

US Political Polling

Racism in America & BLM



Key findings

9 July 2020

In our first public poll [in partnership with Guardian US](#), Opinium surveyed 2,000 US adults 18+ between June 19th and 24rd. The survey was conducted online and weighted to represent the US adult population according to demographics, education and past voting behaviour. Here's what we found—

Racism in America

Americans across the political spectrum agree that racism and police violence are a problem, but disagree on the severity and how it should be handled.

91% of Americans now agree that racism is a problem in the United States (72% think it is a *serious* problem). These numbers are comparable to the share of Americans who think police violence is a problem (89% and 65% who think it is a *serious* problem).

Though there is now broad agreement across the political spectrum that racism and police violence are a problem in the US, liberal-leaning Americans are *significantly* more likely to view these issues as serious and thus significantly more likely to believe the protests are justified.

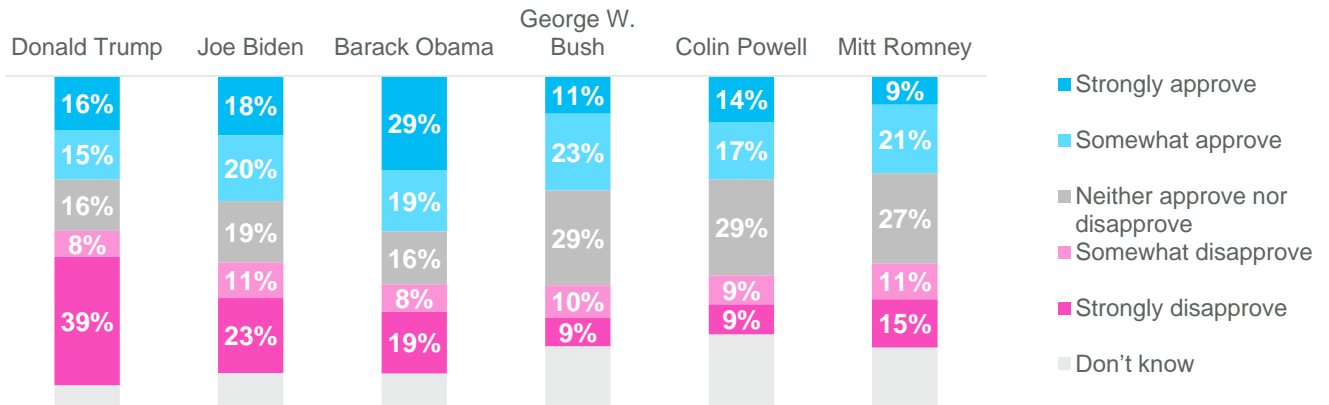
Younger Americans are also much more likely to view racism as a *serious* problem in the US—80% say so vs. 68% and 69% of 35-54's and 55+'s respectively. Minorities, predictably, also tend to see these issues as more serious than white Americans.

There is broad disapproval of Trump's handling of the protests.

More Americans disapprove than approve of Trump's response to the protests (47% vs. 31%). This is true, predictably, of Registered Democrats (75% disapprove; 12% approve) but also of Registered Independents (55% disapprove; 27% approve). Meanwhile, those who voted for Trump in 2016 remain steadfast in their support—70% approve while only 14% disapprove.

Meanwhile, the balance tips towards approval for almost every other politician surveyed, including a variety of Republicans currently and previously in office. Americans are also more supportive of Biden and Obama's responses to the protests (though there is significantly more enthusiasm for Obama's response than Biden's.)

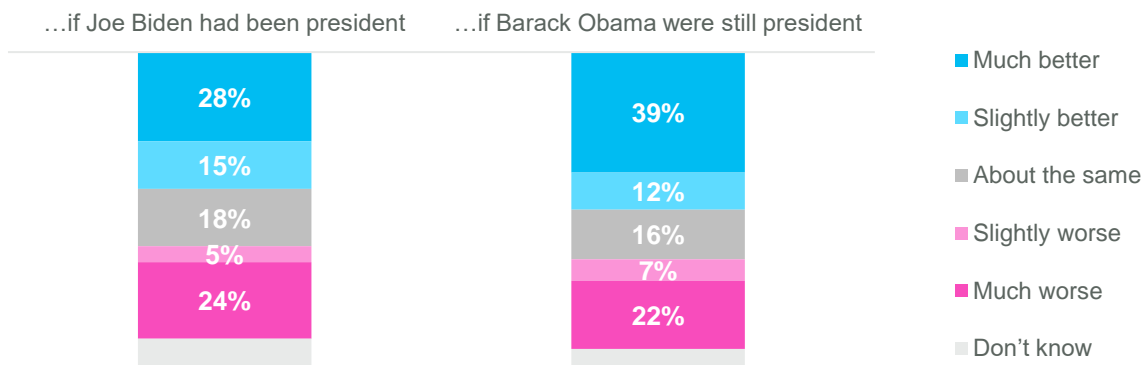
Do you approve or disapprove of this person's response to the protests?



