



Center for Communication and
Civic Renewal at the University of
Wisconsin-Madison

How Americans' Views Have Changed Under Trump

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

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Introduction

The Center for Communication and Civic Renewal at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has been conducting a large panel survey of Americans that began in October 2024, with a follow-up interview in 2025.

American politics has been tumultuous and fraught since we last checked in with our panelists one year ago. How are they processing all that has happened? Have their views changed with era-defining events, or have their attitudes remained largely unperturbed?

In this survey report from our Spring 2026 survey, we investigate public views toward recent policies championed by President Donald Trump, public mood and well-being assessments, trust in social and political institutions, views about the political system, voting restrictions tied to historic inequities, and public perceptions of “artificial intelligence” and data center construction.

Key Findings

2026 Trump Policies

- **Broad opposition:** We asked about many 2026 Trump policies, including ICE immigration raids, government pressure on media companies & universities, school vaccine requirements, banning abortion pills in the mail, and potential war on Greenland. The public is broadly opposed to these policies, sometimes by large majorities, and sometimes with pluralities of Republicans opposed too.

Public Mood & Well-being

- **Dark national future:** Compared to 2024, Americans in 2026 were 17 points more likely to say, “things are going to get worse in this country.” Democrats were much more negative about the future, and Republicans were much more positive. Two thirds of respondents said US democracy was weakening each year.
- **National economy:** The public overwhelmingly believes the national economy is worse now than it was one year ago with 66% saying worse, and just 15% saying better. Comparing views from the same respondents in October 2024, Democrats and Republicans largely swapped perceptions on economic health, while Independents barely moved.
- **General Mood:** Regarding general well-being, Americans were similarly happy (on average) across Oct 2024, Spring 2025, and Spring 2026, and their self-reports of depression and anxiety were similarly stable on average. However, we find happiness changes by party across the same time. Democrats were generally happier than Republicans in October 2024, but Republicans were happier than Democrats in Spring 2025 and that gap grew in Spring 2026. Average levels of anxiety and depression by party did not change.
- **Financial Well-Being:** On average, Americans felt a little better about their family’s financial situation, and they are less likely to say they are taking steps to cut costs or seeking more income. Once again, partisanship mattered a great deal, and the direction flipped under Trump versus Biden. In fact, partisanship alone

explained over 20% of the variation in family finance evaluations in October 2024. Partisans moved in opposite directions on job worries, cutting costs, and seeking more income. These could partly reflect disparate impacts of Trump on partisans, but they likely reflect at least some partisan cheerleading as well.

Rising Public Distrust, 2024-26

- **Partisan & Social Distrust:** Democrats and Republicans distrust the opposing partisans in their own states more in 2026 than in Fall 2024. Trust in immigrants was stable overall but rose among Democrats. Trust in other races is up overall – among Democrats but not Republicans. Trust in business declined, including among Republicans. Trust in unions is down, including among Democrats.
- **Institutional Distrust:** Trust in Congress fell sharply overall, including among Republicans. Trust in the Supreme Court is down overall, even among Republicans. Trust in police is down, especially among Democrats. Trust in universities is unchanged overall, but with slightly more polarization among partisans. Trust in the military is down among Democrats.

Political System Views

- **Violence:** The public strongly disapproves of political violence, and, if anything, that disapproval has grown slightly since Fall 2024. Only 5% of respondents agreed that violence against political enemies is permissible, with levels indistinguishable across partisans and Independents.
- **Fair Play:** In Spring 2026, a plurality of people in both parties think their own party should maintain high standards of conduct and not break rules of ‘sink to their opponents’ level. Republicans were several points more likely to endorse high standards than Democrats and Independents.
- **Conspiracies:** A large minority of Americans believe our lives are largely controlled by plots hatched in secret places and that our real leaders aren’t known to us. Republicans became less conspiratorial when they gained national power and Democrats became more conspiratorial, though Democrats were still less conspiratorial than Republicans overall.

Views on Jim Crow-era Voting Limits

- Following a Spring in which the Supreme Court invalidated key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, the public opposes classic Jim Crow-era voting restrictions of poll taxes, literacy tests, and felon disenfranchisement, though other surveys show the public supports different kinds of voting barriers with disparate effects.

