

Opportunities for Accountability-Related Conversations: Understanding Americans' Views toward January 6

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AMERICA

 Protect
Democracy

Background

Despite the national unity that initially followed the January 6 Capitol insurrection, conversations surrounding the attack quickly became politicized and the subject of heated disinformation, as polarized narratives about “what happened” entrenched.

Recognizing that developing a shared narrative of—and ensuring accountability for—political violence is critical for its non-recurrence, this project sought to identify alternative inroads for engaging cross-partisan Americans in conversations surrounding January 6 and related accountability efforts.

Building on a large body of work examining public attitudes toward January 6, our research investigated Americans’ worldviews, values, and assignments of responsibility for the Capitol attack. This report is the first in a series of publications summarizing our findings.

We conducted this research via YouGov in January 2022 on a nationally representative sample of 1274 Americans.

This report explores three themes:

- (1) Attitudes toward January 6:** Americans across ideological lines harbor negative emotions toward the January 6 violence and support reforms to prevent its recurrence, including publishing a full record of what happened and the responsible parties. Still, amidst conspiracy theories casting doubt on efforts to investigate January 6, self-identified conservatives largely distrust the Select Committee, believing it is only interested in damaging Donald Trump.
- (2) Apportioning responsibility:** Americans tend to assign responsibility for the January 6 violence along ideological lines. Even so, there's cross-partisan agreement that the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol are responsible for the violence. However, Americans disagree on who comprises those protestors and on the legitimacy of the charges facing this group.
- (3) Accountability-minded conservatives:** While most self-identified conservatives are at least skeptical of the Select Committee, about one-quarter are amenable to its work. We call this segment “accountability-minded conservatives” and believe that they can play a critical role in building and more broadly signaling cross-partisan support for accountability efforts. We focused on this segment because it complicates the narrative that views toward January 6 fully fracture along ideological lines.

This is the first in a series of resources summarizing our findings. Additional reports will explore:

- **January 6 accountability and “sacred values”:** Using a sacred values lens, this report examines how deeply Americans hold their accountability stances and why. Sacred values are non-negotiable moral imperatives that, when challenged, can cause value-holders to disengage from discussion or even take up violence to defend their position. When sacred values are in play, thoughtful, values-based communications approaches are needed.
- **January 6 and risks for further political violence in the U.S.** This report discusses a segment of Americans who support political violence targeting members of the opposing political party, public health officials, and school board members. Efforts to defuse risks for political violence in the U.S. must consider this group and the worldviews and values animating their positions.

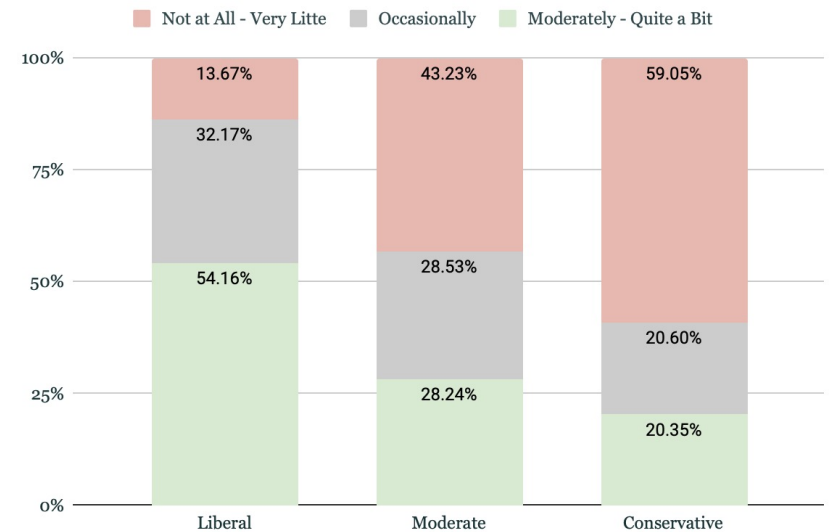
PART I: ATTITUDES TOWARD JANUARY 6

- **Americans harbor negative emotions toward the January 6 violence.**
- **There is also cross-ideological support for reforms to prevent its recurrence.**
- **Amidst conspiracy theories inaccurately characterizing January 6 as a “false flag operation” and casting doubt on investigations into the violence, conservatives largely distrust the Select Committee, believing it is only interested in damaging Donald Trump.**

January 6 is not top of mind for most Americans.

