

May 2018

Political Polarization and Trust among Millennials

A summary of key findings from the first-of-its-kind bimonthly survey of racially and ethnically diverse young adults 18-34

Cathy J. Cohen, Matthew Fowler, Vladimir E. Medenica
and Jon C. Rogowski

<http://www.genforwardsurvey.com/>

genFORWARD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

i.	About GenForward
ii.	Key Findings
I.	Introduction
II.	Evaluations of the Federal Government
III.	Views of Institutions
IV.	Evaluations of the Political Parties
V.	Overcoming Polarization?
VI.	Toward a Socialist Future?
VII.	Conclusion
VIII.	Survey Methodology

Media Inquiries:

Ryan Daniels | 919-414-7621 | rdaniels@rabengroup.com

Preferred citations:

Media: GenForward Survey, University of Chicago: May 2018 Report

Academic: Cohen, Cathy J., Matthew Fowler, Vladimir E. Medenica, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2018. "Political Polarization and Trust among Millennials"

"

About GenForward

> *The Survey*

The GenForward Survey is the first of its kind—a nationally representative survey of over 1,750 young adults ages 18-34 conducted bimonthly that pays special attention to how race and ethnicity influence how young adults or Millennials experience and think about the world. Given the importance of race and ethnicity for shaping the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of young people, we believe researchers make a mistake when they present data on young adults in a manner that assumes a monolithic Millennial generation and young adult vote.

Millennials now represent the largest generation of Americans, and they are by far the most racially and ethnically [diverse generation¹](#) in the country. About 21% of Millennials identify as Latinx, Latina/o or Hispanic, 14% as Black or African American, 7% as Asian American, and 56% as white. They also comprise the largest share of the workforce and eligible voters. Thus, to fully understand how young adults think about politics and public policy we apply an intersectional lens and pay attention to identity characteristics such as race and ethnicity.

In this report, we present an empirical overview of Millennials' trust in and evaluations of the federal government, their views on important institutions, political parties and their members, as well as political polarization more broadly. The data presented were collected between February 23rd and March 10th, 2018.

> *The GenForward Team*

Cathy J. Cohen, Principal Investigator/Founder
Jon Rogowski, Research Director
Matthew Fowler, Postdoctoral Scholar
Vladimir E. Medenica, Postdoctoral Scholar
Margaret Brower, Graduate Research Assistant
Jordie Davies, Graduate Research Assistant
Alfredo Gonzalez, Graduate Research Assistant
Jenn M. Jackson, Graduate Research Assistant
David J. Knight, Graduate Research Assistant

¹ Hyperlinks are used throughout this report as citations. Click on the linked text to view and learn more about each citation.

Key Findings

- > **Strong Government v. Free Market.** Majorities of Millennials across race and ethnicity believe a strong government rather than a free market approach is needed to address today's complex economic problems.
- > **Federal Government's Handling of the Economy:** Majorities of white and Asian American Millennials believe the government is strengthening the economy (64% and 57%), compared to only 41% of African Americans and 45% of Latinx Millennials taking a similar position.
- > **Negative Evaluations of the Federal Government:** Millennials provide negative assessments of the government's performance in managing the nation's immigration system, ensuring access to high-quality education, and protecting the environment, where evaluations of the government's performance are all under 40% and often under 30%, across race and ethnicity groups.
- > **Planned Parenthood vs. the Military.** When respondents were asked to indicate their favorability toward a set of institutions and organizations, Planned Parenthood had the highest favorability among African American (68%) and Asian American (82%) Millennials. Latinx (70%) and white (79%) Millennials score the military as most favorable.
- > **Views of Institutions by Partisanship.** The racial divide in attitudes is mirrored by partisan divides as well; Democrats (87%) express highest favorability toward Planned Parenthood while Independents (64%) and Republicans (87%) score the military as most favorable.
- > **African Americans Distrust of Institutions related to Policing.** Institutions related to policing and law enforcement, including the criminal justice system, the courts, police, and to a lesser extent the FBI, are seen much less favorably by African American Millennials than their peers, often by a substantial margin of more than 20 percentage points.
- > **Partisan Polarization on NRA.** Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to hold favorable views of the NRA by an overwhelming difference of 55 points (72% vs. 17%).

- > **FBI viewed Favorably.** The FBI is viewed favorably by Millennials across race and ethnicity, with majorities of Asian Americans (57%), Latinxs (53%), and whites (62%) holding favorable views of the FBI. African Americans are evenly divided in their views of the FBI with 47% expressing favorable views and 48% expressing unfavorable views.
- > **Partisans as Closed-Minded.** An overwhelming majority of Democrats (76%) and a smaller majority of Republicans (53%) across race and ethnicity believe that members of the opposing party are closed-minded and resistant to alternative viewpoints.
- > **Mixed Views on Capitalism.** Majorities of Asian American (56%) and white Millennials (54%) hold favorable opinions toward Capitalism, but only 45% of Latinxs and 34% of African Americans feel similarly.
- > **Democrats Favorable toward Socialism.** A significant majority (61%) of Millennial Democrats express favorable views toward Socialism. Less than a third of Independents (32%) hold favorable views of Socialism. Only 25% of Republicans report feeling favorably toward Socialism.

I. Introduction

Political [commentators](#) have devoted considerable attention to the growing partisan divide in American politics in recent years. There is increasing concern that individuals are segregating themselves into smaller and more homogenous communities, both in their [offline](#) and [digital](#) lives. Pundits point to the rise of ideological [echo chambers](#), exacerbated by sophisticated sorting [algorithms](#), that have allowed ideological camps to create and choose their [own facts](#) and led to the decline of productive political discourse.

[Some scholars](#), outside of journalism and punditry, are somewhat less alarmist. It is true that growing party polarization is a [problem](#) among elected officials and political elites. Nevertheless, research on individual attitudes suggests that people are [no more polarized](#) on issues than they have been in the past. Most people are not blind ideologues but rather hold a mix of conservative and liberal preferences with some sympathy for both sides of political debates. In other words, polarized attitudes among the general public is less of a concern than polarized attitudes among strong partisans, people who strongly identify as either a Democrat or a Republican.²

Overlooked in these conversations is how polarization in political attitudes and preferences, including evaluations of government, institutions, and political parties, varies among other important demographic characteristics like race and age. Relatively little exploration has been conducted on polarization among Millennials—the nation’s most racially diverse and politically [liberal](#) generation. What do Millennials think about the federal government and institutions? How are their views shaped by their racial, ethnic, and partisan identities? This GenForward report provides a window into what young adults—particularly young adults of color—think about the federal government’s performance, their opinions on various institutions, impressions of the political parties, and political polarization more generally.

The report begins by providing an outline of how Millennials evaluate the federal government’s performance on a range of issues spanning the economy and infrastructure to the environment and the handling of natural disasters. We then overview how Millennials feel about a number of political and non-political institutions before exploring Millennials’ opinions on political parties and partisan polarization. We end this report with data on whether Millennials believe we can move beyond partisan

² In our sample, only 24% of respondents identify as strong partisans.

politics and a discussion of what these data potentially signify for the 2018 midterm election.

We recognize that Millennials are a diverse generation, with important variation across lines of race and ethnicity but also political party. Thus, throughout the report, we pay special attention to how the attitudes of Millennials differ across these areas by race and ethnicity as well as partisanship.

II. Evaluations of the Federal Government

Key Findings:

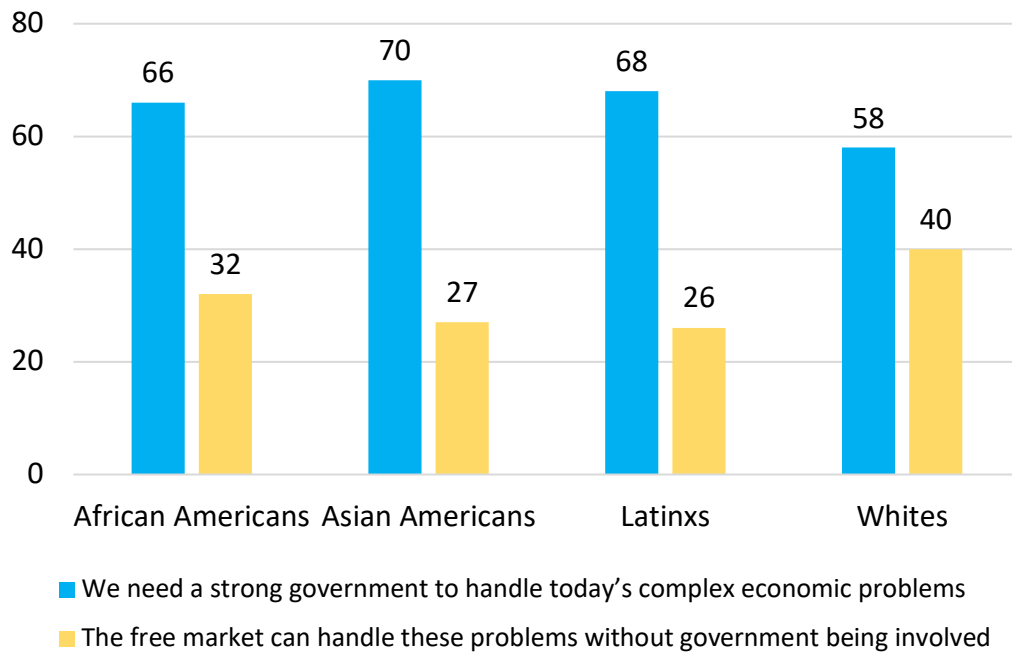
- > **Strong Government.** Majorities of Millennials across race and ethnicity believe a strong government rather than a free market approach is needed to address today's complex economic problems.
- > **Federal Government's Handling of the Economy:** Majorities of white and Asian American Millennials believe the government is strengthening the economy (64% and 57%), compared to only 41% of African Americans and 45% of Latinx Millennials taking a similar position.
- > **Performance of the Federal Government.** Less than a third of Millennials (31%) of all racial and ethnic backgrounds believe the government is doing a good or very good job on protecting the environment or managing the nation's immigration system.

