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NATIONAL: AUTHORITARIANISM AMONG TRUMP VOTERS

Study finds differences between two types of supporters

*Note: this release is not a standard **Monmouth University Poll**. The data here are drawn from an ongoing study of authoritarianism in the American electorate. The original survey was conducted in the fall of 2019 as research for [Authoritarian Nightmare: Trump and His Followers](#), a book by John W. Dean and Bob Altemeyer focusing on what motivates supporters of President Donald Trump. Because the findings in this release are drawn from a subset of the original survey sample, the specific percentages presented here should not be projected onto a larger population. However, Monmouth feels it is worth sharing this information to further our understanding of America's body politic in light of the violence at the U.S. Capitol this month.*

West Long Branch, NJ – Donald Trump voters with high authoritarian inclinations are more likely than other Trump voters to engage in conspiracy theories, such as the existence of a “Deep State” that has been out to get Trump and the idea that state Republican election officials have covered up voter fraud. The results of an ongoing study of authoritarianism in the American electorate also highlight the potential danger of those authoritarian views taking hold among a larger group of citizens if they are allowed to go unchecked. Identifying the fundamental values and motivations behind undemocratic behavior that has spread across the United States is a critical step in curbing it.

The Monmouth University Polling Institute conducted an online survey of a random sample of American voters in 2019 for a book by John W. Dean and Bob Altemeyer, [Authoritarian Nightmare: Trump and His Followers](#). The framework for the book's analysis is a set of psychological scales developed by psychologist [Altemeyer](#) and others to measure voter perceptions of prejudice, social equality, morality and preferences for strong leadership. The key scale – Right Wing Authoritarianism – was [summarized on the Polling Institute's blog](#) in August 2020. In December, Monmouth contacted 303 participants from the original study to ask about their reaction to the presidential election results. While the specific percentages are not projectable to a larger population, these data are relevant because they

cast a light on statistically significant differences between Trump supporters who have high authoritarian inclinations and those who do not.

“Research on authoritarianism suggests that a fairly consistent proportion of the public has anti-democratic inclinations. The extent to which we see these authoritarian tendencies play out in public life depends on whether those views are given credibility by the society, particularly by its leaders. This is especially important for understanding the growing display of undemocratic beliefs and actions in America and its persistence well beyond January 20th,” said Patrick Murray, director of the independent Monmouth University Polling Institute.

To begin, the stability of public opinion on Trump that has been well documented in polling over the past four years is also evident in the current panel study. In 2019, an unweighted 45% of these respondents approved (33% strongly and 12% somewhat) and 54% disapproved (49% strongly and 5% somewhat) of the job Trump was doing. Just over one year later – following the 2020 election – 45% approved (34% strongly and 11% somewhat) and 55% disapproved (52% strongly and 3% somewhat). At an individual level, 83% of respondents gave identical responses to this question in both waves of the survey – or 94% when “strongly” and “somewhat” responses are grouped together.

Among panelists who reported voting for Trump in the 2020 election, just over 4 in 10 score in the highest quartile of the Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale when the original survey weights from the 2019 survey are applied. This leaves just over half of Trump supporters who are not classified as having high authoritarian inclinations. [It should also be noted that only a handful of President-elect Joe Biden’s voters in the panel have a high RWA score – too few to break out in this analysis.]

The panel data confirm significant differences in attitudes between high RWA Trump voters and other Trump voters – some differences being more substantive and consequential than others. For example, while nearly all Trump voters approve of the job he is doing as president, high RWA supporters in the panel are significantly more likely to “strongly” approve (94% to 74% for lower RWA Trump voters).

Differences in authoritarianism also impact views of preferred style of governance. High RWA Trump supporters (22%) are much less likely than other Trump voters (60%) to feel that a lack of compromise among federal official is more problematic than public officials who are unwilling to stand firm on principle. In fact, non-RWA Trump voters are more similar to Biden voters (73%) on this measure than they are to high RWA Trump voters.

There are some areas where Trump voters agree regardless of their predisposition for authoritarianism. For example, few high RWA (29%) and other (24%) Trump voters agree that Trump has needed to bend the rules to get things done. But Trump voters split dramatically on whether Biden should feel free to act like Trump in his approach to the rules. Whereas 80% of high RWA Trump

supporters strongly disagree that Biden should be able to bend the rules, just 41% of other Trump voters feel the same. Interestingly, Biden voters (63%) are more likely than non-RWA Trump voters to strongly disagree that the incoming president they supported should bend the rules like Trump. To be clear, nearly all Trump and Biden voters think the incoming president should stick to the rules in carrying out his duties. But the difference in the strength of that opinion among Trump supporters is interesting.