- We fielded this research amidst a media blitz covering the one-year anniversary of the Capitol insurrection. Still, January 6 was not top of mind for most Americans.
- Only 20% of conservatives and 28% of moderates have thought much about the events of January 6. Just over half of liberals have thought much about the attack.

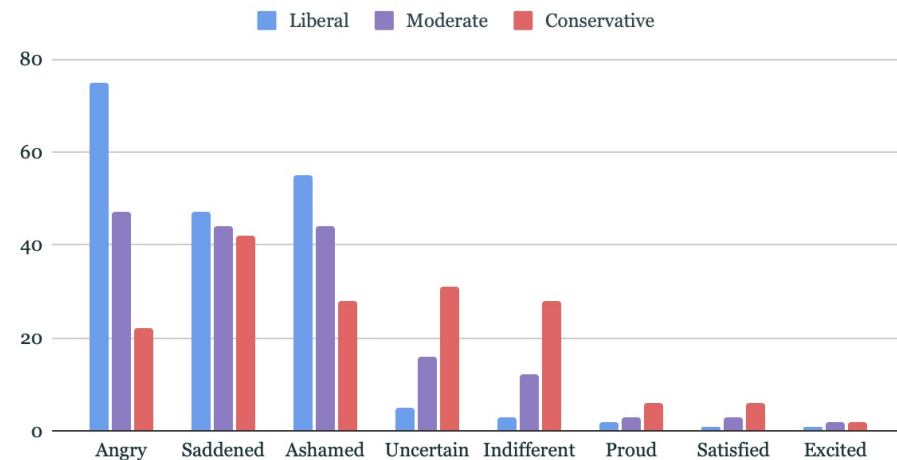
Over the past year, how often have you thought about the events of Jan. 6?



Americans feel negatively about the January 6 violence.

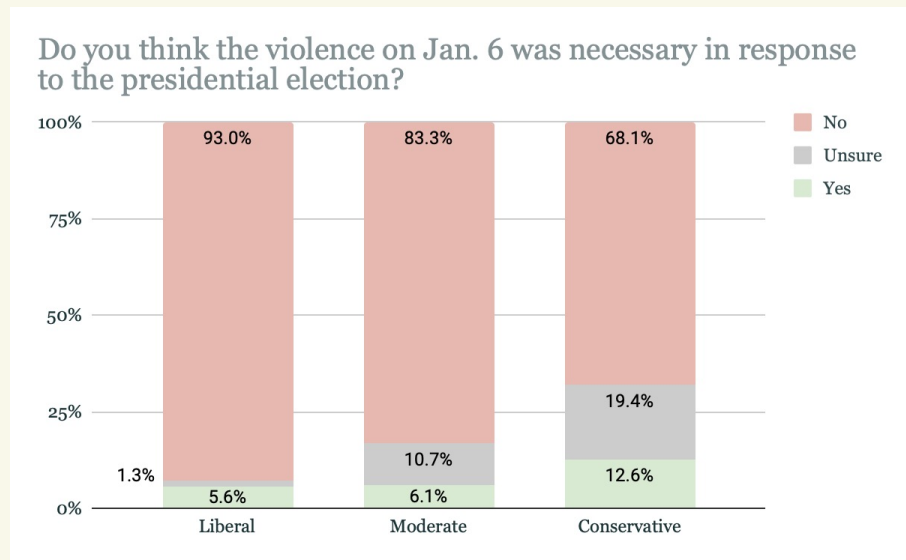
- Respondents across ideologies report feeling sadness and shame toward the violence.
- Only a small minority of Americans harbor positive emotions toward the violence: 14% of conservatives, 8% of moderates, and 4% of liberals. Additional segments cite indifference: 28% of conservatives, 12% of moderates, and 3% of liberals.
- While large portions of liberals (75%) and moderates (47%) feel anger, nearly one-third of conservatives (31%) feel uncertain.

