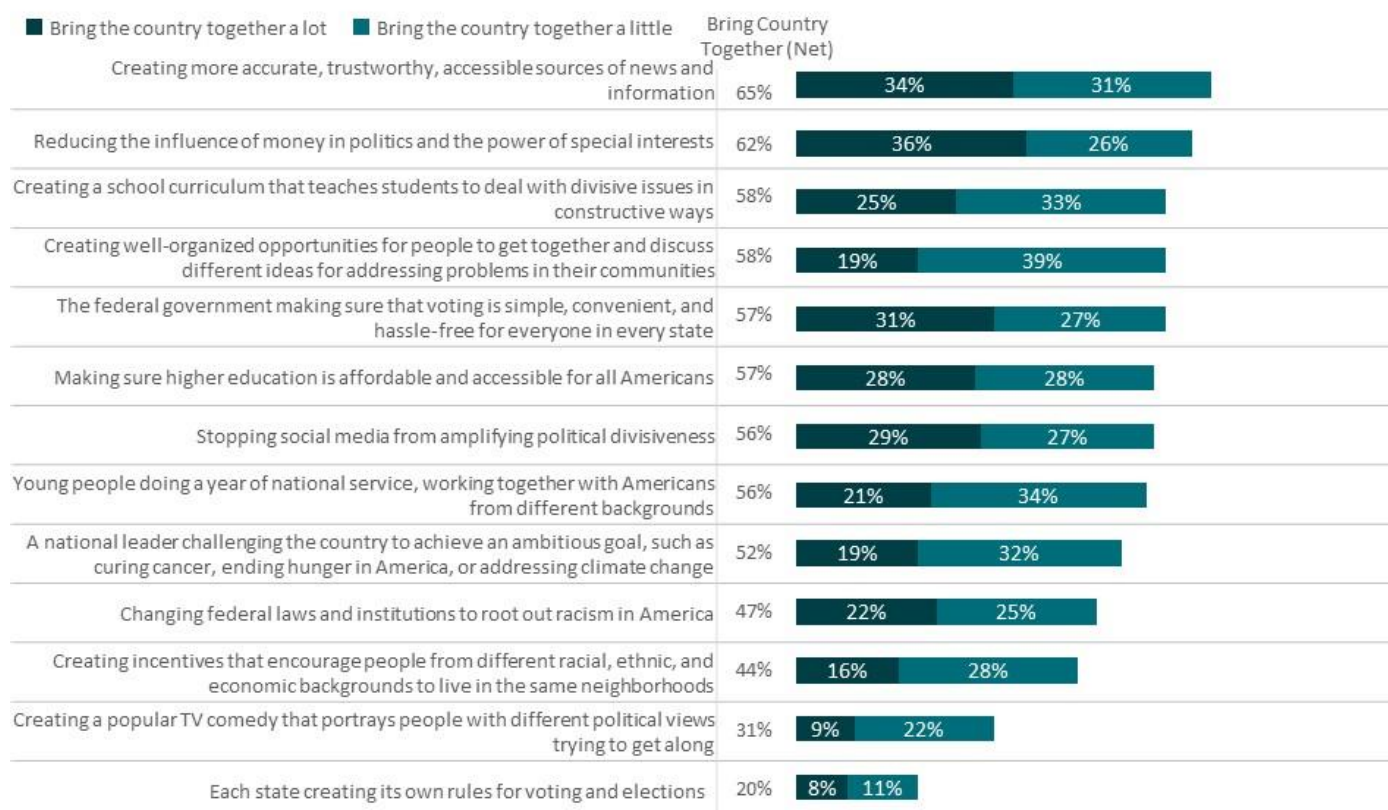
FINDING 5. TO BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER, AMERICANS AGREE ON THE NEED FOR BETTER NEWS AND INFORMATION; AND, MOST WANT SOCIAL MEDIA TO STOP AMPLIFYING DIVISIVENESS.

Two-thirds of Americans believe that creating more accurate, trustworthy, accessible sources of news and information would help to bring the country together, including 69 percent of Democrats, 69 percent of Republicans, 65 percent of Independents and 51 percent of politically unaffiliated Americans. Of all the potential approaches to unifying the country that this survey asked about, better news and information is the approach that the largest proportion of Americans say would help bring the country together; see Figure 23.

People share this belief regardless of their main source of news, including 65 percent of those who say Fox News is their main source, 71 percent of those who say that CNN or MSNBC is their main source, and 68 percent of those who say ABC, CBS or NBC is their main source.