.....

Millennials, as a generation, have lived through the economic restructuring of the nation's economy, from neoliberalism to globalization to financialization to the great recession. Given that lived experience, we posed the question to Millennials whether we needed a strong government to handle the complex economic problems or if they believed the free market could handle these problems without the government. As the data in Figure 1 and Figure 2 demonstrate, Millennials are generally supportive of a strong central government to handle the country's economic problems.

As shown in Figure 1, Millennials, regardless of racial and ethnic background, generally are more likely to believe that a strong government is needed to tackle today's complex economic problems instead of just relying on the free market. Majorities of African American (66%), Asian American (70%), Latinx (68%), and, to a somewhat lesser extent, white (58%) Millennials believe in a strong government. In contrast, fewer than 40% of Millennials of any race or ethnicity believe that the free market can handle today's economic problems without government involvement.

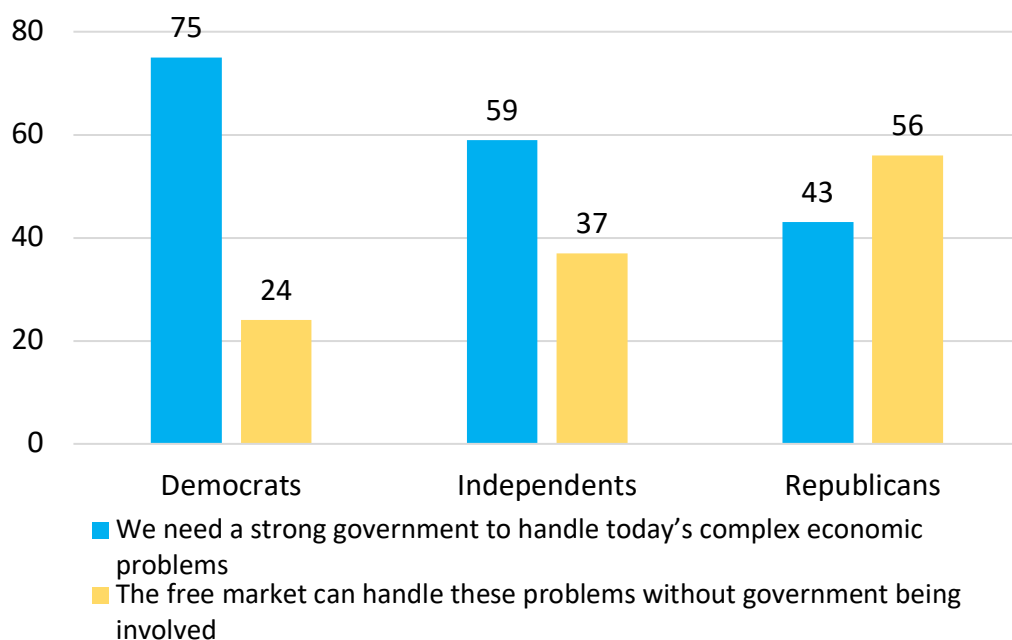
Figure 1: Strong Government vs. Free Market by Race



Support for a strong government shifts when analyzing opinion by partisanship rather than race and ethnicity, as illustrated in Figure 2. As expected, Millennials who identify as Democrats (75%) overwhelmingly believe in the necessity of a strong government while a majority of Millennials who identify as Republicans (56%) believe in the capacity of the free market to handle the country's problems without the government being involved. But, perhaps surprisingly, there is a considerable amount of support for a strong government in economic issues among Republicans. Approximately 43% of Millennial Republicans believe the U.S. needs a strong government to handle current economic problems.

Republicans are actually more closely divided in their support for a strong government or free market than are Independents. Independents are more likely to believe in the necessity of a strong government than the ability of the free market to handle current economic problems by roughly 22 percentage points. In comparison, the difference in responses among Republicans is 13 percentage points.

Figure 2: Strong Government vs. Free Market by Party ID



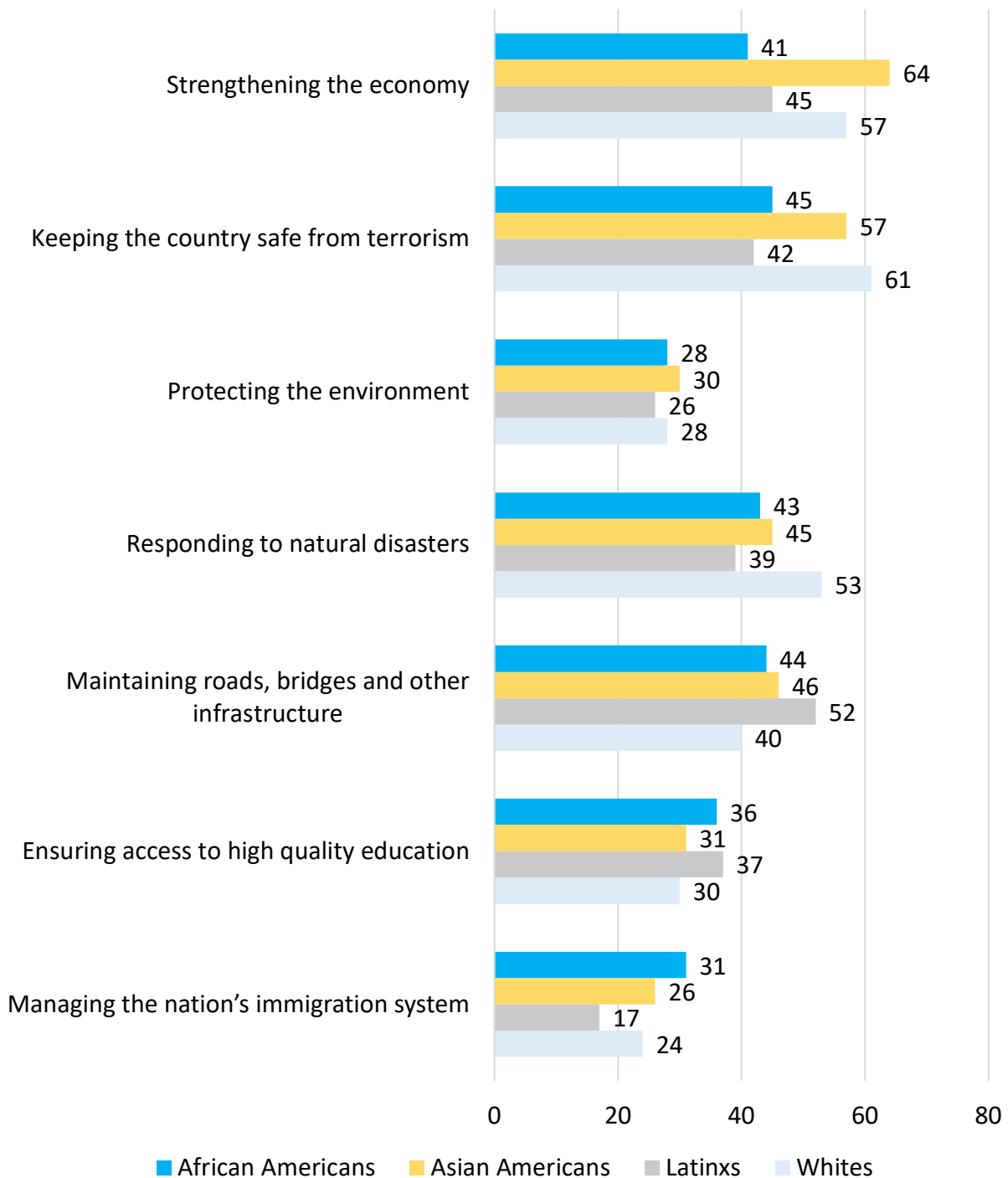
Believing that a strong government is needed to address current problems does not necessarily mean that Millennials think the government is doing a good job in all areas. There are real differences in evaluations of government when comparing perceptions of performance across issue areas as well as when comparing perceptions of performance by race and ethnicity.

Figure 3 portrays what Millennials think about the government's performance on a number of issues. Overall, evaluations of government performance are somewhat tepid; the proportion of Millennials who think the government is doing a "very" or "somewhat" good job is rarely over 50% for any particular area, and is often under 40%.

There are, however, important differences both by race and ethnicity in issue areas. For example, majorities of white and Asian American Millennials believe the government is strengthening the economy (64% and 57%), compared to only 41% of African Americans and 45% of Latinx Millennials taking a similar position. Again, majorities of white and Asian American Millennials (57% and 61%) believe the federal government is doing a good job keeping the country safe from terrorism. In contrast, only 45% and 42% of African American and Latinx Millennials, respectively, agree with that idea. Generally,

while there is disagreement by race on issues of the economy and terrorism, Millennials share disappointment, across race and ethnicity, in the government's handling of other issues such as their management of the nation's immigration system, ensuring access to a high-quality education, and protecting the environment.

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who think that the government is doing a “very” or “somewhat” good job by issue area and race/ethnicity



Differences in evaluations of government are starker yet when comparing Millennials along partisanship. As illustrated in Figure 4, Republicans are much more likely to approve of the government's performance than either Democrats or Independents. On issues of the economy, terrorism, and the government's response to natural disasters, over 75% of Republican Millennials express positive evaluations of the job the government is doing. A majority of Republicans also approve of the government's protection of the environment (54%) and maintenance of the nation's road, bridges, and other infrastructure (56%).