How do you feel about the protestors' use of force on Jan. 6, 2021?



Just as Americans harbor negative emotions toward the violence, they view it as an unnecessary response to the November 2020 presidential election.

Even so, 32% of conservatives, 17% of moderates, and 7% of liberals believe or are unsure whether the violence was a necessary response to the election.

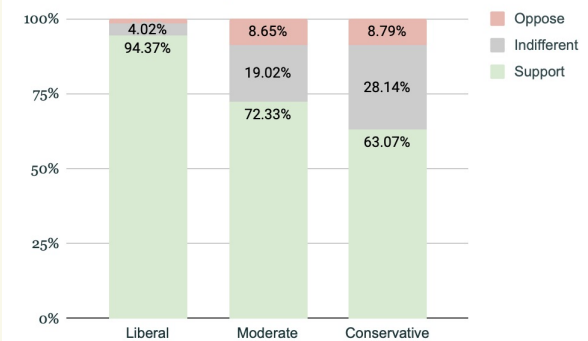


Americans support reforms to prevent further political violence.

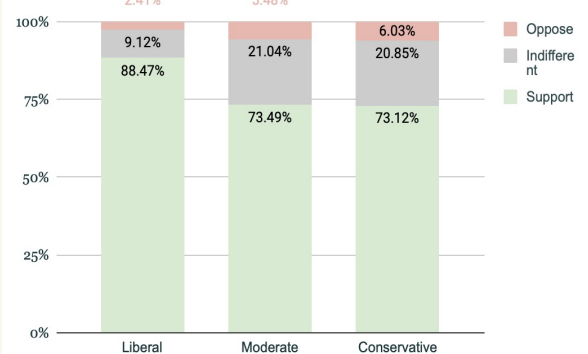
- For “publishing a full account of what happened on January 6 and who was responsible” and “pushing for greater transparency from social media companies,” segments that do not expressly support these measures demonstrate high levels of indifference, suggesting that these would not be explosive issues to engage.
- Support for publishing a full account of January 6 suggests cross-ideological openness to the Select Committee’s mandate (though the Select Committee itself is polarizing).
- Among the proposed reforms, there is the most opposition to “strengthening laws against political violence,” though the majority still supports or is indifferent to this measure.

“In the interest of preventing further political violence, do you support or oppose the federal government...”

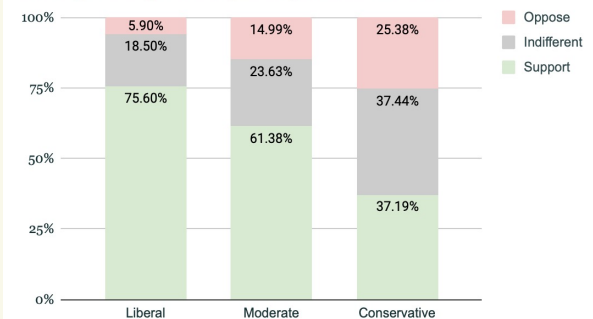
Publishing a full account of what happened on Jan. 6 and who was responsible