When asked about 13 measures that might help bring the country together, Americans see the greatest potential in more accurate and trustworthy news and information.

Figure 23. Percent of Americans who say how much each of the following would help bring the country together:



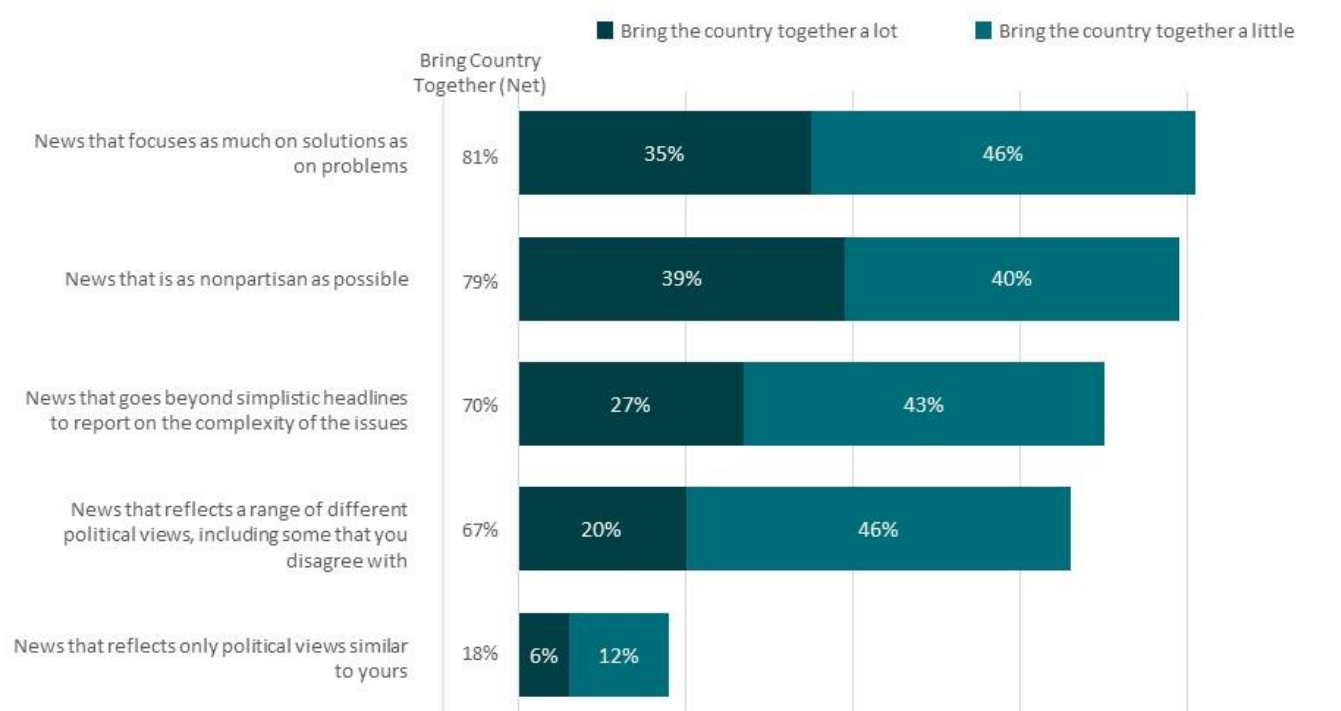
Base: All respondents n=2,345

Public Agenda/USATODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey—Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

Among the two-thirds of Americans who think that creating more accurate, trustworthy, accessible sources of news and information would help bring the country together, cross-partisan majorities say they favor news that is solutions-focused, non-partisan and reflects a range of viewpoints. Few think that news that reflects only political views similar to their own would have that effect; see Figure 24. There are only minor differences in these views between people who get their news from different sources.

People who think that better news and information would help bring the country together favor solutions-focused, non-partisan news that reflects a range of viewpoints.

Figure 24. Of Americans who say that creating more accurate, trustworthy, accessible sources of news and information would help bring the country together a lot or a little, percent who say how much each of the following would help bring the country together:



Base: Americans who say that creating more accurate, trustworthy, accessible sources of news and information would bring the country together, n=1,499

Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

MOST AMERICANS OVERALL WANT SOCIAL MEDIA TO STOP AMPLIFYING POLITICAL DIVISIVENESS. MOST USERS OF SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE FELT FED UP WITH HOW PEOPLE TALK ABOUT POLITICS ONLINE, AND HALF OF THEM SAY THEY HAVE POSTED ABOUT AMERICANS' COMMON GROUND.