“Authoritarian Trump followers rule out Biden acting like Trump, but other Trump voters seem to recognize the potential for a double standard in that position,” said Murray. “The fact that most Biden voters do not want him to stray from the straight and narrow path just because his predecessor did is also worth noting here. There seems to be even less of a ‘what is good for the goose’ attitude among Biden voters than there is among some Trump voters.”

AUTHORITARIAN AND NON-AUTHORITARIAN TRUMP VOTERS				
KEY DIFFERENCES				
<i>(weighted responses)</i>	High RWA Trump voters (n=63)	Other Trump voters (n=63)	Chi-square significance (p value)	<i>Biden voters (n=157)</i>
Strongly approve of Trump’s job performance as president	94%	74%	.009	0%
Problem in federal government is politicians not willing to compromise	22%	60%	.000	73%
Trump has needed to bend the rules in order to get things done	29%	24%	.534	80%
Strongly disagree that since Trump bent the rules Biden should feel free to do the same	80%	41%	.000	63%
“Deep State” definitely trying to hurt Trump	93%	62%	.000	0%
Definitely agree that voter fraud changed 2020 election outcome	91%	45%	.000	0%
Strongly agree that Republican election officials who say there was no fraud are covering up evidence	62%	27%	.001	0%
Definitely support alternate elector slate in states Biden narrowly won	60%	25%	.000	0%
Definitely believe Trump campaign over judges who said no evidence of irregularities was presented	56%	41%	.138	0%
Trump has done more than past presidents to protect U.S. Constitution	95%	89%	.275	0%

Source: Monmouth University Polling Institute, December 2020 panel

High RWA Trump voters are also more likely to entertain unsupported conspiracy theories. For example, high RWAs (93%) are more likely than other Trump voters (62%) to believe that a secretive Deep State has definitely been trying to hurt the Trump presidency. Turning to the 2020 election, high RWA Trump voters (91%) are significantly more likely than other Trump voters (45%) to definitely agree that widespread voter fraud changed the presidential outcome. They are also significantly more likely to strongly agree (62% to 27%) that state Republican election officials who claim there was no evidence of voter fraud are engaged in a cover-up. And finally, high RWA Trump voters (60%) are likely than other Trump voters (25%) to strongly support having alternate slates of electors in states that Biden won narrowly, or at least they were when we asked them in December.

“There is clearly a relationship between innate authoritarian tendencies and a willingness to reject democratic norms. It becomes dangerous to society when those views are given standing by some political leaders. When other leaders stand idly, the potential increases for these views to become acceptable to less authoritarian partisans who initially may have rejected such views. Indeed, scholars such as [Mann and Ornstein](#) trace this transformation among Republican leaders in Congress back to Newt Gingrich’s rise to power a generation ago. The findings in the Monmouth project show how readily these views can pervade the party’s voter base when they are left unchecked by leadership,” said Murray.

Regarding court cases on voting irregularities that have been dismissed by federal and state judges because of a lack of evidence, 56% of high RWA Trump voters and 41% of other Trump voters say they definitely believe the Trump campaign’s claims over the judges’ findings. This numerical difference is *not* statistically significant. In a related area where there is near unanimous level of agreement and no RWA-based differences, 95% of high RWA Trump voters and 89% of other Trump voters believe that Trump has done more than past presidents to protect the U.S. Constitution.

“I noted in [our August analysis of the original survey](#) that those on the left with anarchic tendencies seem to be more self-aware, or at least willing to acknowledge that they are calling for actions that might breach constitutional norms. Those on the right, though, seem to have reframed the U.S. Constitution in their own minds to match whatever Trump says it is – such as disregard for the authority of co-equal branches of government. The fact that many of the Capitol rioters claimed that they were defending the Constitution shows how dangerous and subversive the authoritarian mindset can be,” said Murray.

Why do these findings matter? Standard public opinion polling can give us a snapshot of what people think at the moment but it is not a robust tool for uncovering deep-rooted values and motivations. The number and type of questions needed to tap into these core elements of human behavior are well beyond the resources and scope of a typical poll. However, these innate values can be more predictive of future behavior than standard survey questions. Studies like the current project can be used to differentiate

the instigators from those who are just willing to go along. Importantly, this type of research can help us better recognize what factors allow the formation of a critical mass of people who actively or tacitly support anti-democratic behavior, and moreover, it can help us understand what can be done to reduce and keep that number below a critical mass.