While significant numbers were neutral or answered “don’t know” for Bush, Powell and Romney, it’s interesting to look at them as an indication of how much more negative views of Trump’s response are than those of other prominent Republicans who have taken more conciliatory approaches even once we factor in the trend of approval of retired political figures becoming more positive over time and Romney and Powell’s semi-detached relationship with national Republicans.

This trend of viewing Biden as better equipped to handle the situation but not as good as Barack Obama is also shown when we asked if the federal response would have been better or worse if each Biden or Obama had been president instead of Trump:

Do you think the federal response would have been better or worse if...



Nearly 5 times as many Americans posted on social media to support Black Lives Matter than contacted their government representatives.

14% of Americans posted on social media in support of Black Lives Matter, while only 3% wrote to or called their representatives asking for change.

Young Americans are significantly more engaged in the Black Lives Matter movement.

73% of 18-34-year-olds have taken some sort of action in support of the Black Lives Matter movement compared to 52% of the general population. Almost 1 in 5 (18%) have signed a petition in support of the movement vs. 10% of all Americans, and about 1 in 10 (9%) have gone out to protest themselves vs. 4% of all Americans. 12% of 18-34's were inspired by the movement to **check their voter registration** vs. only 6% of the general population.

18-34's are also most optimistic that the movement will lead to real change—56% believe it will vs. only 44% of the general population.

Fewer than 1 in 5 Americans (18%) think that racism in America is mostly systemic.

Despite the [rise of the term 'systemic' racism in public discourse](#), only 18% of Americans think racism in America is *mostly* systemic. 35% of Americans think racism in America is mostly individual (stemming from the personal prejudice of individual people) and another 35% believe it is equal parts individual and systemic. The understanding of racism in America as mostly systemic is higher among younger Americans (25% of 18-34's). Even among Democratic-leaning individuals fewer than a third believe that racism in America is mostly systemic.

Perspectives on policing

76% of Americans believe that most cops are good people, but there are a few 'bad apples'

Only 13% of Americans take the opposite view—that most police officers are bad people, but there are some good ones. Very few Americans remain on the fringes with 2% believing that 'all cops are good people' and 2% believing that 'all cops are bad people.' The 'bad apple' narrative remains the leading view even among Black/African American respondents, though by a smaller margin—49% buy into it vs. 32% who believe that most cops are bad, with some good.

- **Police Reform & Support for Protest Slogans**
 - **Most widely supported reforms:** investigating all use of deadly force by police (74% of Americans approve), ban police use of choke holds and other neck restraints (67% approval), make police misconduct records publicly available (66%), require officers to use de-escalation when they can in use of force policies (66%), require officers to use alternatives to deadly force when possible (59%).
 - **Calls to defund the police:** Only 32% say they approve of redirecting funding for police departments towards education/healthcare, and community social programs. And while this is a commonly understood meaning of '**defund the police**,' there is more reticence to stand behind the activist rallying cry, which only 24% of Americans say they agree with (58% disagree).

- **Calls to abolish the police:** An even smaller share (13%) of Americans agree with the activist slogan ‘abolish the police.’ More Americans (21%) approve of the initiative when explained as: ‘abolishing the police in its current form entirely, to replace it with a newly imagined form of community-enforced safety.’
- **Policing Mindsets:** 61% of Americans think that, ideally, police officers should think of themselves more as ‘members of the community’ aiming to de-escalate violent situations wherever possible’ than as ‘soldiers on a battlefield where every person they encounter could be a lethal threat.’ Only 16% of Americans lean towards the latter.
- **Police Militarization:** Americans are quite divided on police militarization but more Americans think it is **right** than wrong (39% vs. 27%) for state and local police forces to have access to surplus military equipment (e.g., armored vehicles, large-caliber weapons, ammunition, etc). Notably, 61% of Obama voters who pivoted to Trump in 2016 think it is right for police forces to have access to this military equipment, while only 14% think it is wrong.