Over half of Americans (56 percent), with little difference by partisan affiliation, believe that stopping social media from amplifying political divisiveness would help bring the country together; see Figure 25. Among people who say they use social media often or sometimes, about three-quarters have felt fed up

with how people talk about politics on social media, with barely any differences by partisan affiliation. Most social media users have also thought someone was being too sensitive and defensive about politics online, again with little difference by political affiliation; see Figure 26.

At least some social media users are trying to offset divisiveness. Half say they have liked, posted, or shared something in the last twelve months that emphasizes Americans' common ground, including similar proportions of Democrats, Republicans and Independents; see Figure 26.

Most Americans think that stopping social media from amplifying political divisiveness would help bring the country together.

Figure 25. Percent of Americans who say how much the following would help bring the country together, drive the country apart, or have no effect, by political affiliation:



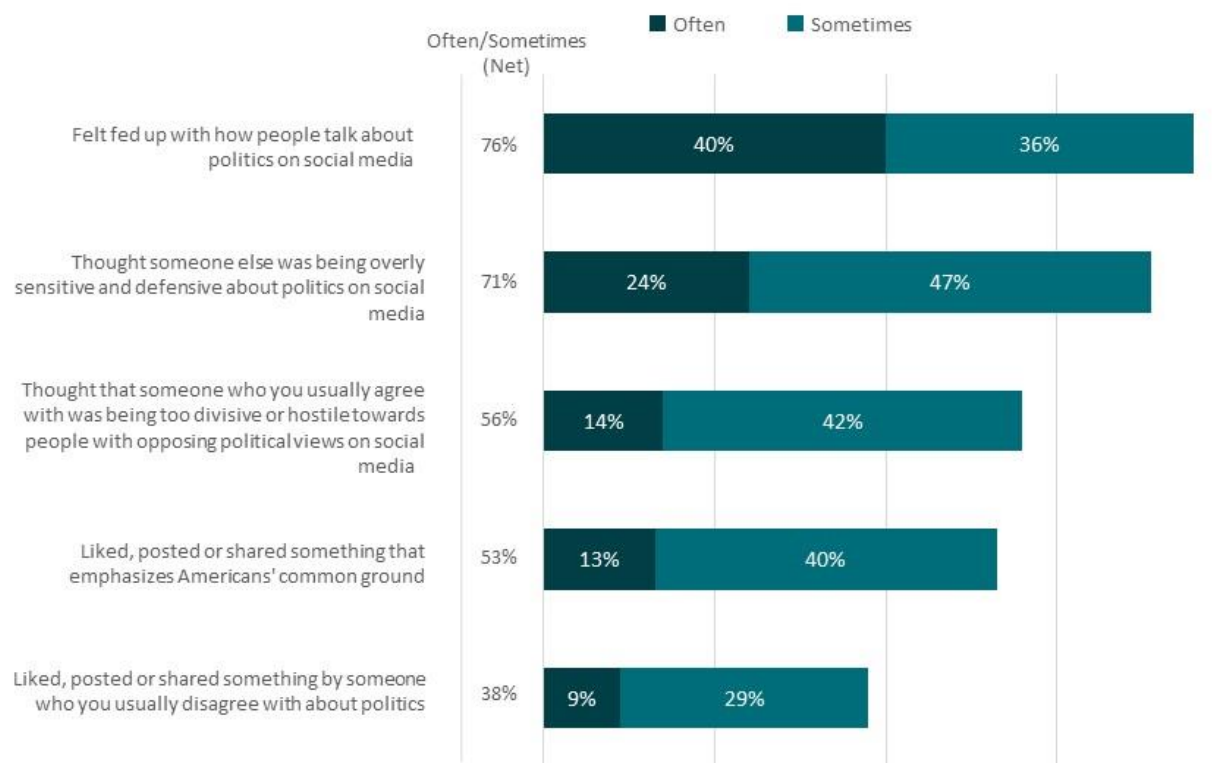
Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^{IU} are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USATODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

Most social media users have felt fed up with how people talk about politics online and half say they have posted about Americans' common ground.