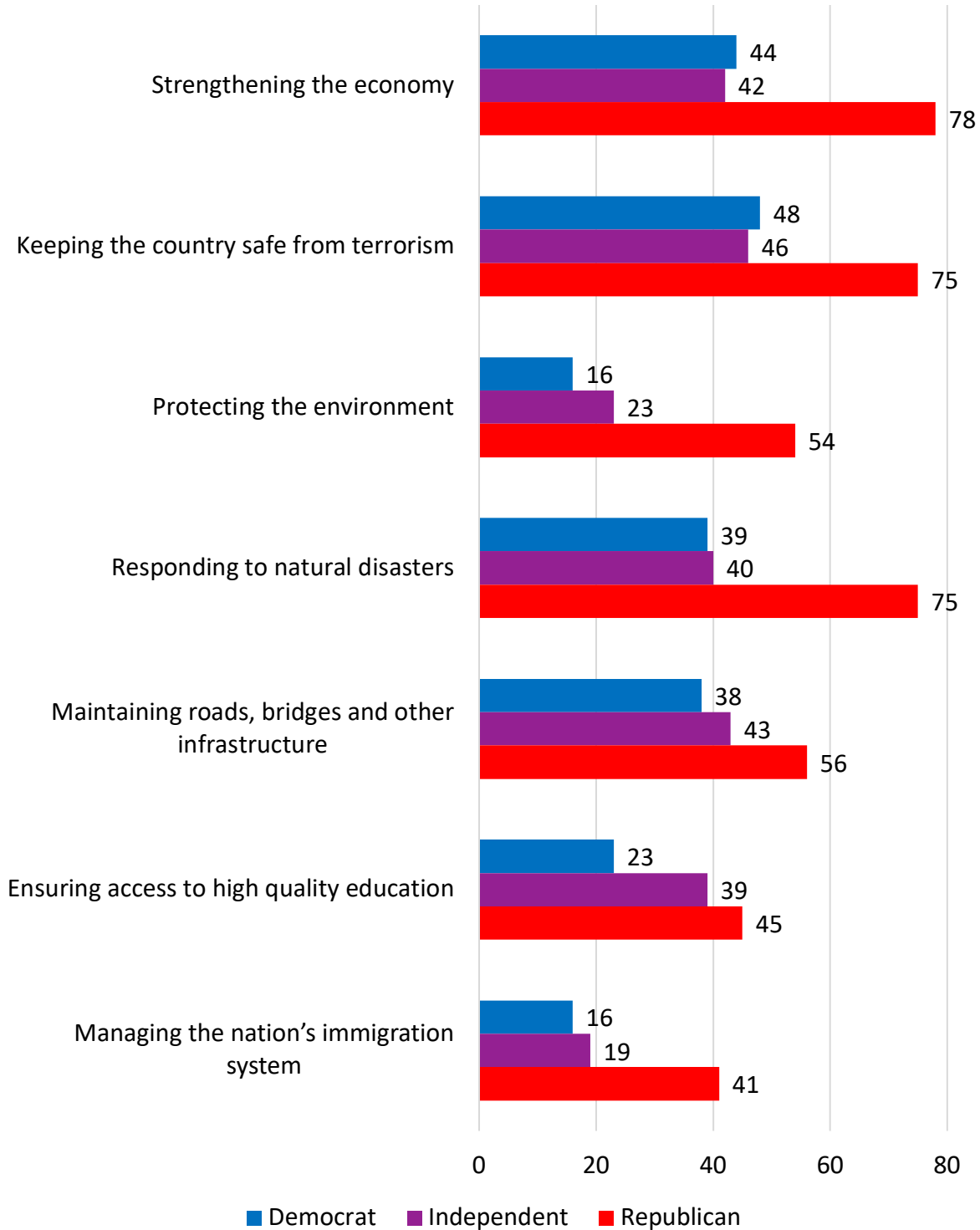
Nevertheless, there are areas where the government fails to obtain majority approval even among Republicans, namely education and immigration. Fewer than half of Millennial Republicans say that the government is doing a "somewhat" or "very" good job on ensuring access to quality education (45%) and maintaining the nation's immigration system (41%).

Support among Republicans across these areas is still higher than that of Democrats or Independents. Democrats, perhaps expectedly, are the least likely to express approval of the government's performance across nearly all issue areas. Responses among Independents closely mirror those of Democrats. In fact, Democrats and Independents exhibit almost equivalent levels of approval of the government's performance.

The notable exception to this is the issue of education. Approximately 39% of Independents report that government is doing a good job of ensuring access to quality education, a figure that is closer to the 45% of Republicans than 23% of Democrats who answer similarly.

While partisan evaluations of the government vary in somewhat predictable ways, Millennials who identify as Independents are a particularly interesting case. Younger people tend to be more likely to identify as an Independent than older people, but they tend to gravitate to one of the two parties [over time](#) as they age. Our data helps answer the question of which party Millennial Independents tend to gravitate toward when they evaluate government. Specifically, for six of the seven areas asked about, Independents look almost identical to Democrats. The exception is education, which is scored fairly unfavorably across all groups. This pattern might suggest that as they age many Millennial Independents will gravitate toward and vote for Democrats.

Figure 4: Evaluations of the Federal Government by Party ID



III. Views of Institutions

Key Findings:

- > **Support for Institutions.** Majorities of Millennials express favorable views of labor unions, the military, churches and organized religion, Planned Parenthood, and Facebook, regardless of race and ethnicity
 - > **Support for the Military.** While a majority of all Millennials report a favorable view of the military, white (79%) Millennials are approximately 18 percentage points more likely to have a favorable opinion of the military than Asian Americans (61%), the group with the lowest proportion of respondents reporting a favorable opinion.
 - > **Low Support for Political Institutions.** Political parties and Congress garner the lowest favorability among Millennials; less than 26% of Millennials of any racial or ethnic background have favorable views of the political parties or Congress
 - > **African Americans Unfavorable toward Institutions related to Policing.** Institutions related to policing and law enforcement, including the criminal justice system, the courts, police, and to a lesser extent the FBI, are seen much less favorably by African American Millennials than their peers, often by a substantial margin of more than 20 percentage points.
 - > **Partisan Polarization.** Polarization is much more predictable when viewed through the lens of partisanship. For example, Republicans are overwhelmingly more likely than Democrats to hold favorable views of the NRA (72% vs. 17%) and Democrats are significantly more favorable of Planned Parenthood than are Republicans (87% vs. 44%).
 - > **Favorability of Courts.** Of the institutions about which we asked respondents' opinions, only one evoked similar levels of favorability among both Democrats and Republicans—the courts. Roughly equivalent proportions of both Democrats (57%) and Republicans (58%) hold favorable opinions of the courts.
-

Decreased trust in and approval of key institutions in our society has been a topic of [concern](#) in recent years. To assess how Millennials views of trust we asked their level of favorability toward a number of different institutions. Specifically, we asked Millennials if they felt favorably or unfavorably towards 16 different political and non-political institutions. The full list of institutions and the percentage of respondents that provided either “mostly” or “very” favorable evaluations is included in Table 1.

A few institutions stand out as garnering positive evaluations from Millennials of all races and ethnicities. Majorities of Millennials express favorable views of labor unions, the military, churches and organized religion, Planned Parenthood, and Facebook, regardless of race and ethnicity. What is more, the proportion of Millennials in each racial/ethnic group that express favorable views are relatively comparable with one exception: the military. White (79%) Millennials are approximately 18 percentage points more likely to have a favorable opinion of the military than Asian Americans (61%), the group with the lowest proportion of respondents reporting a favorable opinion.

Other institutions elicit consistently low favorability. These include the media, Congress, banks, large corporations, and political parties. Notably, political parties and Congress—two expressly political institutions—garner the lowest favorability among Millennials; less than almost one-quarter (26%) of Millennials of any racial or ethnic background have favorable views of the political parties or Congress.

The next least favorable institution are large corporations. While unpopular, Millennials view large corporations somewhat more favorably than political parties or Congress. Roughly one third of Millennials across racial and ethnic groups express favorable opinions of large corporations.

There is considerable variation in opinions on the remaining institutions by race and ethnicity. Most institutions related to policing and law enforcement, including the criminal justice system, the courts, and the police are seen much less favorably by African American Millennials than their peers, often by a substantial margin of more than 20 percentage points. Indeed, African American Millennials are the only group where a majority of respondents do not view the courts or the police favorably. Conversely, the police garner the second-highest favorability of all 16 institutions (behind the military) among white Millennials (69%).

Despite their negative views on institutions related to criminal justice, a substantial proportion of African Americans (48%) view the FBI favorably. The FBI is also viewed favorably by Millennials more generally, regardless of race, with majorities of Asian American (57%), Latinxs (53%), and whites (62%) holding favorable views of the FBI.

Table 1: Favorability of Institutions by Race

	African Americans	Asian Americans	Latinxs	Whites
Military	63	61	70	79
Police	32	53	56	69
Planned Parenthood	68	82	67	68
Labor Unions	56	62	66	64
FBI	48	57	53	62
The Courts	29	61	51	59
State & Local Governments	41	65	45	58
Churches & Organized Religion	61	55	55	54
Facebook	50	53	54	53
Banks	47	53	43	51
NRA	20	28	24	45
Criminal Justice System	22	40	41	44
Large Corporations	35	33	32	36
Media	33	42	43	31
Congress	21	24	24	18
Political Parties	26	20	18	15
N	517	284	503	551

Millennials' favorable views of the FBI are striking due to the ongoing attention and criticism the agency has received, first for how former Director James Comey handled the Clinton email scandal and more recently for its role in investigating alleged collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia. The Trump administration has been a vocal critic of the FBI on a number of fronts, including alleging partisan bias and lack of follow-through in investigating the mass shooter of Parkland, Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Despite these and other attacks on the agency, Millennial attitudes toward the FBI are favorable and generally match those of the general [population](#).

