

Snapshot of anti-democratic attitudes in the U.S.  
 13 November 2023  
 Jane Junn, Professor of Political Science, USC

To what extent do Americans embrace anti-democratic attitudes? A summer 2023 survey of 1,580 Americans undertaken by the Rooney Center at the University of Notre Dame provides a snapshot of the public’s opinions on election fraud, support for “right wing authoritarianism” (RWA), the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection, and Christian nationalism (see: Hall, Matthew E.K., and David E. Campbell. 2022. *Notre Dame Health of Democracy Survey*. <https://rooneycenter.nd.edu/research/health-of-democracy-survey/>).

I. Election Fraud

More than two and a half years since the 2020 election and the January 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 insurrection, nearly a quarter of the U.S. population says they believe the former president’s false rhetoric that the election was “stolen” and that Democrats are to blame. While more than half of Americans disagree with these statements on election fraud, those who endorse the deceit are disproportionately Republican party affiliates, older voters (60+), whites, and those with a high school education or less.

Statement	% agree	% neither	% disagree
Joe Biden stole the 2020 presidential election	22	21	56
Democrats often engage in voter fraud	22	24	54

II. Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA)

Support for an authoritarian leader and policies looking backward to traditional hierarchies is between 21% and 42% of Americans, with the highest proportion who want a strong leader.

Statement	% agree	% neither	% disagree
Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the racial new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.	31	27	42
What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path.	42	26	33
Our country will be great if we honor the ways of our forefathers, do what the authorities tell us to do, and get rid of the “rotten apples” who are ruining everything	31	27	32
This country would work a lot better if certain groups of troublemakers would just shut up and accept their group’s traditional place in society.	21	31	48

These statements of “right wing authoritarianism” are modified from the original post-WWII survey questions aimed at measuring anti-democratic values in the mass public. Covariates of RWA are similar to opinion on election fraud, with Americans who identify as born-again Christians systematically more supportive of right-wing authoritarian leadership.

### III. January 6<sup>th</sup> Insurrection

Support for the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection is more modest than anti-democratic RWA. Twelve percent of Americans justify the behavior as patriotic, and 19% attribute the violence at the U.S. Capitol that day to a left-wing group. More than a quarter blame the media for exaggerating the violence that day. Covariates are again the same, with older, white, Republican, and less educated Americans denying the anti-democratic nature of the Capitol insurrection.

Statement	% agree	% neither	% disagree
The January 6 <sup>th</sup> protest at the U.S. Capitol was a justified reaction by patriots.	12	22	67
Any violence at the January 6 <sup>th</sup> protest at the U.S. Capitol was perpetrated by Antifa.	19	39	43
The media exaggerated the violence at the January 6 <sup>th</sup> protest at the U.S. Capitol	27	20	53

### IV. Christian Nationalism

Finally, support for Christian nationalism is between 10% and 26% based on the indicators included in this survey. Covariates are identity as a born-again Christian, Republican Party support, lower levels of education, and older age, while race is less significant compared to the other measures of anti-democratic attitudes.

Statement	% agree	% neither	% disagree
The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation.	18	22	60
I consider being Christian an important aspect of being truly American.	26	22	52