Figure 26. Percent of social media users who say how often, if at all, they have done the following on social media in the last twelve months:



Base: Americans who use social media often or sometimes, n=1,739

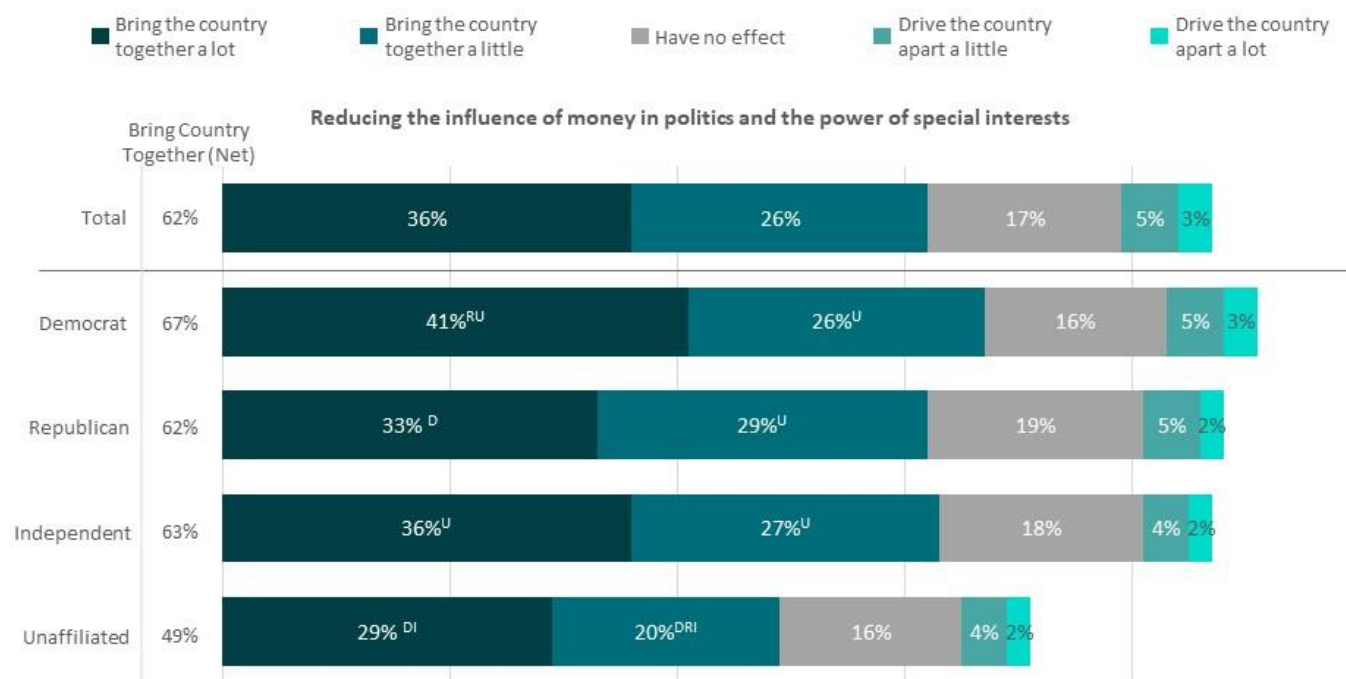
Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

FINDING 6. ACROSS PARTISAN LINES, MOST AMERICANS AGREE THAT REDUCING THE INFLUENCE OF MONEY IN POLITICS WOULD HELP BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER. MANY PEOPLE ALSO BELIEVE THAT EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES WOULD HELP UNIFY THE COUNTRY.

To bring the country together, most Americans across the political spectrum see potential in reducing the influence of money in politics and the power of special interests, including similar proportions of Democrats, Republicans and Independents; see Figure 27. However, only one-third of Americans (31 percent) think it is likely that in the next ten years special interests will have less political power, and ordinary people will have greater influence over decisions that affect their lives and communities.

Americans agree on the importance of reducing money in politics to help bring the country together.