Views on various institutions are much more polarized by partisanship, often in ways that align with general expectations of partisan sympathies. Republicans are overwhelmingly more likely than Democrats to hold favorable views of the NRA (72% vs. 17%) and Democrats report significantly more favorable attitudes toward Planned Parenthood than Republicans (87% vs. 44%), just to name two extreme examples. In general, Democrats hold more favorable views of the media, Planned Parenthood, and Facebook. Republicans, on the other hand, have more favorable opinions of the banks, the criminal justice system, corporations, churches and organized religion, and the NRA.

While the difference in levels of opinion between partisans are often substantial, there is some consistency in the absolute opinions of members of both parties. In other words, majorities of both Republicans and Democrats may view an institution favorably but the proportion of Republicans holding favorable views may be much higher than that of Democrats. Examples of this include the military, the police, the FBI, state and local governments, and labor unions. Majorities of both Republicans and Democrats view these institutions favorably (see Table 2 for percentages). The proportion of Republicans that do so, however, is higher than that of Democrats with the exception of labor unions. Approximately 75% of Democrats hold favorable views of labor unions compared to 50% of Republicans. Even this level of support among Republicans might be surprising to some given the [narrative](#) in the press of mainstream Republican opposition to organized labor.

Of the institutions about which we asked respondents' opinions, only one evoked similar levels of favorability among both Democrats and Republicans—the courts. An estimated 57% of Democrats and 58% of Republicans rate the courts as being

“somewhat” or “very” favorable, perhaps suggesting that both parties trust the judicial system to be fair and impartial in their judgements.

Table 2: Favorability of Institutions by Party ID

	Democrat	Independent	Republican
Planned Parenthood	87	59	44
Labor Unions	75	54	50
Military	72	64	87
FBI	66	42	58
The Courts	57	37	58
State & Local Governments	56	36	63
Facebook	56	51	48
Police	53	54	78
Churches & Organized Religion	48	47	76
Media	45	28	22
Banks	43	50	61
Criminal Justice System	32	41	54
Corporations	29	29	50
NRA	17	34	72
Political Parties	17	10	26
Congress	16	22	27
<i>N</i>	<i>1,147</i>	<i>313</i>	<i>410</i>

Overall, partisan differences in opinions among Millennials follow partisan cleavages observed in the general [population](#), though there is substantial overlap among Millennial partisan views in some areas. The largest partisan differences are views toward the NRA and Planned Parenthood – 55 and 43 point gaps, respectively – and these differences are twice as large as the partisan differences for any other institution or actor respondents were asked about.

The next major set of partisan differences received a smaller but still significant gap in favorability of approximately 20 to 25 points. These institutions include labor unions, the media, the criminal justice system, corporations, the police, and churches. Despite these differences, partisans of different stripes have similar views of national political organizations/institutions – both groups view Congress and political parties unfavorably while the courts and the FBI are generally considered favorable by both Democrats and Republicans.

IV. Evaluations of Partisans and the Political Parties

Key Findings:

- > **Reasons for Identifying as Independent.** Majorities of African American (66%) and Asian American (59%) Millennials as well as a plurality of Latinx Millennials (46%) who identify as Independents, say they do so because they are against the two major parties. White Millennial Independents are more evenly split in their stated reasons, with approximately 50% identifying as Independent because they are “for a mix of political views.”
- > **Partisans as Closed-Minded.** Overwhelming majorities of partisans across race and ethnicity believe that members of the opposing party are closed-minded and resistant to alternative viewpoints. Higher numbers of Democrats (76%) express this belief than Republicans (53%).
- > **Opposing Party Views Pose a Threat to the Nation:** Substantial majorities of Asian American and White Millennials across partisanship report that the policies of the opposing party threaten the nation’s well-being. This is also true for African American and Latinx Democrats but not Republicans. Approximately 56% of African American Millennial Democrats and 68% of Latinx Democrats report that the Republican Party’s policies pose a threat to the nation. However, African American and Latinx Millennials who are Republicans are less likely to say that the Democratic Party’s policies threaten national well-being (45% and 42%).

.....

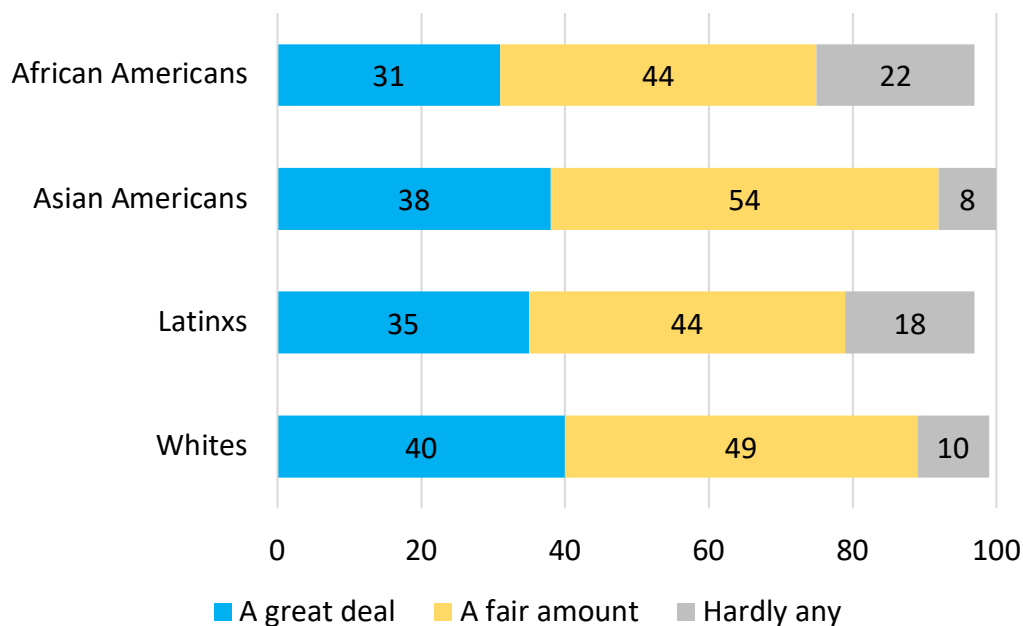
Polarization in American politics is largely seen as a [growing divide](#) between Democrats and Republicans—two parties sharply split not only along lines of political ideology, but also lines of culture, outlook and experience. These divisions do not only go beyond politics, [researchers](#) have identified partisan affiliation as an important social identity that structures how people behave and see themselves. An average individual’s attachment to their party is now [believed to be stronger](#) than their attachment to other important social identities, like race or religion, according to one study.

Given the power of partisanship to structure so much of American politics and the American political experience, we asked Millennials a series of questions about the political parties and their own partisanship, including whether there are significant

differences between the two parties, why Millennials chose to identify with either party, and if members of opposing parties were closed-minded or trustworthy in making political decisions.

Figure 5 illustrates, how Millennials perceive differences between the Democratic and Republican Parties. In general, large majorities of Millennials of all races and ethnicities report that there is at least a fair amount of difference between the two political parties. Nevertheless, 22% of African American Millennials and 18% of Latinx Millennials say that there is hardly any difference between the Democratic and Republican parties, which are substantially larger percentages than those for white (10%) or Asian American (8%) Millennials.

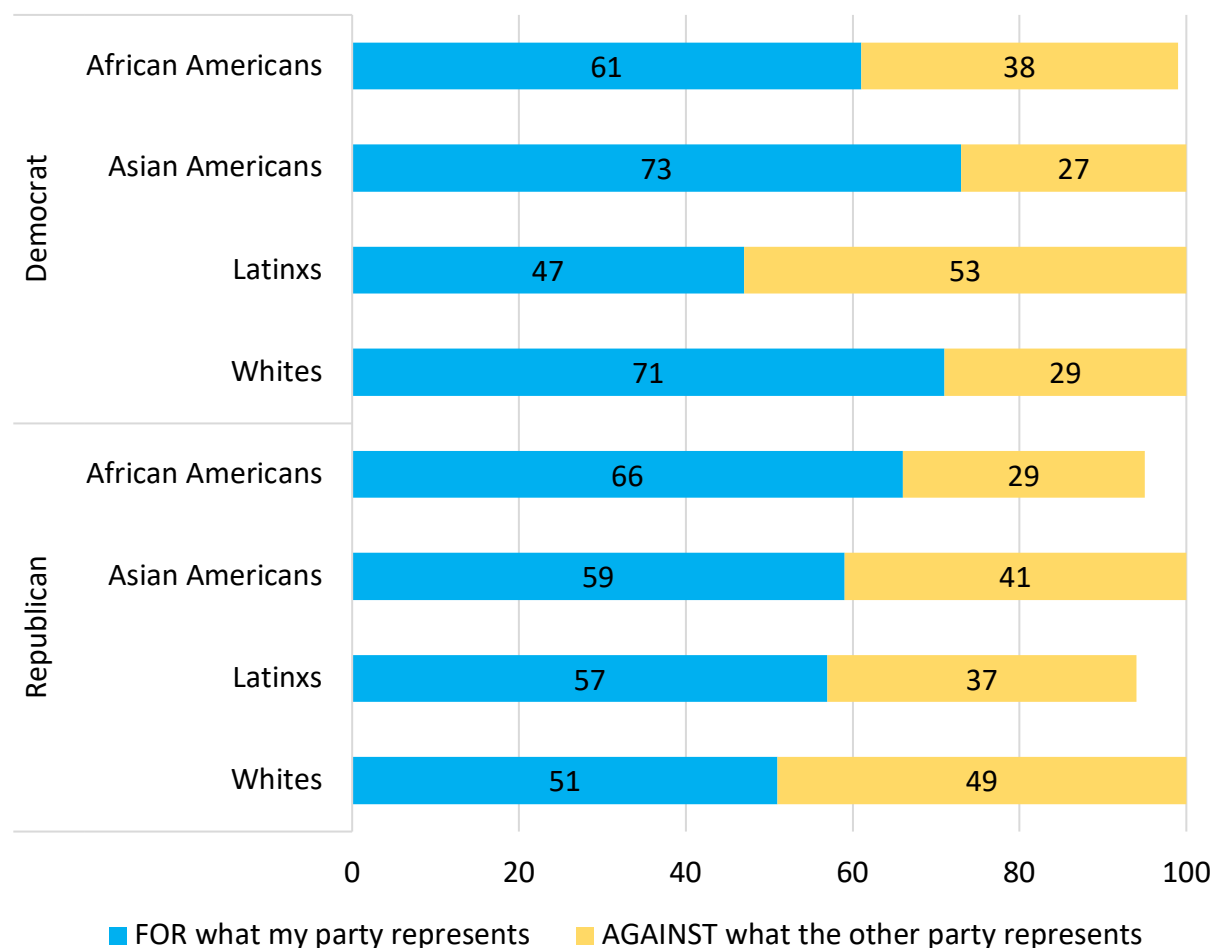
Figure 5: Perceptions of Differences between Democrats and Republicans