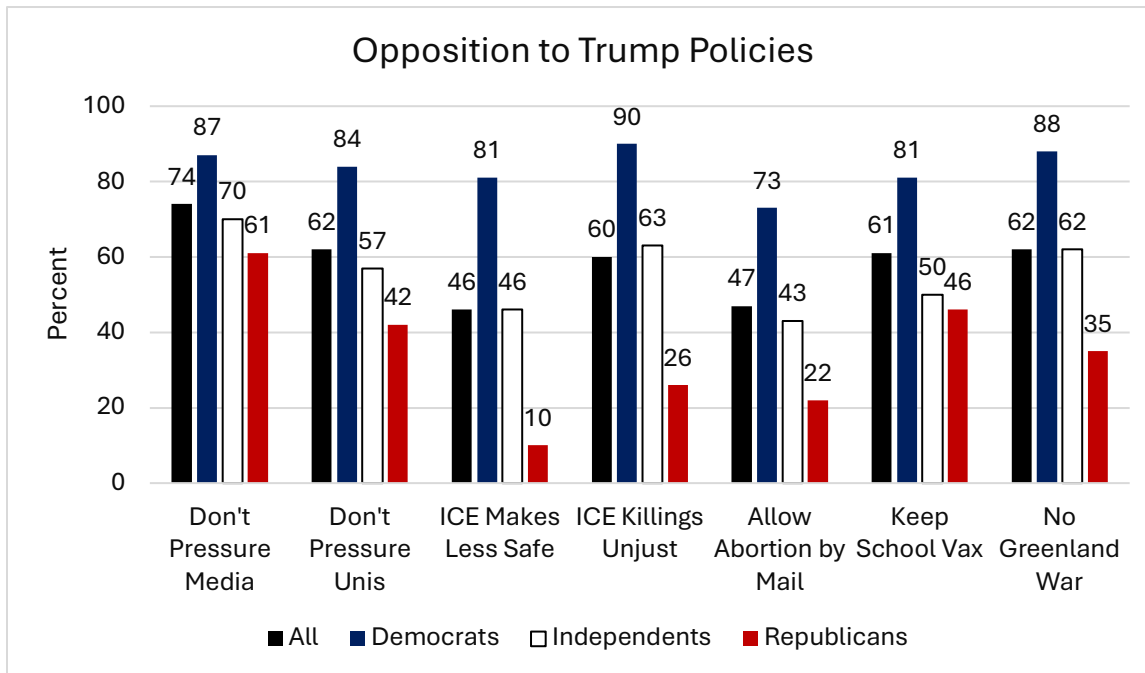
Views on Artificial Intelligence & Data Centers

- The public is neutral about AI across a range of evaluations, including accuracy, effectiveness, usefulness, safety, and ethics. Democrats are slightly more negative toward AI than Republicans. The public’s views were strongly negative on constructing data centers. Democrats were substantially more negative than Republicans and Independents, but all three groups disliked data centers.

1. 2026 Trump Policies

We asked several questions about Trump administration policies that erode democratic rights and worsen public well-being, including government pressure on media companies to cancel shows the government doesn't like, government pressure to fire professors whose work the government doesn't like, evaluations of violent ICE immigration raids, restrictions on access to abortion care by mail, removing school vaccination guidelines, and threatening war to conquer Greenland.

Each question was asked on a balanced 5-point scale with support on one end and opposition on the other. For ease of presentation, we report the percent in opposition since that is the majority or plurality in every case, leaving aside neutral and supportive response categories.



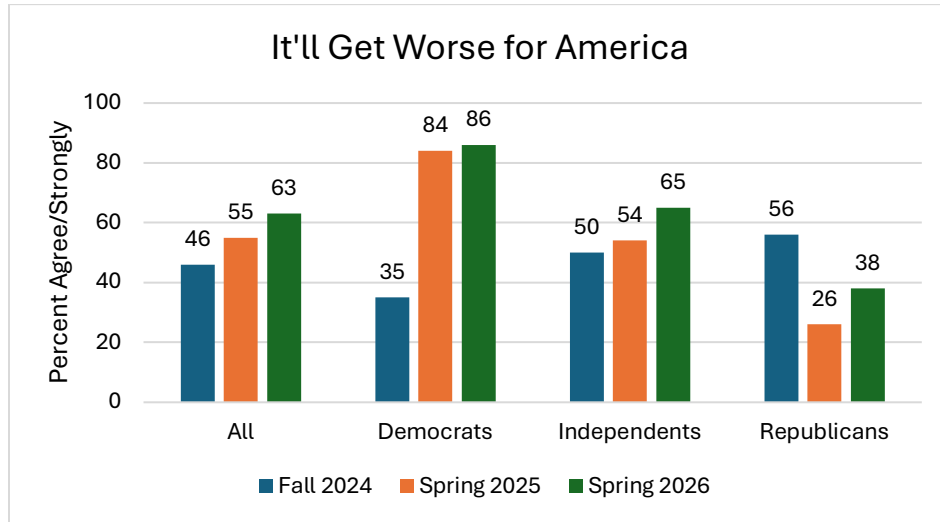
Government pressure on media garnered 74% opposition overall, including a majority of Republicans. Just over 60% of respondents also opposed pressure on universities and wanted to keep school vaccination requirements, including a plurality of Republicans. Just over 60% of respondents also regarded ICE killings of Americans as unjust and opposed a potential Greenland war. The plurality of respondents said ICE makes American cities less safe and wanted to keep abortion access by mail legal.