Figure 27. Percent of Americans who say how much the following would bring the country together, drive the country apart, or have no effect, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

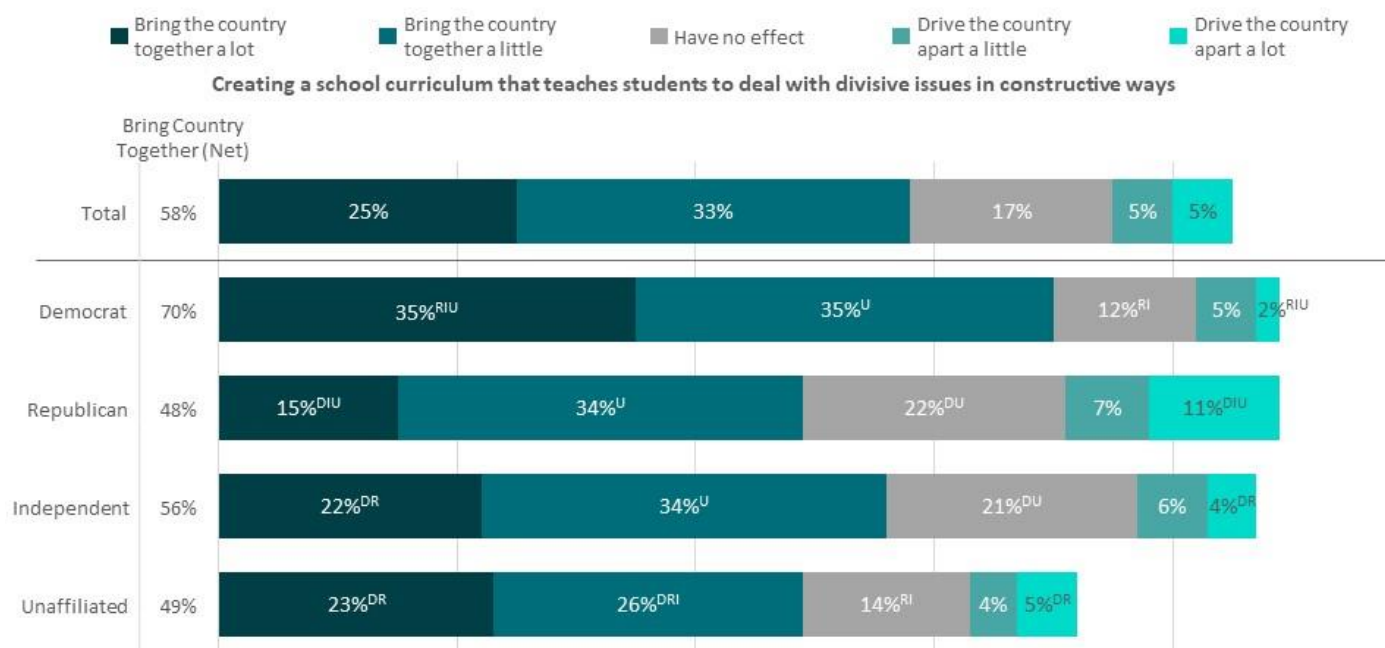
Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

MOST AMERICANS THINK THAT TEACHING STUDENTS TO DEAL WITH CONFLICTS CONSTRUCTIVELY AND TEACHING THEM ABOUT BOTH THE NATION'S SHORTCOMINGS AND ITS ACHIEVEMENTS WOULD HELP BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER.

A modest 58 percent majority of Americans believe that creating a school curriculum that teaches students to deal with divisive issues in constructive ways would help bring the country together. Democrats tend to be more enthusiastic about this and other approaches to unifying the country than Republicans, Independents and politically unaffiliated people. While few Republicans, Independents or politically unaffiliated people think these approaches would drive the country apart, substantial minorities think they would have no effect either way or are unsure; see Figure 28.

A majority of Americans think that teaching students to deal with divisive issues in constructive ways would help bring the country together.

Figure 28. Percent of Americans who say how much the following would help bring the country together, drive the country apart, or have no effect, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