We asked Millennials if they identified with their chosen political party primarily because of what that party represents or rather because they are against what the opposing party signifies. For Millennials who identified as Independents, we asked them if they were for a mix of both parties or if they were against what both parties represent. The results by both party and race/ethnicity are shown in Figures 6 and 7.

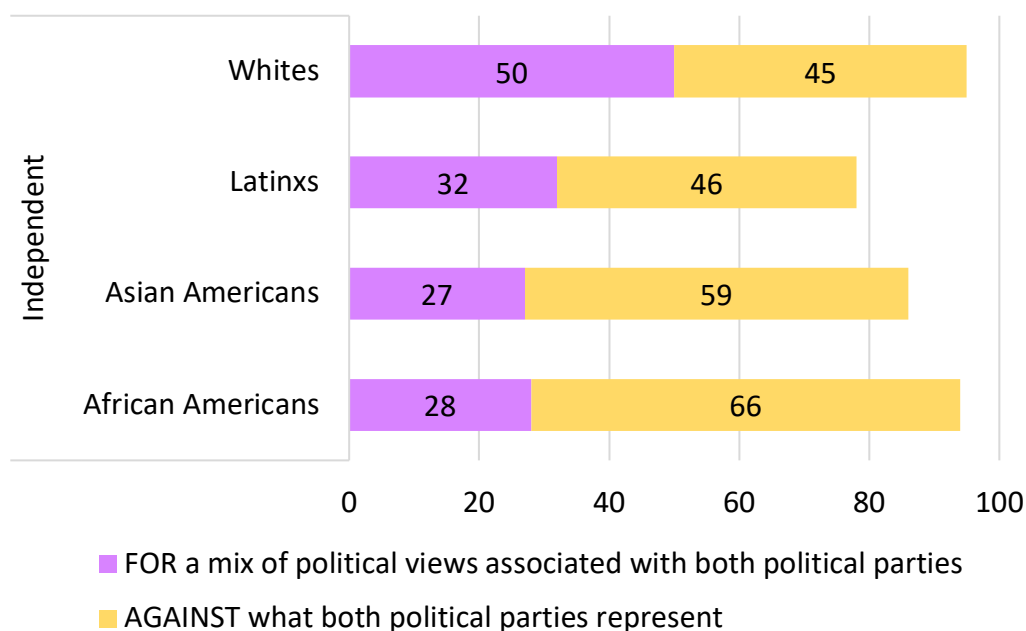
Among Democrats, Latinx Millennials stand out in their responses from their other Democrat-identifying peers. Specifically, 53% of Latinx Millennials indicate they identify with the Democratic Party because they are against what the Republican Party represents. Standing against the Republican Party and its policies motivates Latinx partisanship to a substantially greater degree than it does for any of the other groups. This is perhaps a reaction against the rhetoric of the Republican Party around issues of immigration and demographic change and a dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party for their lack of ability to deliver on immigration-based legislation.

Figure 6: Reason for Reported Partisanship among Democrats and Republicans by Race



Interestingly, Independents, particularly those of color, are most likely to state that their partisanship is due to being against what both parties represent. This is a significant, though perhaps unsurprising, difference from both Democrats and Republicans, who primarily explain their partisan attachment as being grounded in what their chosen party represents. Independents, on the other hand, express a dissatisfaction with both parties. While Independents are often seen as ideological moderates that borrow policy positions from both parties, Millennial Independents seem to deviate from this model of partisanship.

Figure 7: Reason for Reported Partisanship among Independents by Race

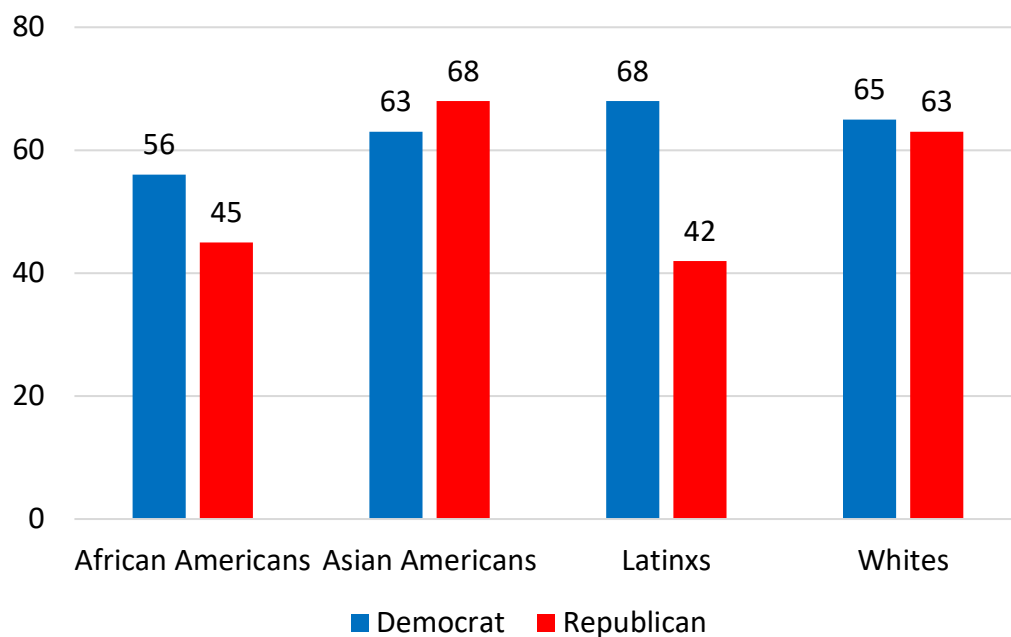


Are negative views of the opposing party rooted in the party's policies or perhaps something about the party's membership? We examined these two possibilities by asking respondents whether policies associated with the out party -- that is, the party opposite their own personal partisan identification -- pose a threat to the nation's well-being. We also asked whether the out-party's members are closed-minded and whether members of the opposing party can be trusted to make political decisions.

Figure 8 illustrates the proportions of respondents who believe the opposing party's politics pose a threat by both race/ethnicity and partisanship. Substantial majorities of

Asian American and White Millennials across partisanship report that the policies of the opposing party threaten the nation's well-being. This is also true for African American and Latinx Democrats but not Republicans. Approximately 56% of African American Millennial Democrats and 68% of Latinx Democrats report that the Republican Party's policies pose a threat to the nation. However, African American and Latinx Millennials who are Republicans are less likely to say that the Democratic Party's policies threaten national well-being (45% and 42%). Overall, Democrats are more likely to believe the opposing party's policies pose a threat to the nation.

Figure 8: Percentage of Millennials that say the Opposing Party's Policies Pose a Threat

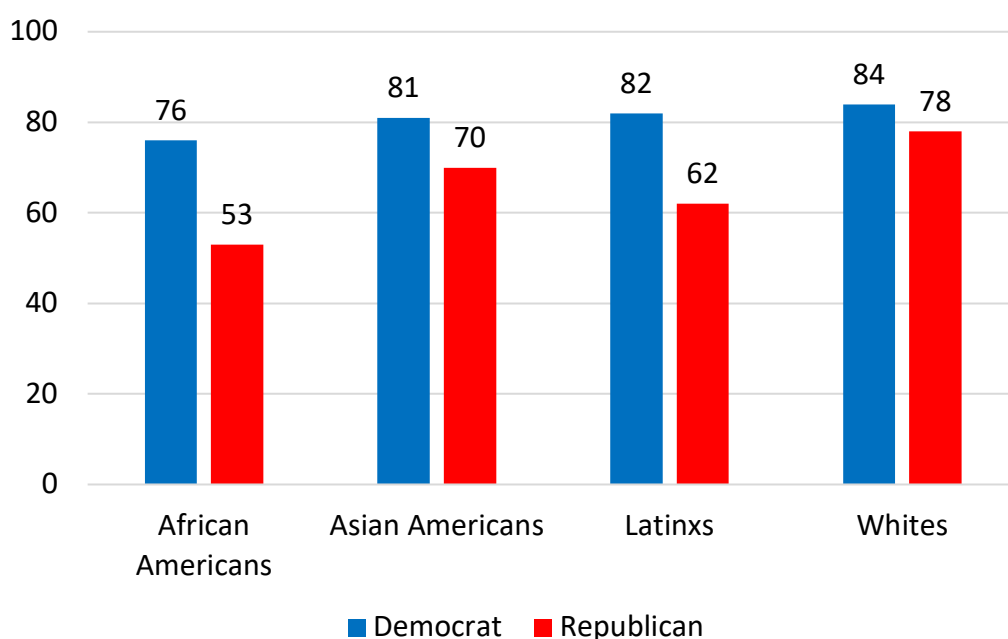


Negative attitudes also extend to perceptions of out-party members. Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans across race and ethnicity believe that members of the opposing party are closed-minded (Figure 9).