2. Public Mood & Well-Being

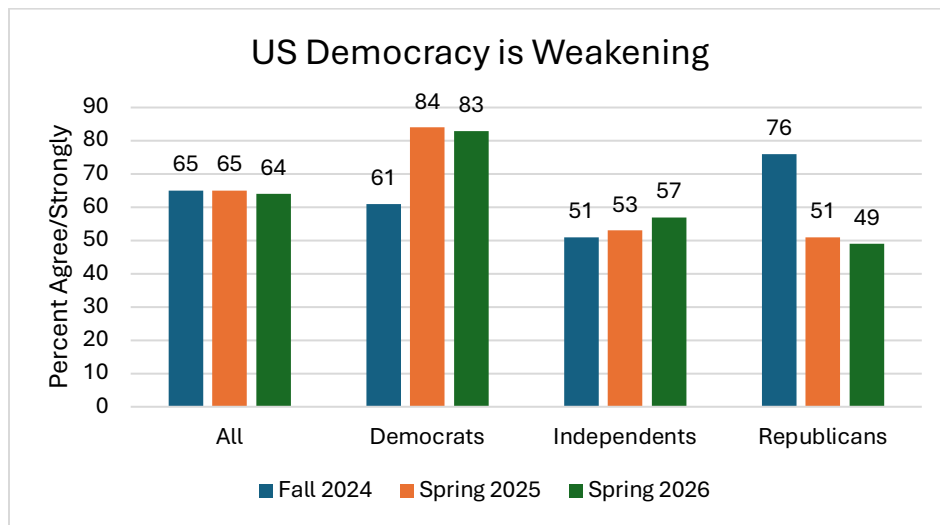
A Dark National Mood

Americans are very pessimistic about the future of the country, and they are becoming much more so each year. In Fall 2024, 46% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "Things are going to get worse in this country." That number rose to 55% in Spring

2025, and it rose again to 63% in Spring 2026. Democrats were held that view much less in Fall 2024 than Independents and Republicans but then shot up 50 points after Trump took office. Republicans, for their part, dropped 30 points following the change from Biden to Trump. Independents were largely unchanged. However both Independents and Republicans became about 10 points more likely to agree that the country was getting worse between Spring 2025 and Spring 2026.



We also asked if people agreed that U.S. democracy is getting weaker. 64% of respondents agreed, which was similar to responses in the two prior years. Republicans and Democrats flip-flopped in their concerns following the presidential transition, but levels of agreement for both remained high. Independents have gradually crept up in worries about weakening democracy over the past three years.

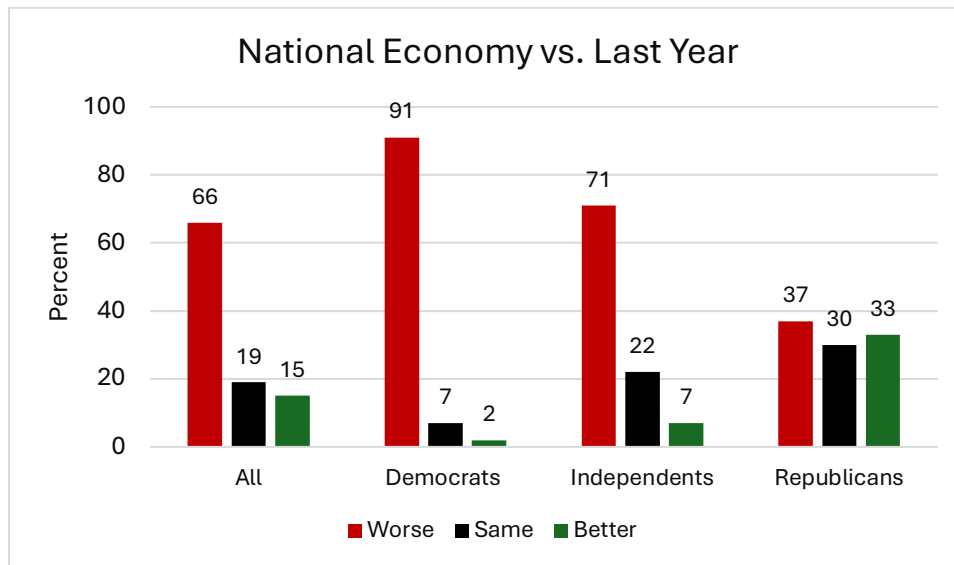


National Economic Evaluations

The public's economic views have been historically negative in recent years, despite some standard economic metrics not being historically bad. In our survey, 66% of all

respondents said the economy was worse than last year, including 91% of Democrats, 71% of Independents, and 37% of Republicans.