For example, the original study also explored another scale – [Social Dominance Orientation](#) (SDO). Individuals who score high on this scale exhibit group-based anti-egalitarian inclinations. There is a high correlation between one’s social dominance orientation and racial prejudices. The original study identified a specific subset of Trump voters who scored high on both the RWA and SDO scales. Based on the research, we would expect these “double-high” Trump supporters to be especially prevalent among those who took part in the insurrection earlier this month. The current panel study does not show much difference between high RWAs and high SDOs on the questions we asked, but there are some exceptions. For example, high social dominators are more likely to take Trump’s word over that of judges in the 2020 election fraud cases. It seems that those with a high anti-egalitarian disposition are the least respectful of the separation of powers (thus, their attempt to disrupt Congress). It could also be that the courts specifically are held in contempt because that is where the redress of group disparities have largely been made the past 50 years or so. More research needs to be conducted in this area.

“It is unlikely that we will ever be able to eradicate authoritarian beliefs, but scholars in psychology, sociology, anthropology, and history may suggest interventions that could tamp down displays of authoritarianism as socially unacceptable in a democratic Republic,” said Murray.

QUESTION TEXT

Questions from the December 2020 panel referenced in this release are:

Did you vote in this year’s presidential election, or did you not vote for whatever reason? Who did you vote for in the 2020 election for president? [ROTATE BIDEN/TRUMP]

Joe Biden / Donald Trump / Other candidate / Did not vote

Do you approve or disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as president?

Strongly approve / Somewhat approve / Somewhat disapprove / Strongly disapprove

What causes more problems in the federal government? [ROTATE]

Elected officials who are not willing to stand up for their principles

Elected officials who are not willing to compromise

Thinking about Donald Trump’s term as president, which of the following statements do you agree with more? [ROTATE]

He has been able to get things done while following the rules

He has needed to bend the rules in order to get things done

Do you agree or disagree: Since Donald Trump bent the rules when he was president, Joe Biden should feel free to do the same?

Strongly agree / Somewhat agree / Somewhat disagree / Strongly disagree

The term Deep State refers to the possible existence of a group of unelected government and military officials who secretly manipulate or direct national policy. Do you think this type of Deep State exists? Has this Deep State been trying to help or hurt President Trump over the past four years?

Definitely help / Probably help / Probably hurt / Definitely hurt / Neither / Does not exist

Do you think widespread voter fraud changed the outcome of the election?

Definitely did / Probably did / Probably did not / Definitely did not

Some Republican officials, including state election officials, governors, and even the president's own Attorney General, have said there is no evidence of widespread voter fraud that would have changed the election outcome. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about what those officials are saying? --- These officials are covering up evidence of fraud.

Strongly agree / Somewhat agree / Somewhat disagree / Strongly disagree

In states where Biden won the vote by a narrow margin, would you support or oppose Republican legislatures sending an alternative slate of Trump electors to the Electoral College?

Definitely support / Probably support / Probably oppose / Definitely oppose

The Trump campaign and other associates filed a number of court cases alleging vote irregularities. However, the judges in those cases said the campaign failed to present specific evidence of any irregularities. Who are you more likely to believe when it comes to having evidence of vote irregularities?

Definitely believe the Trump campaign

Probably believe the Trump campaign

Probably believe the judges

Definitely believe the judges

Compared to past presidents, do you think Donald Trump...

Has done more to protect the U.S. Constitution

Has done more to undermine the U.S. Constitution

Has been no different when it comes to upholding the U.S. Constitution

METHODOLOGY

The original study was conducted online with 990 randomly selected voters. The sample was drawn from a national list of voters maintained by Aristotle, with a 30% email coverage rate of registered voters in the United States. The questionnaire and survey methodology from the original 2019 survey conducted for the Dean and Altemeyer book, can be found [online here](#) in Appendix V. [Also, Appendix VI discusses the measurement data for the original scales.] All 990 respondents from the original study were invited to participate in a panel survey conducted December 10-18, 2020. A total of 303 completed the survey. Because this is a panel study using data from both waves of the survey primarily to make comparisons between groups within the sample, the percentages reported here should not be assumed to be projectable to a larger population with a calculable margin of sampling error. One should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