Pushing for greater transparency from social media companies



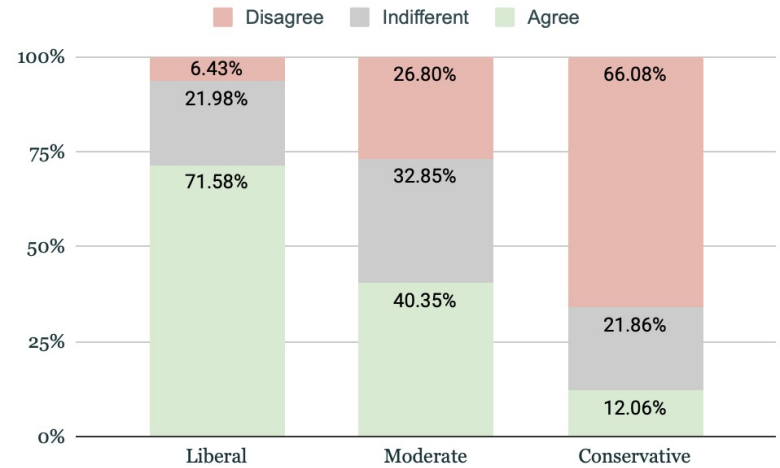
Strengthening laws against political violence



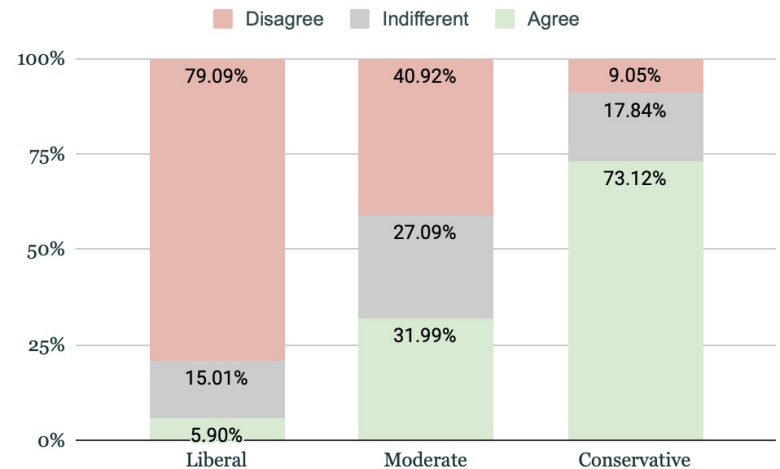
Support for the Select Committee splinters along ideological lines.

- While conservatives support the Select Committee’s mandate in theory (over 91% support or are indifferent to the federal government establishing a full record of what happened on January 6 and who is responsible), they nevertheless largely oppose the Select Committee itself.
- Amidst conspiracy theories wrongly characterizing January 6 as a “false flag operation” and sowing distrust in efforts to investigate the violence, most conservatives doubt that the Select Committee will undertake an impartial investigation (68%) or benefit the country (66%). Over 73% of conservatives instead believe that the Select Committee is only interested in damaging Donald Trump.
- While liberals largely support the Select Committee, moderates are more divided: 60% doubt or are indifferent to whether the Select Committee will benefit the country. 32% of moderates believe that the Select Committee is only interested in damaging Donald Trump.