Boundaries of protest

74% of Americans believe protests should always be peaceful and 71% condemn the looting.

Meanwhile, 16% believe that while protests should *mostly* be peaceful, violence is sometimes necessary. This number rises to 30% among non-White respondents and 35% among 18-34’s. Only 4% believe that violence is the only way to bring about needed change in society (rising to 10% among 18-34’s).

Though 71% of Americans condemn the looting, 1 in 5 (19%) of the general population say that though they *generally* disapprove of looting, they understand the looters’ state of mind. Only 4% of Americans believe the looting was fully justified. Younger Americans aged 18-34 were generally more tolerant towards the looting, with only 40% condemning it outright and 43% saying that though they generally disapprove of looting they understand the looters’ state of mind.

Americans are divided on whether past leaders of the civil rights movement would be proud of this current movement and the recent protests. 39% think **Martin Luther King** would *not* be proud, while a smaller 36% think he would be. Americans are more confident that **Malcolm X** would be proud of this movement—39% think he would while only 20% think he wouldn’t.

What’s a worthy cause to assemble?

Just a little over a third of Democrats believe the protests should take place despite Covid-19.

Only a fifth of Americans (22%) believe that the cause is important enough that the protests need to take place despite public health concerns around Covid-19. That percentage is slightly higher among registered Democrats, though still a minority (35% vs. only 9% of registered Republicans).

Over half of Americans (53%), the largest cohort, believe that the cause is important, but not enough to risk endangering public health and spreading Covid-19. This position is held in similar proportions among registered Republicans and Democrats (52% and 53% respectively).

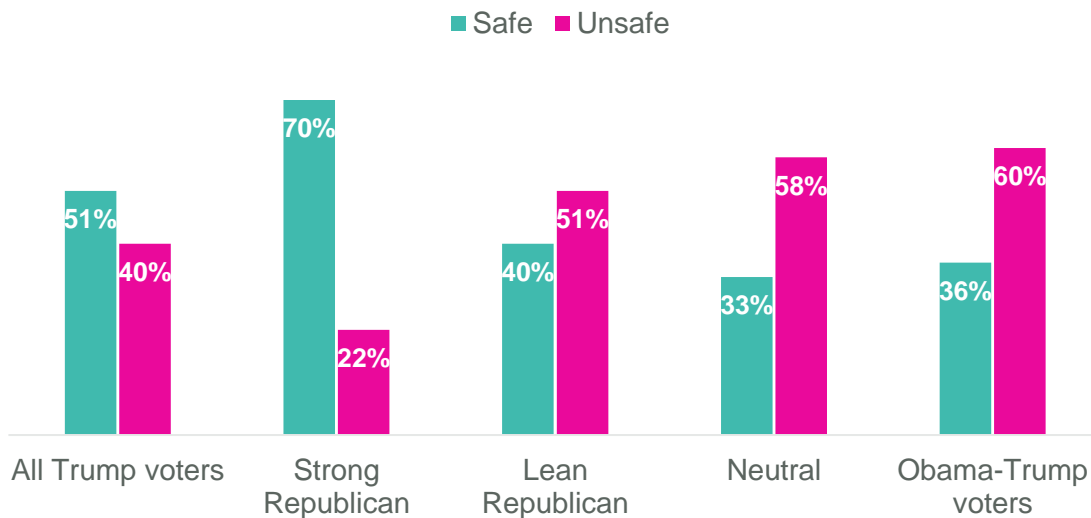
Trump voters split on whether rallies are safe to attend

Just over half (51%) of Trump voters (who voted for him in 2016 or would do so in 2020) say that they would feel safe attending an indoor rally for the president vs. 40% who would feel unsafe.

Attitudes change depending on how strongly partisan a respondent is. Among those who identify on a partisan scale as “strong Republican”, 70% believe it’s safe to attend indoor rallies while 22% believe it is unsafe. Among those who identify as “lean Republican”, these figures are 40% safe vs. 51% unsafe.

This latter group have more in common with Obama 2012-Trump 2016 voters who believe attending indoor rallies is unsafe by a margin of 60% to 36%.

Would you feel safe attending an indoor Trump rally?





About Opinium

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