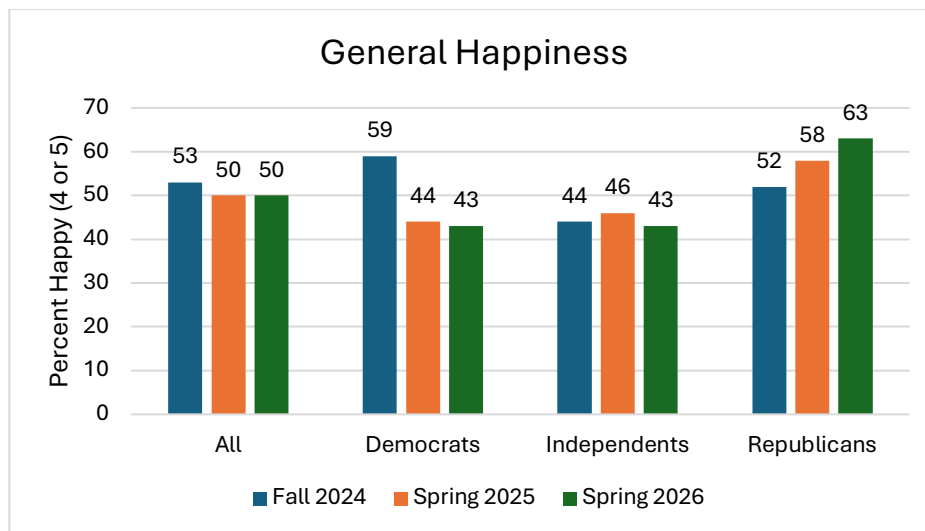
These numbers were several points worse than evaluations in Spring 2025, when 60% of respondents said the 2025 economy was worse than 2024, including 80% of Democrats, 65% of Independents, and 40% of Republicans.



Personal Moods

The public’s dark national outlook partly corresponded with personal unhappiness. We observe similar but muted partisan swings in general mood following the change in presidential party.

We asked survey respondents “how happy do you feel” in all three waves – Fall 2024, Spring 2025, and Spring 2026. They answered on a 5-point scale, ranging from “I feel very happy” to “I feel not happy at all.” Here, we assess the percentages who are on the happy side of the scale.

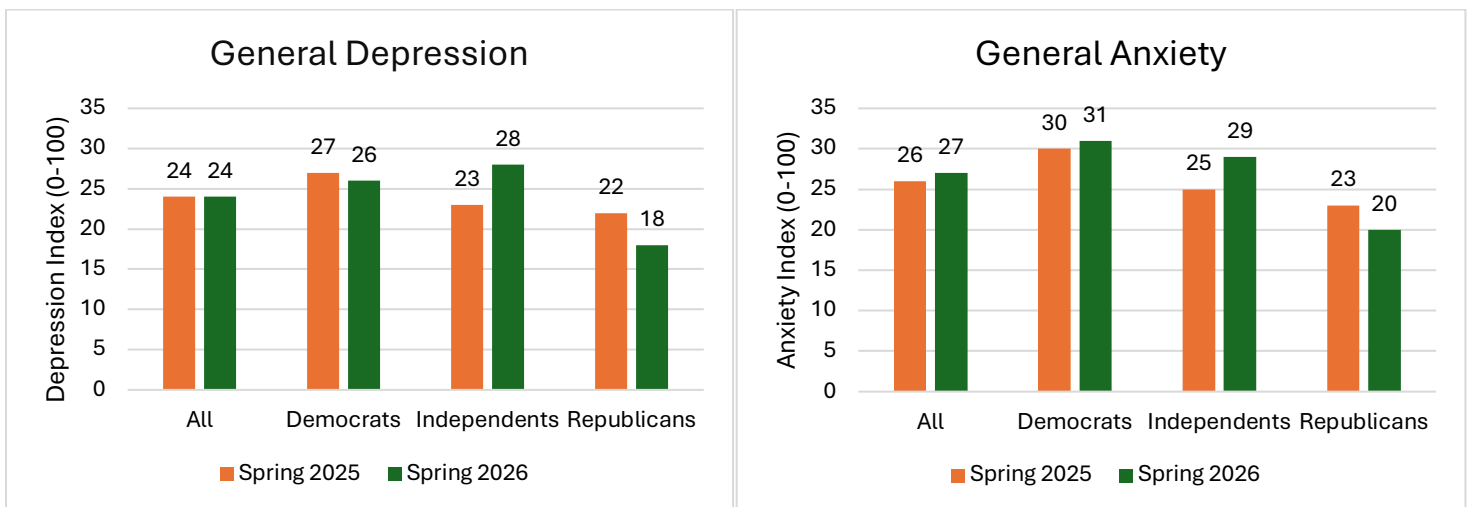


Average public happiness remained fairly steady across the three surveys, but we found substantial shifts in happiness by party, even though the question makes no mention of politics.

59 percent of Democrats were happy in Fall 2024 under the Biden Administration, but that number fell into the low 40s in both years with Trump in power. Republicans showed the reverse: Lower happiness under the Biden Administration, rising in Trump’s first year in power, and rising again in Trump’s second year in power. Independents were less happy across all three years.

It’s worth noting that the survey is primarily about politics, and so that probably increased the influence of political considerations on broader happiness evaluations. In other words, these ratings probably reflect truly general evaluations of happiness along with partisan cheerleading.¹

We asked related questions about depression and anxiety symptoms in the two spring surveys, with two questions each. Democrats reported higher levels of depression and anxiety than Republicans (with Independents in the middle) and these numbers did not change much between 2025 and 2026. Unfortunately, we did not include depression and anxiety questions on the 2024 survey and so we cannot evaluate negative mood change as a function of the presidential transfer of power.