I believe the Select Committee's work will benefit the country



I believe the Select Committee is only interested in damaging Donald Trump



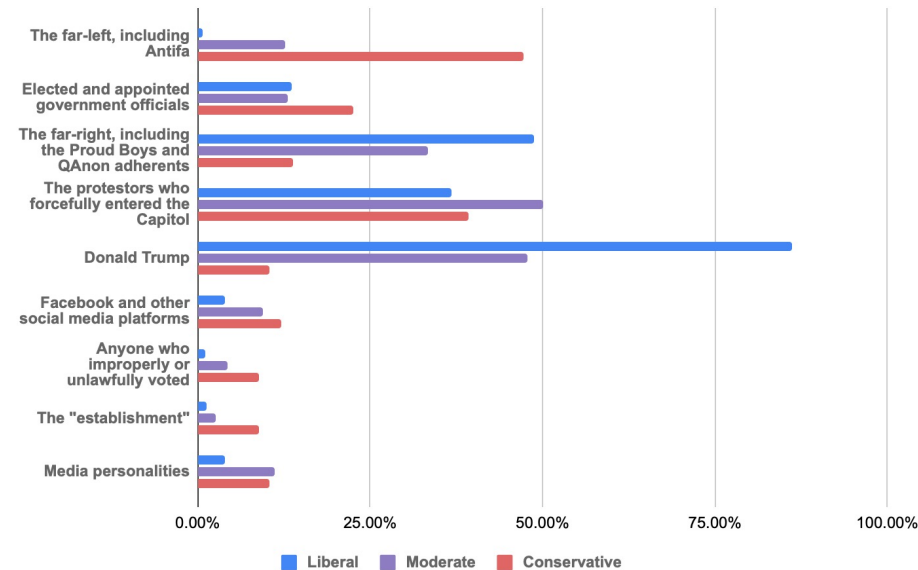
PART II: APPORTIONING RESPONSIBILITY

- **Americans tend to assign responsibility for the January 6 violence along ideological lines.**
- **Even so, there's cross-partisan agreement that the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol are responsible for the violence.**
- **However, Americans disagree on who comprises those protestors and on the legitimacy of the charges facing this group.**

Americans agree that “the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol” are responsible for the violence. Other assignments of responsibility break down along ideological lines.

- Liberals selected:
 - Donald Trump (86%)
 - The far-right, including the Proud Boys and QAnon adherents (49%)
 - The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol (37%)
- Conservatives selected:
 - The far-left, including Antifa (47%)
 - The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol (39%)
 - Elected and appointed government officials (23%)
- Moderates selected:
 - The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol (50%)
 - Donald Trump (48%)
 - The far-right, including the Proud Boys and QAnon adherents (33%)

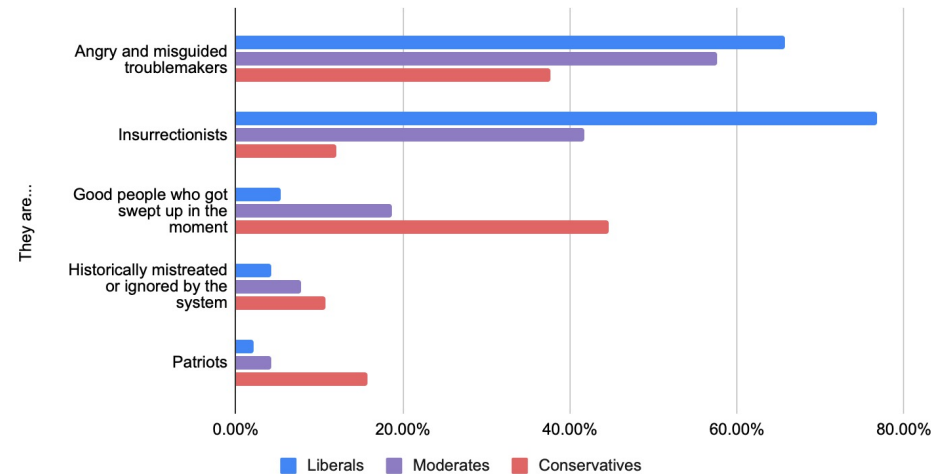
What two groups do you believe are MOST responsible for the violence on January 6?



Characterizations of those who forcefully entered the Capitol likewise vary by ideology, though there is some agreement that they are “angry and misguided troublemakers.”

- Conservatives most often characterize the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol as “good people who got swept up in the moment,” though nearly half (inaccurately) cite “the far-left, including Antifa” as responsible for the violence.
- This may signal inconsistent beliefs surrounding January 6 and/or support for the conspiracy theory that Antifa and the far-left agitated an otherwise peaceful crowd and are thus responsible for the resulting violence. (Open-ended responses suggest support for this conspiracy theory.)
- Only 12% of conservatives view those who forcefully entered the Capitol as insurrectionists (compared to 42% of moderates and 77% of liberals).