DEMOGRAPHICS (weighted)	2019 survey (n=990)	2020 panel (n=303)
Self-reported		
Republican	26%	33%
Independent	41%	33%
Democrat	32%	32%
Conservative	35%	38%
Moderate	32%	33%
Liberal	32%	28%
Male	46%	52%
Female	54%	48%
18-44	37%	29%
45-64	36%	38%
65+	27%	33%
White	72%	83%
Black	13%	10%
Hispanic	10%	2%
Asian/Other	5%	5%
No degree	58%	46%
4 year degree	42%	54%

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Monmouth University Polling Institute -- Authoritarianism Panel Study (Dec. 2020)
1/19/21

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_B4. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as president?	Strongly approve	34%	94%	74%	0%	13%
	Somewhat approve	9%	5%	25%	1%	18%
	Somewhat disapprove	4%	1%	1%	4%	16%
	Strongly disapprove	54%	0%	0%	95%	53%

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_A7. What causes more problems in the federal government?	Elected officials who are not willing to stand up for their principles	40%	78%	40%	27%	42%
	Elected officials who are not willing to compromise	60%	22%	60%	73%	58%

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_B6. Thinking about Donald Trump's term as president, which of the following statements do you agree with more?	He has been able to get things done while following the rules	41%	71%	76%	12%	56%
	He has needed to bend the rules in order to get things done	56%	29%	24%	80%	44%
	No answer	4%	0%	0%	7%	0%

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_C17. Do you agree or disagree: Since Donald Trump bent the rules when he was president, Joe Biden should feel free to do the same?	Strongly agree	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%
	Somewhat agree	11%	7%	17%	11%	3%
	Somewhat disagree	26%	12%	34%	26%	36%
	Strongly disagree	61%	80%	41%	63%	61%
	No answer	2%	1%	6%	0%	0%

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_B3. Has this Deep State been trying to help or hurt President Trump over the past four years?	Definitely help	9%	0%	0%	16%	10%
	Probably help	15%	0%	1%	21%	42%
	Probably hurt	9%	7%	27%	2%	9%
	Definitely hurt	32%	93%	62%	0%	28%
	Neither	11%	0%	10%	15%	8%
	Does not exist	24%	0%	0%	45%	4%

Monmouth University Polling Institute -- Authoritarianism Panel Study (Dec. 2020)
1/19/21

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_C5. Do you think widespread voter fraud changed the outcome of the election?	Definitely did	28%	91%	45%	0%	21%
	Probably did	12%	7%	43%	1%	9%
	Probably did not	10%	2%	12%	6%	41%
	Definitely did not	51%	0%	0%	93%	29%

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_C7. Some Republican officials ... have said there is no evidence of widespread voter fraud that would have changed the election outcome. How much do you agree or disagree: These officials are covering up evidence of fraud.	Strongly agree	17%	62%	27%	0%	11%
	Somewhat agree	17%	22%	52%	2%	13%
	Somewhat disagree	14%	2%	20%	10%	46%
	Strongly disagree	51%	14%	1%	89%	31%

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_C12. In states where Biden won the vote by a narrow margin, would you support or oppose Republican legislatures sending an alternative slate of Trump electors to the Electoral College?	Definitely support	18%	60%	25%	0%	21%
	Probably support	21%	30%	55%	2%	27%
	Probably oppose	10%	9%	16%	6%	17%
	Definitely oppose	52%	1%	4%	92%	33%
	No answer	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_C10. The Trump campaign and other associates filed a number of court cases alleging vote irregularities. However, the judges in those cases said the campaign failed to present specific evidence of any irregularities. Who are you more likely to believe w	Definitely believe the Trump campaign	21%	56%	41%	0%	21%
	Probably believe the Trump campaign	16%	35%	31%	1%	33%
	Probably believe the judges	13%	9%	26%	9%	10%
	Definitely believe the judges	50%	0%	2%	90%	36%
	No answer	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

		TOTAL	Voter Type			
			Trump High RWA	Trump Not high RWA	Biden voter	Other, non-voter
W2_B7. Compared to past presidents, do you think Donald Trump...	Has done more to protect the U.S. Constitution	38%	95%	89%	0%	26%
	Has done more to undermine the U.S. Constitution	53%	0%	0%	93%	56%
	Has been no different when it comes to upholding the U.S. Constitution	9%	5%	11%	7%	18%