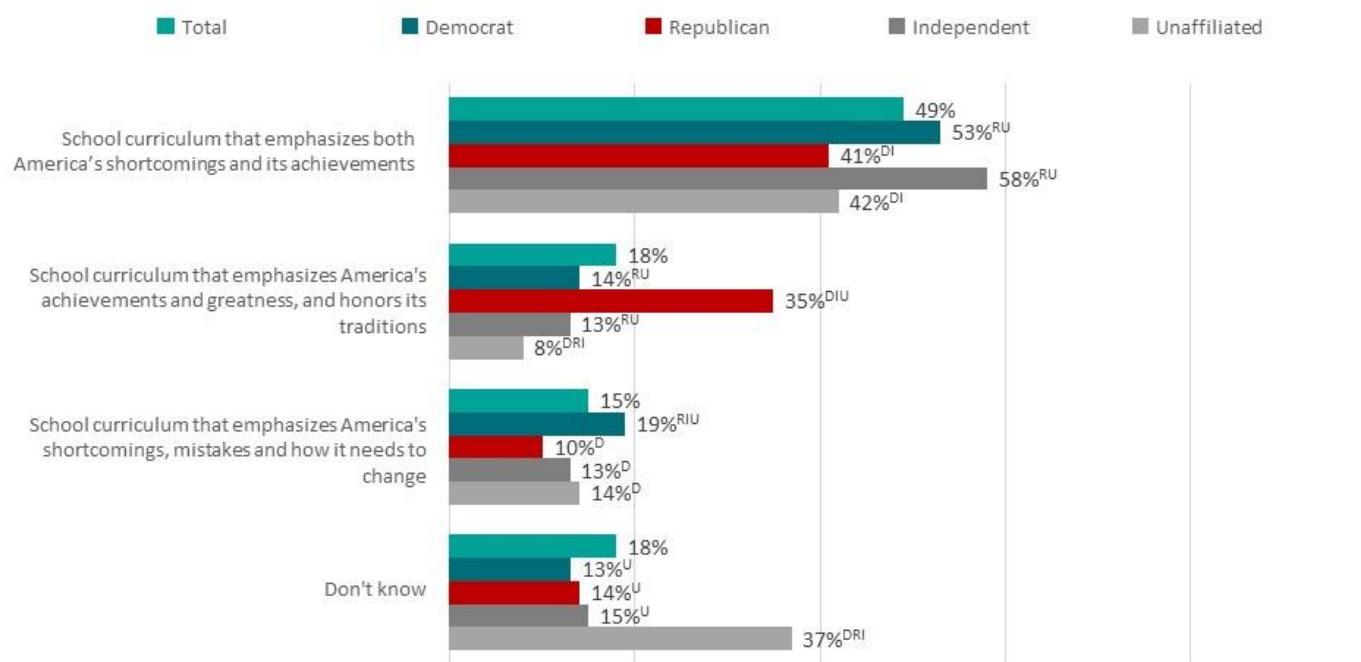
Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

Amid recent debates reported in the news media over how schools should teach about slavery, racism, and colonialism, a 49 percent plurality of Americans believe that a curriculum that emphasizes both America's achievements and shortcomings would do the most to bring the country together. This includes pluralities of Republicans, Democrats, Independents and the politically unaffiliated. Fewer people think schools should only teach about America's achievements and fewer think that schools should teach only about its shortcomings; see Figure 29.

Pluralities across the political spectrum agree on the value of a K-12 curriculum that emphasizes both America's achievements and its shortcomings.

Figure 29. Percent of Americans who say which of the following would do the most to bring the country together, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

MODEST MAJORITIES OF AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE HIGHER EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE DOING NATIONAL SERVICE WOULD HELP BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER.

Fifty-seven percent of Americans say that making sure higher education is affordable and accessible for all Americans would help bring the country together. Again, more Democrats believe that doing so would help bring the country together. Few Republicans, Independents or politically unaffiliated people say that making higher education more affordable would actually drive the country apart, but substantial minorities of them either say it would have no effect or that they do not know; see Figure 30.