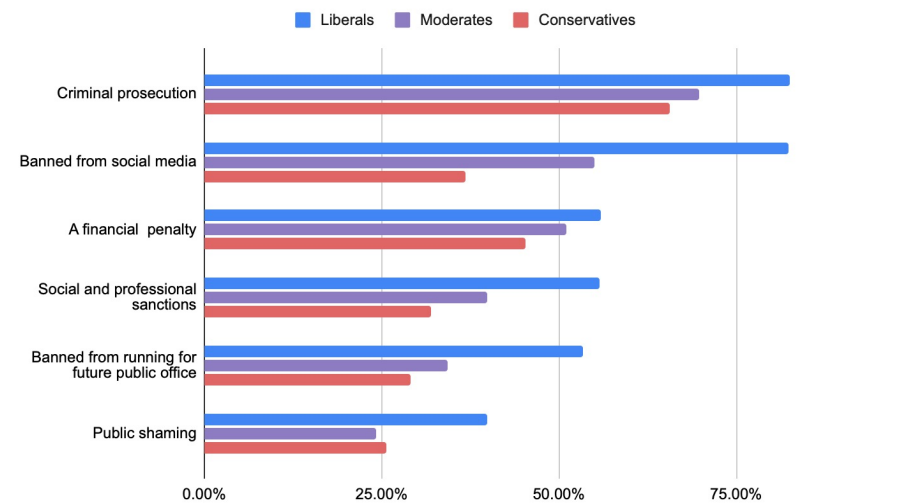
How do you view the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol on January 6? (Select all that apply.)



Nearly 90% of respondents believe that those responsible for the violence should be held accountable.

- They support a range of accountability options, including and beyond criminal prosecution.
- Still, given divergent assignments of responsibility, they disagree on who should be held accountable.

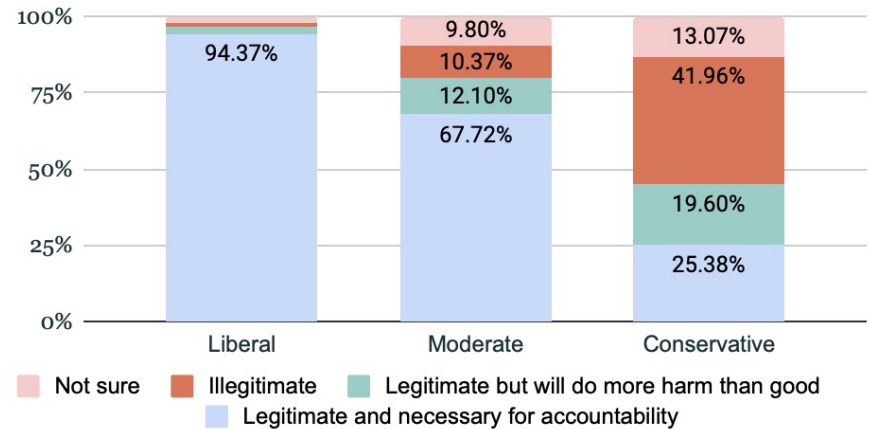
How should those responsible for the violence on Jan. 6 be held accountable?



While Americans overwhelmingly support accountability for those they deem responsible for the violence, responses splinter along ideological lines on the perceived legitimacy of the charges facing the protestors.

- About 45% of conservatives believe that the charges against those who forcefully entered the Capitol are legitimate. Still, this segment is divided over whether they are necessary for accountability (25%) or will do more harm than good (19.60%).
- Open-ended responses surfaced one possible explanation for this: A prevalent belief among conservatives that there is a “two-tiered justice system” that has allowed liberals to evade accountability for the summer 2020 protests. As one such response captured, “Those on the left are never held accountable to the laws, while conservatives are crucified.”
- Across the ideological spectrum, more Americans view the charges facing the January 6 participants as legitimate than believe that the Select Committee will undertake an impartial investigation or will benefit the country.

Since January 6, over 700 individuals have been arrested and charged for their involvement in the events that day. How do you view these charges?