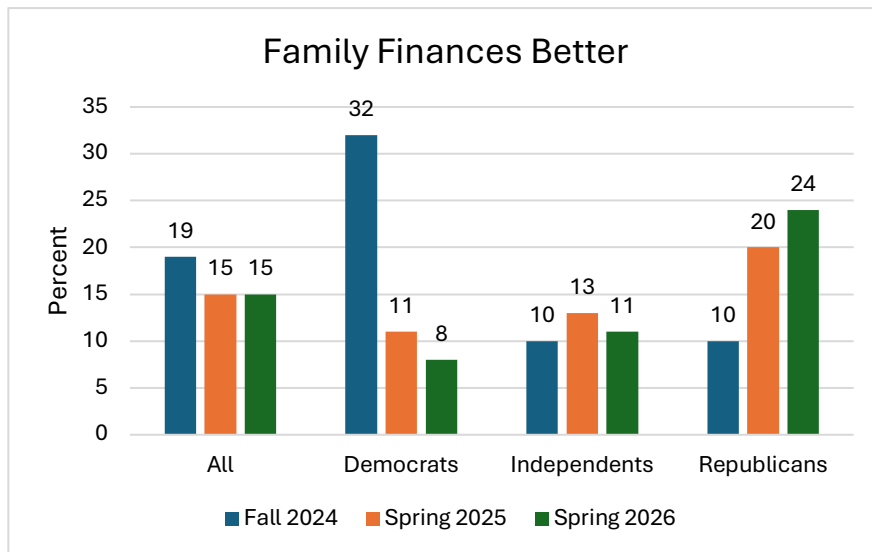


Family Finances

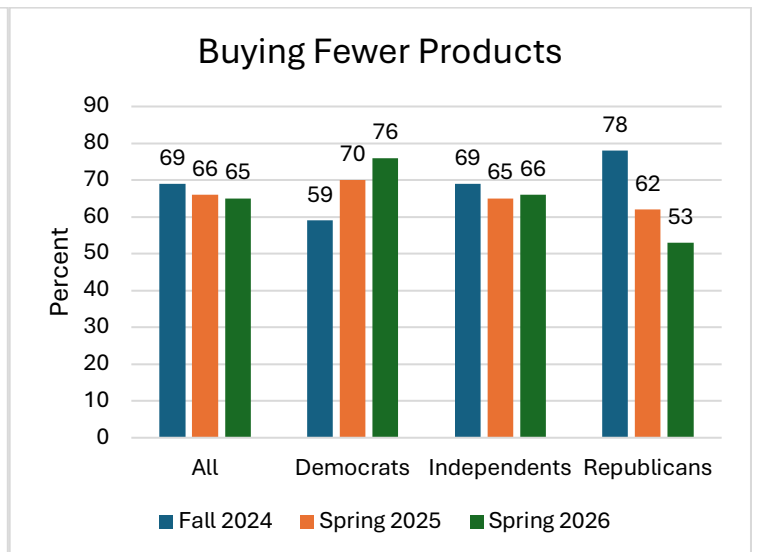
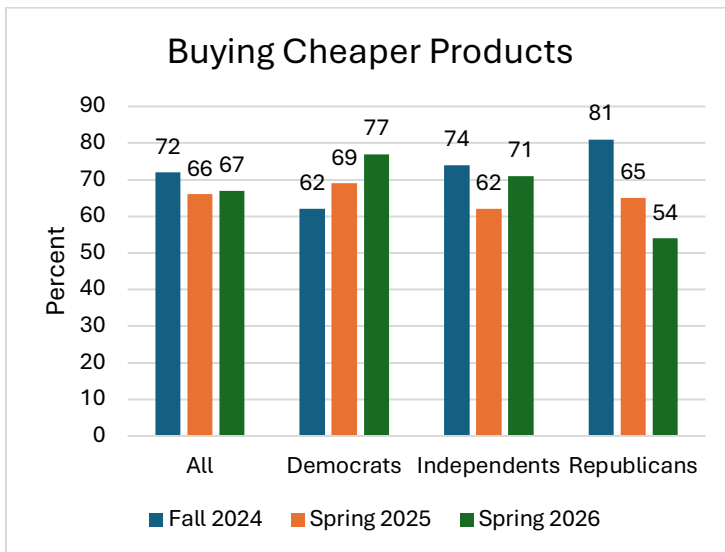
We also asked our survey respondents in each wave about their family’s financial well-being – whether they were better off than the year before. Overall, the percentage of people saying their family finances had improved dropped between Fall 2024 under Biden and Spring 2025 under Trump, and it stayed at that lower level in Spring 2026. However, that small average drop masks huge partisan shifts. Democrats dropped from