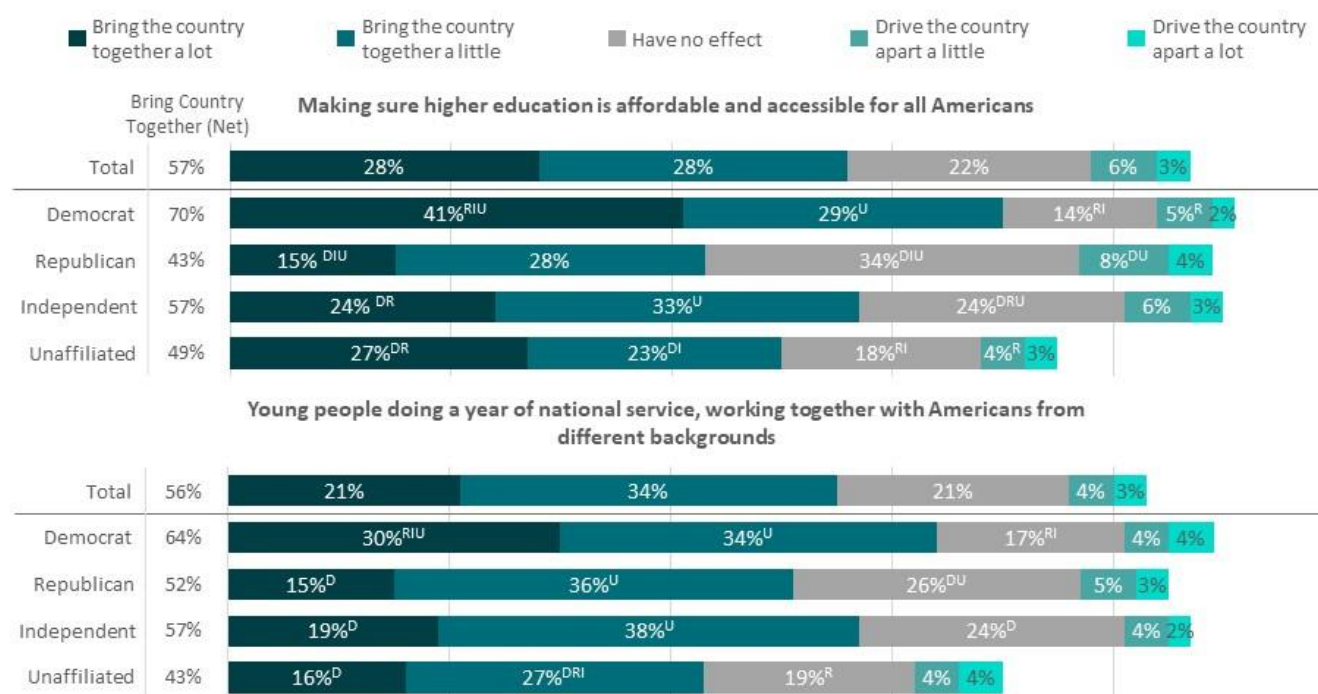
Fifty-six percent of Americans, including majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, say that young people doing a year of national service would help bring the country together; see Figure 30.

Of those who believe that national service would help bring the country together, 25 percent actually believe that it should be required. A 56 percent majority believes that it should be encouraged but not

required, with incentives such as college credits or student loan forgiveness. Only 15 percent of those who think that national service would help bring the country together believe that it should be purely voluntary.

Most Americans think that affordable, accessible higher education and young people doing national service would help bring the country together.

Figure 30. Percent of Americans who say how much each of the following would bring the country together, drive the country apart, or have no effect, by political affiliation:



Base: All respondents, n=2,345; Democrat, n=774; Republican, n=600; Independent, n=534; Politically Unaffiliated, n=437

Estimates indicated with a ^D are statistically significant from the Democrat estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^R are statistically significant from the Republican estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^I are statistically significant from the Independent estimate. Estimates indicated with a ^U are statistically significant from the politically unaffiliated estimate. Estimates are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.

Public Agenda/USA TODAY Hidden Common Ground Survey – Putting Partisan Animosity in Perspective

Reflections and Implications

Differences of opinion are normal in a democracy. But extreme affective polarization—that is, highly negative views of people who hold opinions different from one’s own—is both highly personal and highly troubling for our nation. Reasonable people, including those who do not particularly like each other, should be able to disagree on substantive issues without democracy itself coming into question. But it becomes difficult to disagree constructively or find common ground if people treat each other with contempt or hatred. Under such conditions, democratic problem-solving grinds to a halt, and political warfare flares uncontrolled. We increasingly find ourselves in this situation in our country today.

Public Agenda’s Hidden Common Ground research shows that most Americans consider extreme partisan animosity between ordinary people to be a grave problem. Few think that partisan animosity between ordinary people will get better in the next ten years, which is likely contributing to the grim mood of our political culture.

But the research also reveals reasons for hope. Not only would most Americans like to see extreme partisan hostility reduced, but many are also trying to reach across partisan divides by talking to people with different political viewpoints and trying to lessen their partisan hostility online.

Another reason to believe the situation is not hopeless is that extreme partisan animosity, while concerning, does not engulf all Americans. This stands in contrast to how partisan animosity tends to be portrayed in the news, enacted by politicians, and intensified on social media. Specifically, our research finds that about 30 percent of Americans feel very unfavorably toward either Democratic or Republican voters. While that’s a lot of politically hostile people—many of whom are loud and active—it’s far from the entire nation, a majority of which feels less partisan animosity or none at all. Twenty percent of Americans feel somewhat unfavorably toward Democratic or Republican voters, and 23 percent of Americans feel only a little unfavorably. Eleven percent of Americans actually feel favorably towards both Democratic and Republican voters and 16 percent do not know how they feel.