PART III: ACCOUNTABILITY- MINDED CONSERVATIVES

- **While most conservatives are at least skeptical of the Select Committee, about 25% are amenable to its work and accountability efforts more broadly.**
- **We call this segment “accountability-minded conservatives” and believe that they can play a central role in building and more broadly signaling cross-ideological support for accountability.**
- **This segment only captures conservatives; it does not represent the many moderates and liberals who support the Select Committee and other accountability initiatives.**
- **We chose to focus on conservatives because it complicates the narrative that views toward January 6 and related accountability efforts splinter fully along ideological lines.**

Accountability-minded conservatives are self-identified “conservative” and “very conservative” respondents who:

- (1) believe that the charges filed against the protestors are legitimate; AND
- (2) are open to the Select Committee’s work

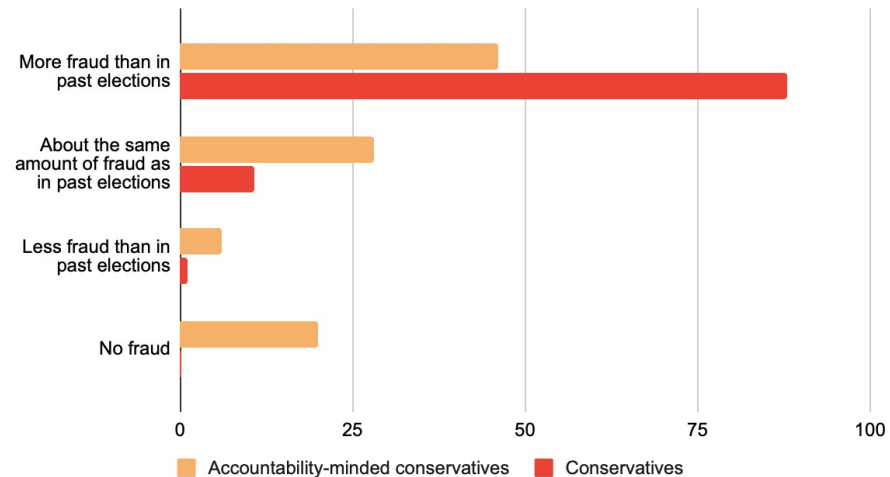
This revealed a segment of 100 respondents, 25% of conservatives and 8% of our overall sample.

They are mostly white, middle-aged Republicans who live in suburban or rural areas throughout the United States.

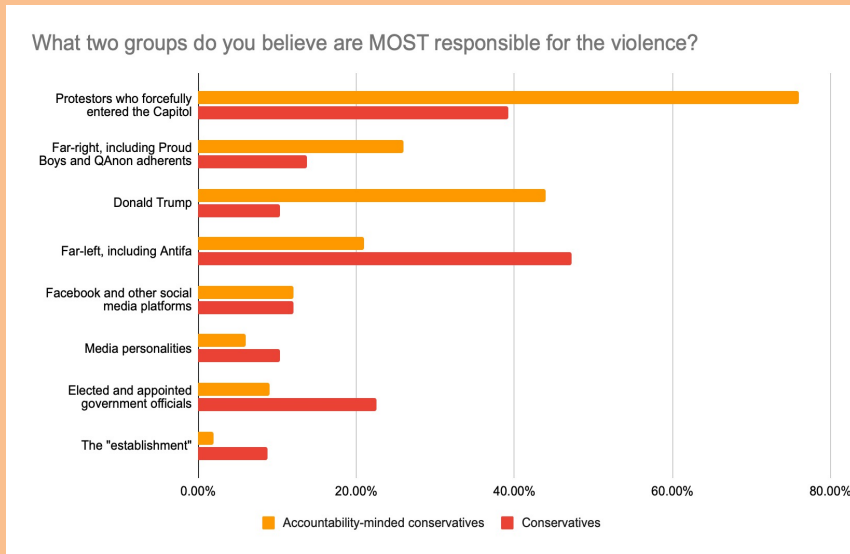
They’re not particularly wealthy but also are not very financially worried. Most have not completed college.

When compared to the overall conservative sample, accountability-minded conservatives are significantly less likely to believe that there was widespread fraud in the November 2020 election.

In the 2020 election, there was...