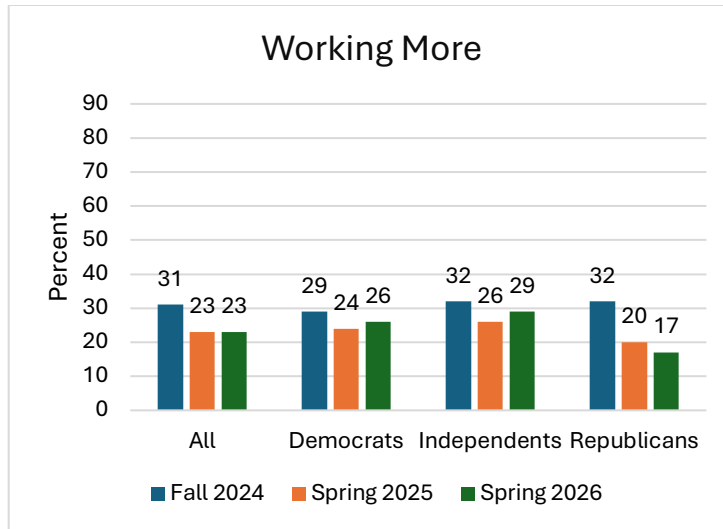
¹ In additional analysis, happiness averaged about seven percentage points lower among people who perceived a worsening national economy in each wave of the survey, and the party gaps in happiness largely disappeared.

32% saying better in Fall 2024 to around 10% in the next two years. In contrast, Republicans went from 10% “better” in Fall 2024 to 20% “better” in Spring 2025 under Trump and 24% “better” in Spring 2026.



Finally, we asked whether respondents were making changes in their purchasing behavior or work to adjust for higher prices. Overall, we see small declines in the number buying cheaper products and the number buying fewer products for Fall 2024 compared to Spring 2025 and Spring 2026. The equivalent drop over that time is larger for people saying they were working more hours to make more money. But, as with personal finance evaluations, partisans moved in dramatically opposite directions coinciding with the shift in presidential party.

