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One Year Later, New UMass Amherst Poll Finds Continued National Political Division Over the Jan. 6 Attack on the U.S. Capitol

With 71% of Republicans viewing Joe Biden's victory as illegitimate, they largely defend those who stormed the Capitol to disrupt his electoral certification

Topline results and crosstabs for the poll can be found at www.umass.edu/poll

AMHERST, Mass. – One year after thousands of supporters of former President Donald Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to protest and disrupt the certification of Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election, the results of a new national [University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll](#) released today show 71% of Republicans – and one-third of the nation – continue to believe that Biden's victory was illegitimate, and that Republicans continue to blame Democrats, Antifa and the Capitol Police for the events of Jan. 6. They also oppose both the continuation of law enforcement efforts to prosecute the rioters and attempts to learn more about what happened that day.

The poll of 1,000 respondents found that only 58% of Americans believe that Biden's electoral victory was legitimate, with more than a fifth (22%) saying that it was "definitely not legitimate," numbers nearly identical to an [April 2021 UMass Amherst Poll](#) (59% / 24%). Only one-fifth of Republicans (21%) view Biden's victory as legitimate.

"Given the continued questioning of Biden's victory by prominent Republican elected officials, conservative media personalities and former President Trump, it is no surprise that 7 in 10 Republicans, conservatives and Trump voters view the results of the 2020 election with skepticism, if not outright disbelief," says [Tatishe Nteta](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll. "However, overall American opinion on the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election has remained steady since April, as close to 6 in 10 Americans view Biden's victory as legitimate."

"Regardless of the truth of the situation, public officials need to shore up faith in how we vote," says [Raymond La Raja](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. "The top reason voters don't think Biden's victory was legitimate has to do with belief in fraud – 83% of the poll's respondents cited fraudulent ballots being counted by election officials to help Biden win in several states. Roughly the same percentage – 81% – claim that absentee ballots from dead people also helped

him. Meanwhile, 76% blamed non-citizens and other ineligible voters who cast ballots. These are extremely worrisome perceptions, and improved faith in the electoral process won't happen until Republicans stop saying the election was stolen."

Republicans continue to defend the events of Jan. 6 and those who perpetrated the attacks on the capitol, with 80% describing the events as a "protest," while the majority (55%) of all respondents of the poll use the term "riot." While 62% of Republicans said the perpetrators were "protestors," more than a quarter (26%) deemed the pro-Trump horde "patriots," while similar numbers (27%) also said they were "Antifa." Democrats, meanwhile, nearly equally described them as "insurrectionists," "white nationalists" and "rioters" (68% each), a "mob" (67%) and "terrorists" (64%).

"Women and people of color are more likely to use negative words such as 'insurrection' and 'riot' to describe the events of January 6," La Raja says. "Meanwhile older, wealthier, conservatives and whites are more likely to use the term 'protest' than other groups. Very few Trump voters view the events as anything worse than a protest."

Regarding who should be held responsible for the day's events, a broad majority of Democrats blame Trump, while Republicans continue to blame the Democratic Party (30%), the Capitol Police (24%) and Antifa (20%), all of which show little movement from April's polling results.

"As we approach the anniversary of Jan. 6, Americans continue to point at former President Trump – who famously told his supporters that morning to 'fight like hell... and if you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore' – as the driving force behind the violence that occurred outside and within the U.S. Capitol," Nteta says.

"A large plurality of Americans – 44% – blame Donald Trump for the events of Jan. 6 compared to any other person or group," La Raja says. "Only 4% blame Joe Biden. Stuningly, almost one-in-three Republican voters blame the Democratic Party for the events of the day. On the flip side, just 8% of Democrats voters blame the Republican Party. They blame Trump by a wide margin, with 75% saying he is the cause of it all."

While 86% of Democrats support continuing law enforcement efforts to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of the Capitol attack, only 29% of Republicans support them, and 52% replied that they oppose the efforts. Three-quarters of Republicans also said the nation should "move on" from investigating the events, while 84% of Democrats say we need to learn more about what happened on Jan. 6. Overall, women are more supportive of both law enforcement efforts (61-53) and congressional investigations (62-50) than men.

"As we close a year that featured a shocking attack on the U.S. Capitol and persistent, baseless claims by the former president and his sycophants that the 2020 Presidential Election was stolen, we continue to see Republicans and Democrats living in

diametrically opposed ‘realities,’” says [Alexander Theodoridis](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll.

Perceptions Remain Unchanged Over Past Year

“Perceptions of the events of Jan. 6 have remained strikingly stable over the past year, despite the dramatic and disturbing revelations of the January 6 Commission,” says [Jesse Rhodes](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “This stability reveals the remarkable power of ideology and partisanship in shaping these perceptions, even in the face of contrary evidence. Significant majorities of Americans want prosecutions of participants in the events of Jan. 6 and want further investigation of what happened, but a substantial share do not. The commission’s work is seriously complicated by polarization over what happened that day, a problem intentionally abetted by politicians.”

Sixty-two percent of Republicans – and 37% of the poll’s respondents overall – said that former Vice President Mike Pence should have used his role in certifying the electoral vote to challenge Biden’s victory as the protestors chanted for his execution that day.

Republicans also downplay the potential severity of the day’s violence, with 72% saying they believe Pence and members of Congress were not in danger of harm by the Capitol’s invaders, while 84% of Democrats say that the lawmakers faced physical threat.

Looking ahead to the 2022 midterm elections, 55% of Republicans say that a candidate questioning the legitimacy of Biden’s victory would be more likely to receive their vote. Such claims would entice only 23% of independents, however, while 38% of independents said it would make the candidate less likely to garner their support. More than a third of Republicans (36%) said that a candidate refusing to say that Biden was legitimately elected president would make them more likely to vote for the candidate, while half (49%) of independents say it would make the candidate less likely to receive their vote.

“Republicans say they will punish GOP candidates who voted to impeach Donald Trump or establish a commission to investigate Jan. 6 and reward those who question Biden’s legitimacy,” says Theodoridis.

The one question in which the poll found nearly identical bipartisan response pertained to whether Congress and the vice president should hold the power to certify – and possibly nullify – presidential elections. Forty-four percent of Democrats and 43% of Republicans responded that the power should not rest with the vice president and Congress, while 23% of Republicans and 21% of Democrats said that it should.

“The events of Jan. 6 and the Trump administration’s attempts to overturn the 2020 election highlighted the potential dangers associated with the nation’s current process of certifying the presidential election, and a plurality of Americans oppose giving the U.S. Congress and the sitting vice president the power to certify and potentially

nullify electoral results moving forward,” Nteta says. “Given the increased politicization of the process by which presidential electoral results are certified, it is not shocking that a plurality of Americans oppose giving this power to the Congress and sitting vice president.”

Methodology

This [University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll](#) of 1,000 respondents nationwide was conducted by YouGov Dec. 14-20. YouGov interviewed 1036 total respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 1,000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements, using the person weights on the public use file.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity and years of education. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 and 2020 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories) and education (4-categories) to produce the final weight.

The margin of error within this poll is 3.1%.

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