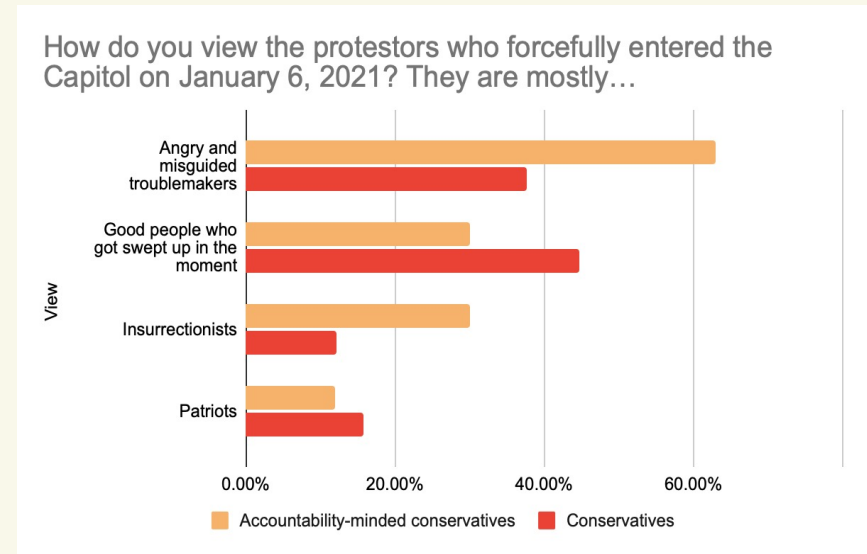


Accountability-minded conservatives have different responsibility appraisals for the January 6 violence than the overall conservative sample.



- Compared to the overall conservative sample, accountability-minded conservatives are significantly more likely to blame the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol, Donald Trump, and the far-right, including the Proud Boys and Qanon adherents.
- They are significantly less likely to blame the far-left, including Antifa.

Accountability-minded conservatives also hold more critical views of the protestors, most often characterizing them as “angry and misguided troublemakers.”



- They are just as likely to characterize the protestors as “insurrectionists” as they are “good people who got swept up in the moment” (the most popular conservative characterization of the protestors).

Accountability-minded conservatives can play an important role in building and signaling cross-ideological support for January 6 accountability efforts. The following insights may be helpful in considering how to reach and engage this segment.

VALUES

Accountability-minded conservatives most value:

- Individual rights and freedoms (53%)
- Respect for the constitution (27%)
- Equality of opportunity (26%)
- Prominent Christian culture (24%)

They were also about 10% more likely to value democracy (21%) than the overall conservative sample.

AMERICAN IDENTITY

This segment believes that the following *should* be “very important” in making someone a “true American”:

- Respecting America’s institutions and laws (78%)
- Working hard to support oneself and one’s family (63%)
- Ensuring that every citizen has the opportunity to vote (63%)
- Resolving political differences through peaceful means” (60%)

They were about 10% more likely than the overall conservative segment to select the latter two as “very important.”

MEDIA HABITS

They get most of their news from:

- Facebook (47%)
- Word of mouth (41%)
- Fox News (36%)
- Local TV news stations (36%)

Summary

- January 6 is not top of mind for most Americans.
- Americans across ideological lines harbor negative views toward the January 6 violence and support reforms to prevent its recurrence, including publishing a full account of what happened and who is responsible. Even so, amidst conspiracy theories casting doubt on efforts to investigate the January 6 violence, conservatives largely distrust the Select Committee, believing it is only interested in damaging Donald Trump.
- Responsibility apportionments for the January 6 violence splinter along ideological lines, though there is some consensus that “the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol” are among the most responsible for the violence.
- While most conservatives are at least skeptical of the Select Committee, about 25% are not. These “accountability-minded conservatives” complicate the narrative that views toward January 6 accountability fully fracture along ideological lines. We believe that this segment could play a central role in building and signaling cross-ideological support for accountability.

For questions or inquiries, please email info@projectoverzero.org