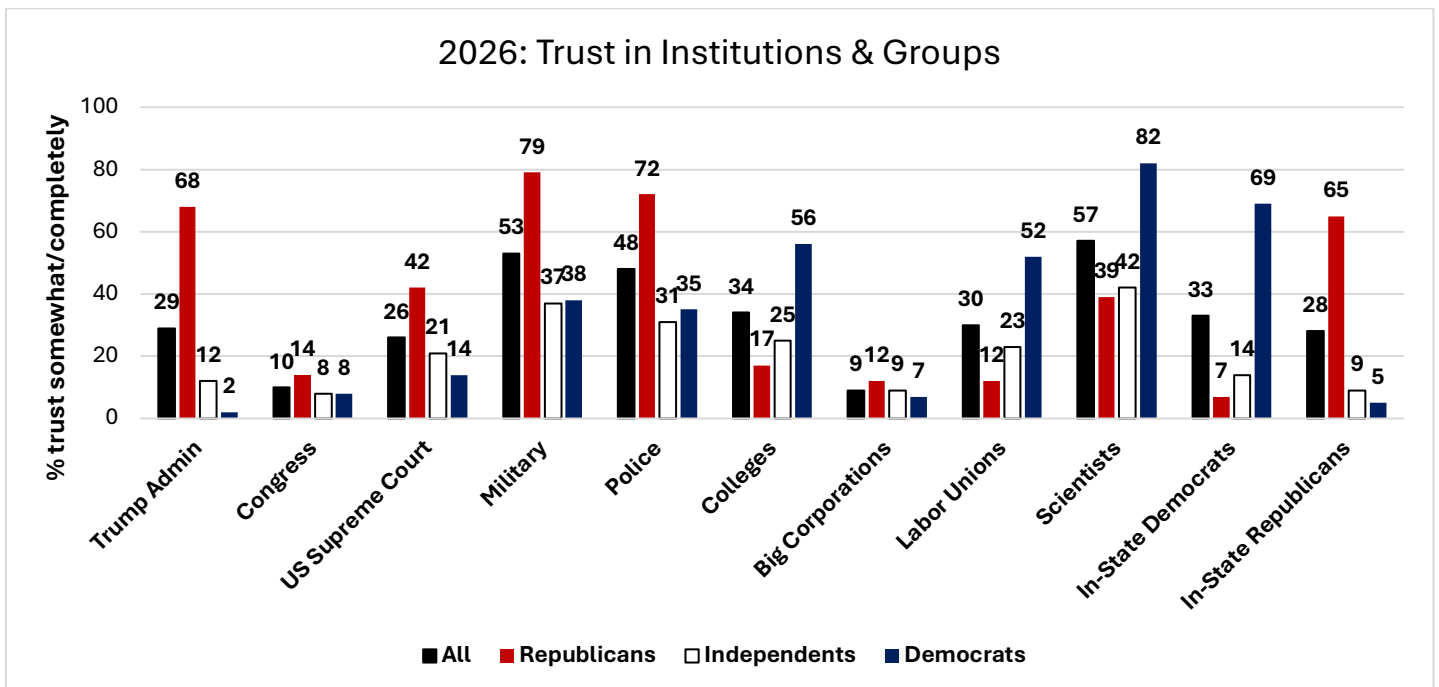




3. Changes in Public Trust

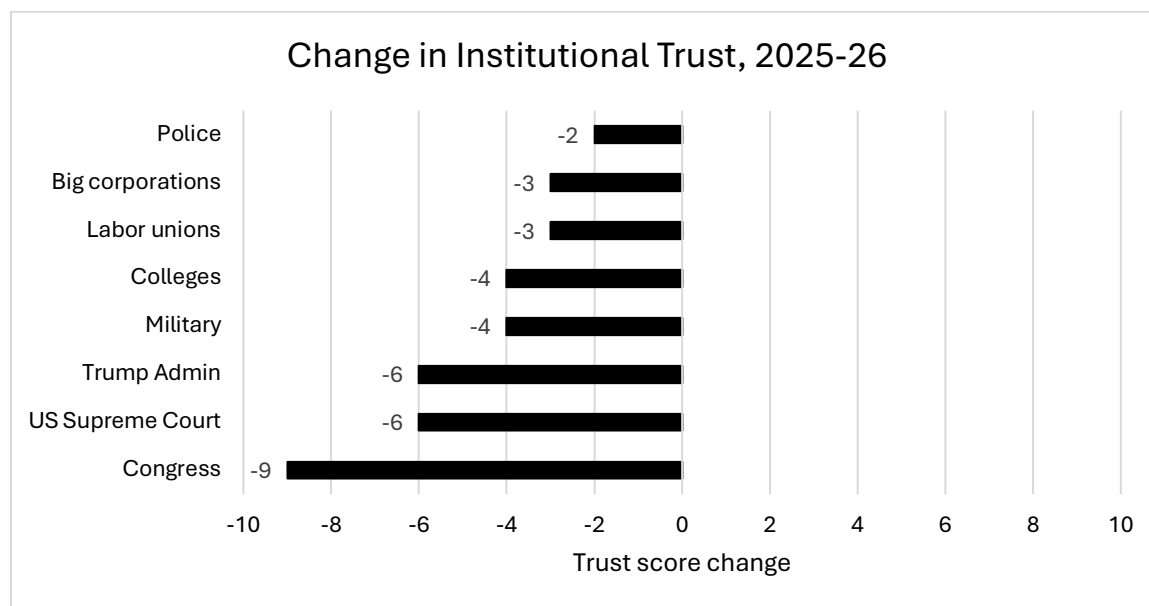
Trust in America’s governing institutions has been falling for decades. That trend is layered over dramatic short-term partisan shifts in trust based on who controls those institutions at a particular time, as with the transition from a Democratic president to a Republican one. Where does public trust in governing institutions lie now in the second year of Trump’s presidency?

We asked respondents to share their level of trust or distrust for a variety of political institutions, civic institutions, and groups. Public trust was highest for scientists, with 57% of respondents saying they somewhat or completely trusted the institution, followed by 53% for military, 48% for police and 34% for colleges and universities.



Public trust was lowest big corporations at 9% and Congress at 10%. The partisan gap in (dis)trust was smallest for both of those, which people in both parties distrust, and the partisan gap was largest for trusting the Trump administration (78% vs. 2%) and in-state partisan opponents. Beside Trump and company, Republicans were highly trusting of the military (79%) and police (72%). Democrats were generally less trusting across the board, but they expressed most trust for scientists (82%), colleges (56%), and labor unions (52%).

We asked these same questions in our Spring 2025 survey with many of the same respondents. Trust fell across all these institutions at least a little. Congress lost the most trust, falling 9 points, followed by the Trump administration and the US Supreme Court, which lost 6 points of trust. These changes were driven by updated views among Independents and Republicans, since Democrats were already mistrusting of these Republican-led institutions.