Democrats are slightly more likely to think that Republicans are closed-minded, though there is important variation by race. Millennial Democrats who are African American (76%) are more likely than Millennial African Americans who are Republicans (53%) to believe that members of the opposing party are closed minded, by 23 percentage points.

Similar gaps between Latinx (20 percentage points) and Asian American (11 percentage points) Democrats and Republicans exist. Among white Millennials the gap was much smaller (6 points) with 84% of white Millennial Democrats and 78% of white Millennial Republicans believing the opposing party's members to be closed-minded.³

Figure 9: Percentage of Millennials that say the Opposing Party's members are closed-minded



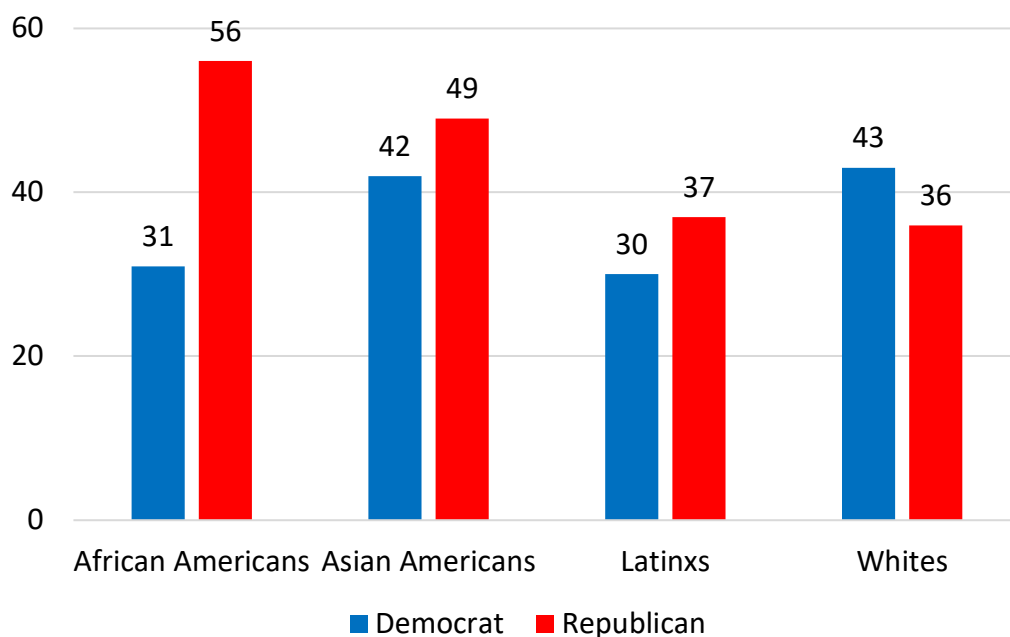
In addition to Millennials largely believing that members of the opposing party are close-minded, they also seem not to trust members of the opposite political party to make political decisions. As Figure 9 shows, far less than a majority of Millennial Democrats, depending on race/ethnicity, trust Republicans to make political decisions.

Millennial Republicans are also generally distrustful of the political decision-making of Democrats. African Americans and Asian Americans are two exceptions; a majority of African American Republicans (56%) and near-majority of Asian American Republicans (49%) trust the opposing party to make political decisions. These estimates, however,

³ This could be due to skewed partisanship toward Democrats among African Americans and Latinxs whereas as partisanship among Asian Americans and whites is more evenly distributed.

may lack precision due to a relatively small number of survey respondents in these groups. Nevertheless, African American, Asian Americans and Latinx Millennial Republicans are more trustful than Democrats, whereas we see the opposite pattern among whites. Given that these differences are relatively small in magnitude, this evidence suggests that partisan polarization is largely symmetric across parties among Millennials. The important exception to this are African Americans—there are substantial differences between African American Democrats and Republicans in levels of trust of opposing partisans.

Figure 10. Percentage of Millennials that trust the Opposing Party's members to make political decisions



Overall, the data reported in this section of the report support what [scholars](#) have called affective polarization, or the growing mutual dislike of partisans in American politics and society. Party polarization does not only shape public opinion on matters of policy, but also shapes evaluations of out-party members. Nevertheless, the effects of affective polarization are not uniformly distributed among parties or racial groups. Among Millennials, the data presented here suggest that Democrats are slightly more likely to hold negative views of Republicans than vice

versa. Moreover, these differences are largest among African American and Latinx Millennial Democrats. That said, our data also suggest that Millennials of color who identify as Republican, especially African American and Latinx Republican Millennials, are different in terms of polarization than white Republicans. African American and Latinx Millennial Republicans seem to be less distrustful of Democrats, less willing to believe the opposing party is close-minded and less likely to believe the policies of the opposing party threaten the nation.

V. Overcoming Polarization?

Key Findings:

- > **Millennial Views on Attitude Change are Mixed.** Majorities of white (57%), Asian American (53%), and Latinx (50%) Millennials disagree with the idea that people will change their political attitudes when they hear a convincing argument. African Americans are more optimistic with 53% saying people would change their attitudes. Democrats (55%) and Independents (60%) are also pessimistic while Republicans are more evenly split (48% disagree).
- > **Many Say They Would Talk to Opposing Party Members.** Majorities of Millennials across race and ethnicity as well as partisanship say they are at least somewhat interested in talking to people with opposing political views. Independents are the notable exception; a majority of Independents (53%) are not interested in talking about politics with people who hold alternative views.

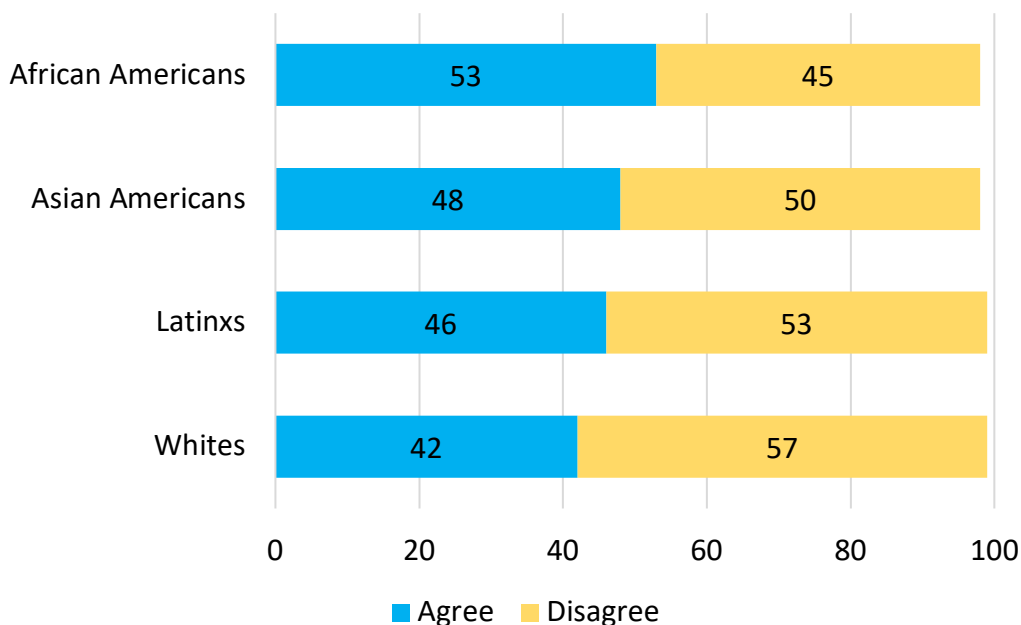
.....

The rise of polarized attitudes toward institutions, policies, and even toward partisans themselves has left many scholars and commentators wondering how to best [bridge](#) partisan divides. Some have asked whether reaching across party lines is even [possible](#) in the current political climate. Given that Millennial participation in politics will likely continue to grow and shape American politics as they age, what Millennials think about overcoming polarization is especially important.

Millennials are generally split when asked whether they believe people are willing to change their attitudes about politics when they hear a convincing argument. As Figure 11 and Figure 12 illustrate, divided attitudes exist along both race/ethnicity and partisanship with some important caveats.

While Millennials are divided on whether people are willing to change their attitudes when confronted with a convincing argument, African American (53%) Millennials are more likely to believe that people are willing to change their minds while white Millennials are the least likely to think so (42%). The differences between groups, however, are relatively modest.