With so many organizations across the country experimenting with approaches to reducing partisan animosity, this mapping of variations in partisan animosity suggests that bridge-building might be made more effective if these variations are taken into account. For example, some bridge-builders may want to pay particular attention to the 20 percent of Americans with only somewhat unfavorable feelings towards Democrats or Republicans to keep them from tipping over into the more deeply hostile category. Others might want to focus on the 30 percent with the most intense negative feelings, who often appear to be the loudest voices and have the most negative impact on our political culture. It is worth exploring whether different approaches to bridge-building are more successful with specific groups.

It could also be useful to concentrate on elevating the voices of the 23 percent of Americans with the least unfavorable feelings towards Democratic and Republican voters, to balance the tendency of news

media and social media to elevate the most conflictual narratives. This group may also have important roles to play in modeling bridge-building behaviors since this research found that they already have more contact with people with different political views.

Organizations experimenting with approaches to bridging partisan divides can also build on the variety of measures and approaches that Americans themselves believe would help bring the country together. These include well-organized community dialogue; nonpartisan, solutions-oriented news sources; reforming social media so that platforms stop amplifying hostility; reducing the distorting political influence of big money; curricula that teach students to deal with conflicts constructively and feature both America's achievements and shortcomings; and national service for young people. Evaluating not just which of these approaches are effective at reducing partisan hostility but also which types of people those approaches are most effective at reaching could make these insights even more useful.

Finally, this survey and previous Hidden Common Ground research have found more partisan disagreement over racism and how to address it than over any other topic that these studies have explored. For example, fewer Republicans than people of other political affiliations believe that racism is a systemic problem or that racism makes it more difficult for people of color to participate in our democracy and to succeed economically.⁹ Working through these differences would likely be valuable in defusing partisan animosity and building common ground on policies that can make a difference in people's lives and communities.

While affective polarization has real impacts on people's lives and our nation, it is not all-encompassing or monolithic. Many Americans are trying to dial down affective polarization, and many support policies and strategies they think could help. Finding better ways to bridge our divides starts with recognizing that affective polarization varies in its scope, intensity and impacts, and tailoring bridge-building efforts to meet people where they are.

⁹ Public Agenda, 2021, "[America's Hidden Common Ground on Renewing Democracy](#)," Public Agenda, 2021, "[America's Hidden Common Ground on Overcoming Divisiveness](#)."



PUBLIC AGENDA

About Public Agenda

Public Agenda is a national nonpartisan organization dedicated to creating a better, more inclusive and informed democracy for everyone. Through research, engagement and communications, Public Agenda focuses on building trust and opportunity, raising up the voices of the public, and bridging divides to facilitate progress. Areas of focus include K-12 education, higher education, health care, economic opportunity, and democracy. Find Public Agenda online at PublicAgenda.org, on Facebook at facebook.com/PublicAgenda and on Twitter at @PublicAgenda.



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Founded in 1982, USA TODAY reflects the pulse of the nation, serving as host of the American conversation by delivering high-quality, engaging content through unique visual storytelling across all platforms. A media innovator, USA TODAY reaches nearly 100 million unique visitors each month across digital platforms, with more than 125 million downloads of our award-winning app. USA TODAY also remains the nation's number one newspaper and is owned by Gannett Co., Inc. (NYSE: GCI).



About The Kettering Foundation

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. The interpretations and conclusions in this publication represent the views of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, its directors, or its officers. More information may be found at www.kettering.org.



About National Issues Forum

Based in Dayton, Ohio, the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves to promote public deliberation about difficult public issues. Its activities include publishing the issue guides and other materials used by local forum groups, encouraging collaboration among forum sponsors, and sharing information about current activities in the network.

About America Amplified

America Amplified is a public media initiative funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting aimed at using community engagement to inform and strengthen local, regional and national journalism.

About the Charles Koch Institute

The Charles Koch Institute supports research, educational programs, and civil discourse to advance an understanding of how people can best live together in peace and prosperity. The Institute provides grants to support a wide range of inquiry on issues including criminal justice and policing reform, free speech and open inquiry, foreign policy, economic opportunity, and those addressed through its Courageous Collaborations initiative among others.

About Civic Health Project

Civic Health Project (CHP) is dedicated to reducing toxic partisan polarization and enabling healthier public discourse and decision-making across our citizenry, politics, and media. Through grant making and advocacy, we support initiatives that empower Americans to reject tribal partisanship and come together to solve our nation's greatest challenges.