Figure 11: Percentage of Millennials who say that people are willing to change their attitudes about politics when they hear a convincing argument (Race)

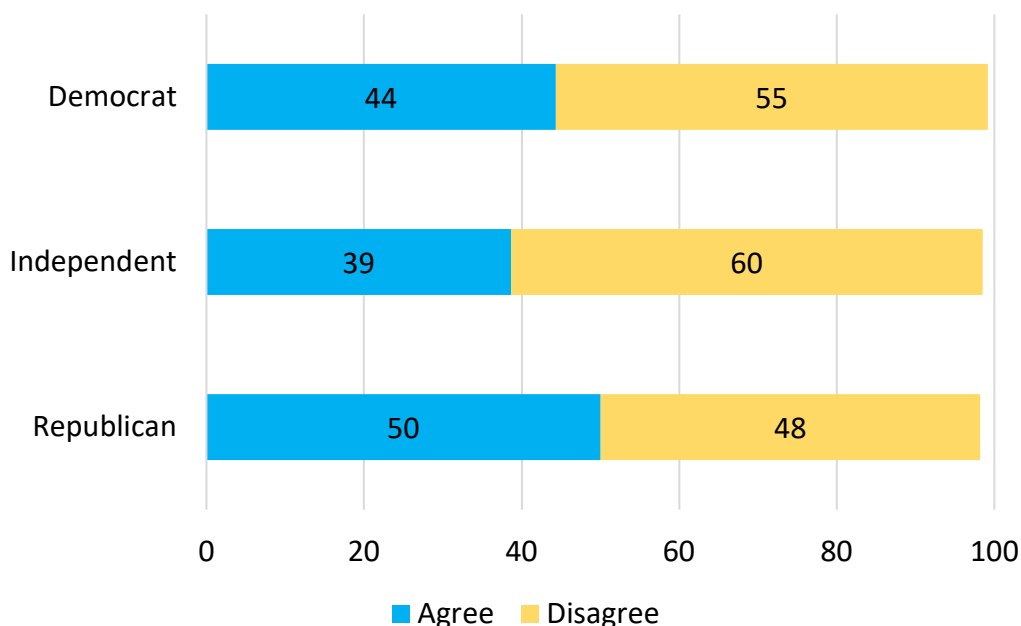


When examining opinion by partisanship instead of race, as in Figure 12, we find that Democrats and Republicans are more evenly split in their views than Independents. Approximately half of Republicans (50%) and Democrats (55%) are likely to believe that people are willing to change their views when faced with a convincing argument.

Independents are much less divided in their opinion of whether people are willing to change their minds. The clear majority of Independents (60%) do not believe that individuals would change their political attitudes even when hearing a convincing argument. The perception that people are generally resistant to political arguments might be part and parcel of their rationale for not identifying as partisans.

These data do not tell us whether these respondents themselves could or would change their minds when exposed to a convincing argument. Rather, they show that Millennials do not have great faith in the power of argument and ideas for producing enlightened opinion or for separating people from their partisan predispositions.

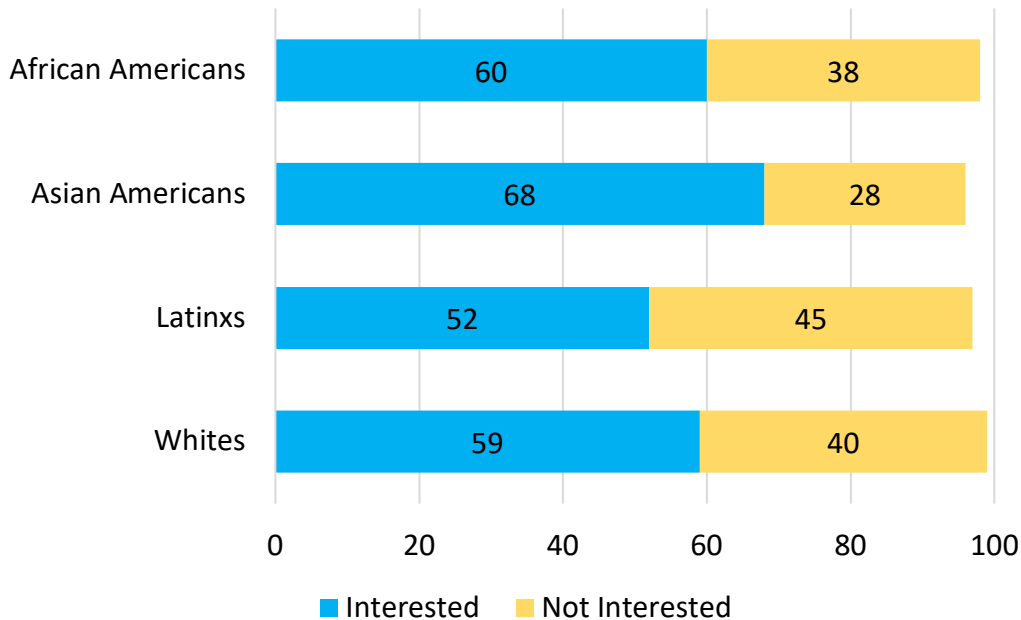
Figure 12: Percentage of Millennials who say that people are willing to change their attitudes about politics when they hear a convincing argument (Party ID)



Despite being skeptical of people's openness to changing their minds when confronted with a convincing argument, majorities of Millennials do express interest in talking to people with alternative political views. This is true both for Millennials across race and ethnicity as well as across partisanship, as Figure 13 and Figure 14 show.

Asian American Millennials express the most interest when compared to their peers. Approximately 68% of Asian American Millennials express interest in discussing politics with others who hold opposing views. Roughly equivalent proportions of white Millennials (59%) and African American Millennials (60%) report being interested in talking with people that hold alternative political views. Fewer, but still a majority (52%), of Latinx Millennials also state that they are interested in talking to individuals with differing political views.

Figure 13: How interested are you in talking to people with alternative political views? (by Race)

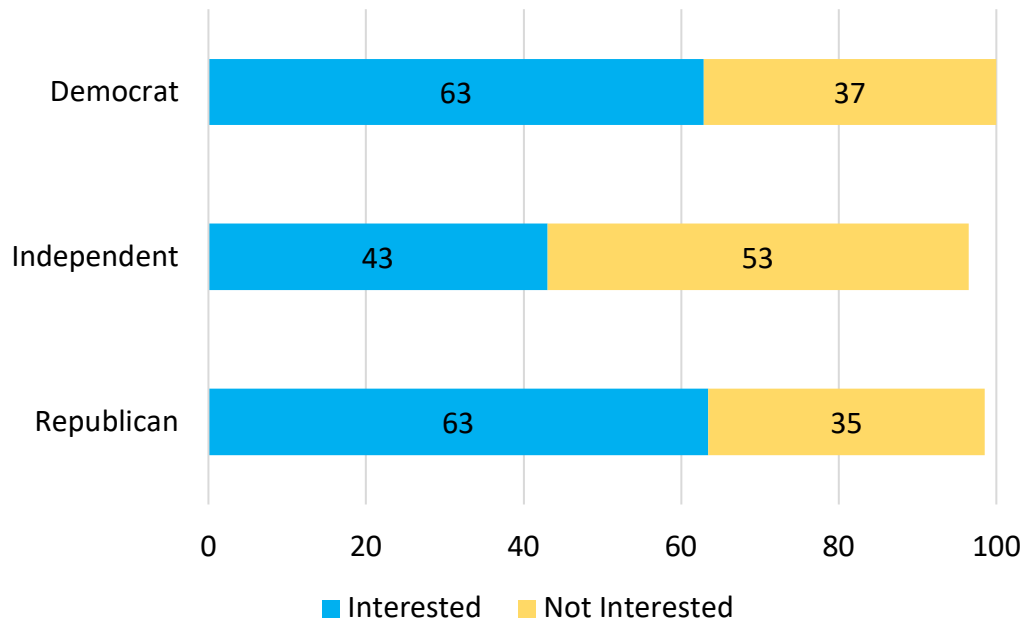


Perhaps due to their belief that people would not change their attitudes when presented with a convincing argument, Independents are largely uninterested in talking to people with alternative political views. Approximately 43% of Independents express interest whereas over half (53%) say that they are not interested.

On the other hand, roughly equivalent majorities of Democrats and Republicans (63%), report being interested in talking with each other. This is perhaps somewhat surprising. While partisans are less likely to trust other party members, believe members of the opposite party to be closed-minded, and often find the opposing party's policies as threatening to the nation, Millennials who identify as Democrat and Republican generally report being interested in talking to each other. Of course, we might read this willingness as a social desirability response to this question.⁴

⁴ Independents may not be as susceptible to concerns of social desirability given that they are generally less politically interested and active than partisans.

Figure 14: How interested are you in talking to people with alternative political views? (by Party ID)



VI. Toward a Socialist Future?

Key Findings:

- > **Mixed Views on Capitalism.** Majorities of Asian American (56%) and white Millennials (54%) hold favorable opinions toward Capitalism, but only 45% of Latinxs and 34% of African Americans feel similarly.
- > **Democrats More Favorable toward Socialism.** A significant majority (61%) of Millennial Democrats express favorable views toward Socialism. Independents do not feel as positively; less than a third of Independents (32%) hold favorable views of Socialism. Only 25% of Republicans, a smaller but still meaningful proportion, report feeling favorably toward Socialism.

.....

Bernie Sanders' campaign for president and his self-identification as a Democratic Socialist [revived](#) American interest in and serious conversation around Socialism as a form or approach to governance, particularly among [young people](#). Whether this "Bernie effect" has extended beyond the campaign and election is unclear. We examine whether Millennials express support for Socialism independent of Bernie Sanders and in comparison to Capitalism.⁵ Our findings are presented by both race/ethnicity and partisanship in Figure 15 and Figure 16.

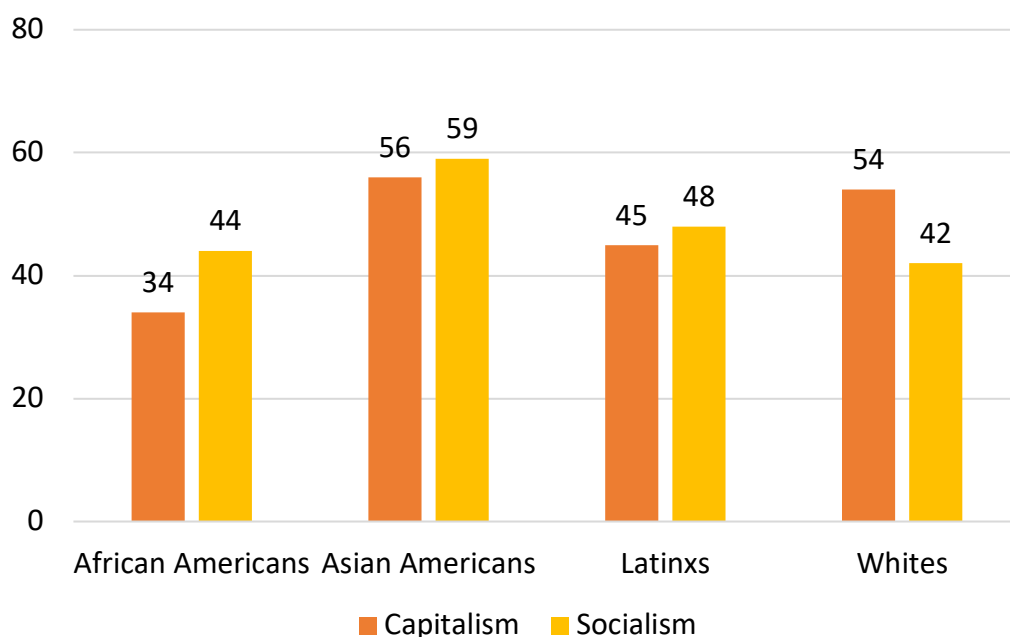
Views on Capitalism among Millennials are mixed. Majorities of Asian American (56%) and white Millennials (54%) hold favorable opinions toward Capitalism, but only 45% of Latinxs and 34% of African Americans feel similarly, a difference that likely reflects divergent experiences in the labor market and economy.

Interestingly, a slightly larger majority of Asian American Millennials (59%) also express favorable views of Socialism. This perhaps suggests that Asian American Millennials do not consider Capitalism and Socialism as competing opposites. Or, perhaps, it is possible that respondents are not clear on the definitions of these concepts. In any case, no other racial or ethnic group reaches a majority of support for Socialism.

⁵ Attitudes toward Capitalism and Socialism were measured using two different questions and not directly in comparison to or competition with one another.

Indeed, there was no majority of support for either system among either African Americans or Latinx respondents. Nevertheless, African Americans (44%) and Latinxs (48%) report more favorable views toward Socialism than Capitalism, despite failing to cross the 50% threshold. White Millennials express the least favorable views toward Socialism (42%).

Figure 15: Favorability of Capitalism and Socialism by Race

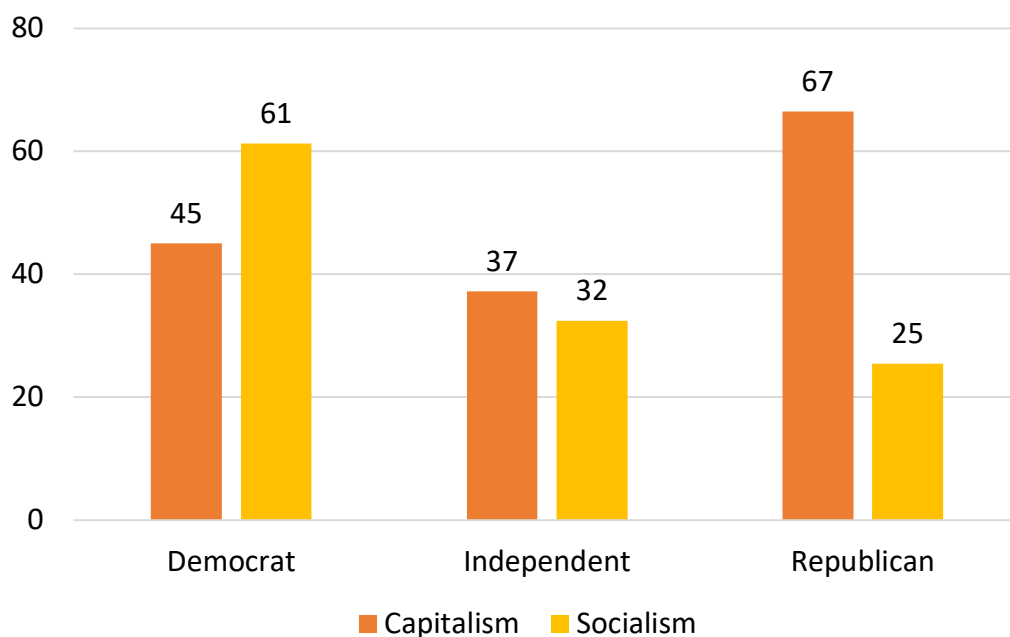


As perhaps expected, there is a significant divide in attitudes between partisans. An overwhelming majority (67%) of Republicans report favorable views toward Capitalism while only 45% of Democrats and 37% of Independents do so.

Some political commentators may be surprised by these relatively low proportions of support for Capitalism among Democrats and Independents. The Democratic Party, after all, has [publicly](#) embraced Capitalism in recent years. And yet, these relatively unenthusiastic views toward Capitalism may have helped Democratic voters, particularly Millennial voters, to embrace Senator Bernie Sanders as a presidential contender in spite of his self-proclaimed identification as a Democratic Socialist.

Indeed, a significant majority (61%) of Millennial Democrats express favorable views toward Socialism. The gap in favorability between Socialism and Capitalism among Democrats is 16 percentage points. Independents do not seem to feel positively toward either Capitalism or Socialism—less than a third of Independents (32%) hold favorable views of Socialism and only 37% have favorable views of capitalism. Republicans hold the least positive attitudes toward Socialism, with only a quarter expressing favorable views. The fact that 25% of Millennial Republicans have favorable feelings toward Socialism may still be a larger proportion than some experts would anticipate given the Republican Party’s history of promoting and protecting Capitalism.

Figure 16: Favorability of Capitalism and Socialism by Party ID



Millennials are the first generation to come of age in a post-Cold War world and their relatively positive attitudes, across race and (to a lesser extent) party, toward Socialism—a once highly taboo concept—might reflect their very different reality relative to Socialism and Socialist/Communist countries.⁶

⁶ While our data does not allow us to compare the views of Millennials to those of other generations, other [surveys](#) have found that younger adults hold more favorable views of Socialism when compared to older adults.

VII. Conclusion

Political polarization among elites has shaped political discourse and the behavior of elected officials in recent years, with members of the Democratic and Republican Parties in Congress rarely reaching across the aisle to work together on issues of policy or governance. Partisan politics have been defined by explicit and strategic obstruction (e.g., refusal to allow Congress to vote on a bill and the refusal to hold confirmation hearings for political nominees) rather than collaboration or compromise. The data presented in this report offer an important window into the opinions of Millennials on these issues.

While far from being a monolithic group, there is a general sense among Millennials that the government is performing poorly in important areas like education, immigration, and protecting the environment, low favorability for important political institutions like Congress, and largely negative views towards the political parties, particularly the political party in opposition to one's own. Underlying these attitudes is significant variation by race and ethnicity as well as by partisanship. As the midterm elections of 2018 creep closer, incumbent and prospective candidates alike will be forced to confront many of the opinions expressed in this report with special attention to the particular positions of specific subgroups.

VIII. Survey Methodology

The GenForward survey is a project founded and directed by Professor Cathy J. Cohen at the University of Chicago. Interviews for this survey were conducted with a representative sample from GenForwardSM, a nationally representative survey panel of adults ages 18-34 recruited and administered by NORC at the University of Chicago.

A total of 1,895 interviews were conducted between February 23 and March 10, 2018 with adults ages 18-34 representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia, including completed interviews with 517 African American young adults, 284 Asian American young adults, 503 Latinx young adults, 551 white young adults, and 40 young adults with other racial and ethnic backgrounds. The survey was offered in English and Spanish and via telephone and web modes.

The GenForward survey was built from two sample sources: 76 percent of the completed interviews are sourced from NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel. AmeriSpeak is a probability-based panel that also uses address-based sample but sourced from the NORC National Frame with enhanced sample coverage. During the initial recruitment phase of the AmeriSpeak panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

Approximately 24 percent of the completed interviews are sourced from the Black Youth Project (BYP) panel of young adults recruited by NORC. The BYP sample is from a probability-based household panel that uses an address-based sample from a registered voter database of the entire U.S. Households were selected using stratified random sampling to support over-sampling of households with African Americans, Latino/as, and Asian Americans ages 18-34. NORC contacted sampled households by U.S. mail and by telephone, inviting them to register and participate in public opinion surveys twice a month. Panelists on both the BYP and AmeriSpeak panels are invited to register for the panel via the web or by telephone to participate in public opinion surveys.

Of the 1,895 completed interviews in the GenForward March survey, 95 percent were completed by web and 5 percent by telephone. The survey completion rate is 26.3 percent. The weighted AAPOR RR3 panel recruitment rate is 21.3 percent and the weighted household panel retention rate is 88.9 percent, for a cumulative AAPOR Response Rate 3 of 5 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.77 percentage

points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. Among subgroups, the margin of sampling error at the 95 percent confidence level is +/- 5.8 percentage points for African Americans, +/- 10.5 percentage points for Asian Americans, +/- 7.05 percentage points for Latinxs, and +/- 5.64 percentage points for whites.

To encourage cooperation, respondents were offered incentives for completing the survey that ranged from the cash-equivalent of \$3 to the cash-equivalent of \$10.

The interviews from the two probability-based sample sources were combined for statistical weighting and analysis. The combined panel samples provide sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. The statistical weights incorporate the appropriate probability of selection for the BYP and

AmeriSpeak samples, nonresponse adjustments, and also, raking ratio adjustments to population benchmarks for 18-34-year-old adults. A post stratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and over-sampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. The post stratification process was done separately for each racial/ethnic group and involved the following variables: age, gender, education, and census region. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults ages 18-34, and the 18-34-year-old populations for African Americans, Latino/as, Asian Americans, and non-Latino/a whites, were used for all analyses.