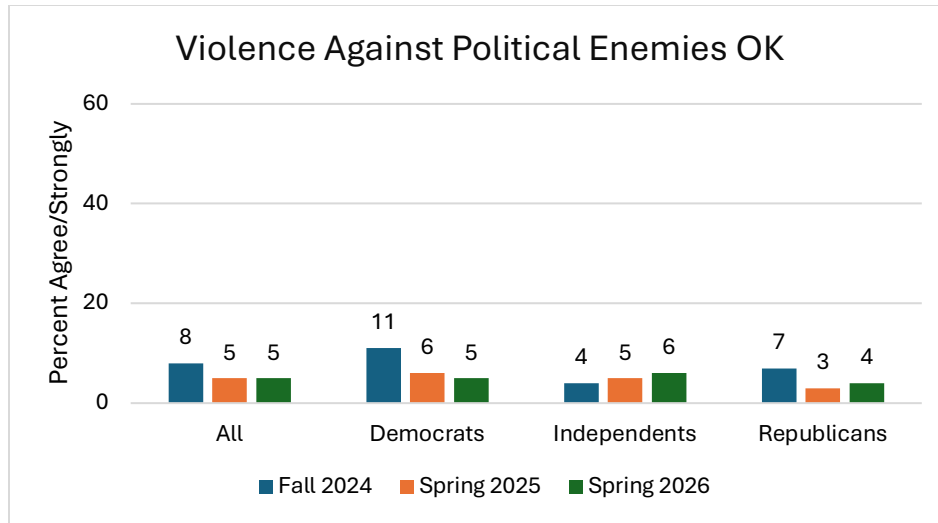


4. Political System Views

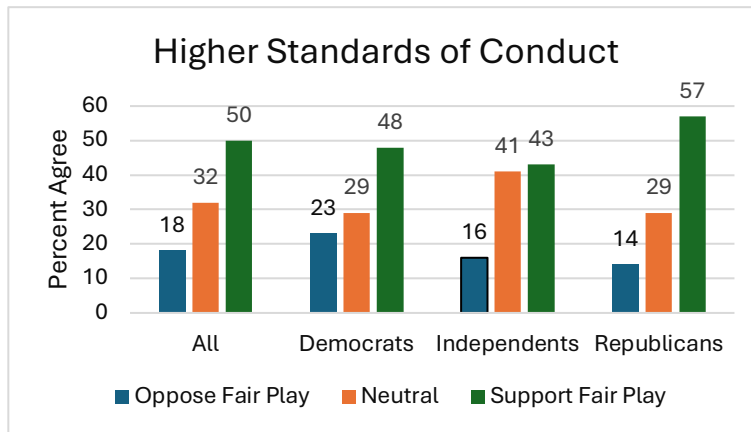
In the midst of dramatic social and political upheaval in national, state, and local politics, we assessed stability and change in a wide range of attitudes about the political system. We share a few of those here.

Violence: During years with multiple high-profile violent political attacks, the public strongly disapproves of political violence, and, if anything, that disapproval has grown slightly over three years. In the most recent Spring 2026 survey, only 5% of respondents agreed that violence against political enemies is permissible, with levels indistinguishable across partisans and Independents.

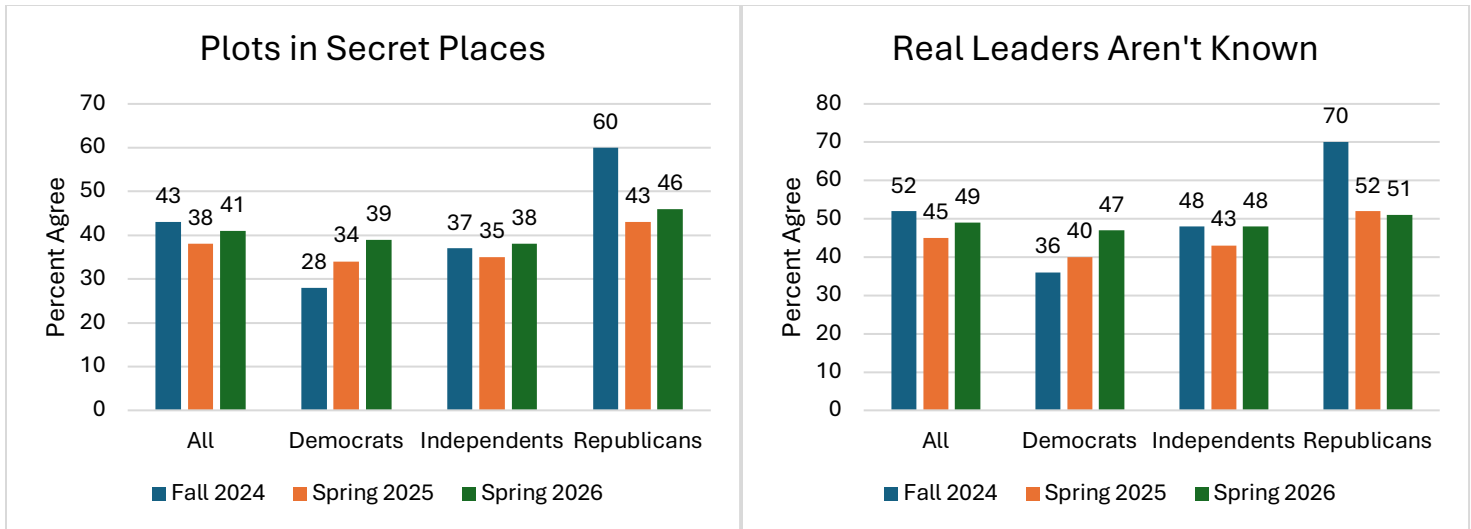




Fair Play: We asked two agree-disagree questions about standards of conduct in Spring 2026 – one on following the rules even when opponents don’t and the other on needing to ‘sink to their opponents’ level’ to win. We averaged both responses in an index. On balance, people in both parties were more inclined to favor rule-following and maintaining higher standards of conduct. Republicans were somewhat more likely to agree with those guidelines than Democrats and Independents, which may reflect their current control of government or a broader preference for status quo-supporting order.



Conspiracies: A large minority of Americans believe our lives are largely controlled by plots hatched in secret places and that our real leaders aren’t known to us. As is typical in American politics, Republicans became less conspiratorial when they gained national power and Democrats became more conspiratorial, though Democrats were still less conspiratorial than Republicans overall.



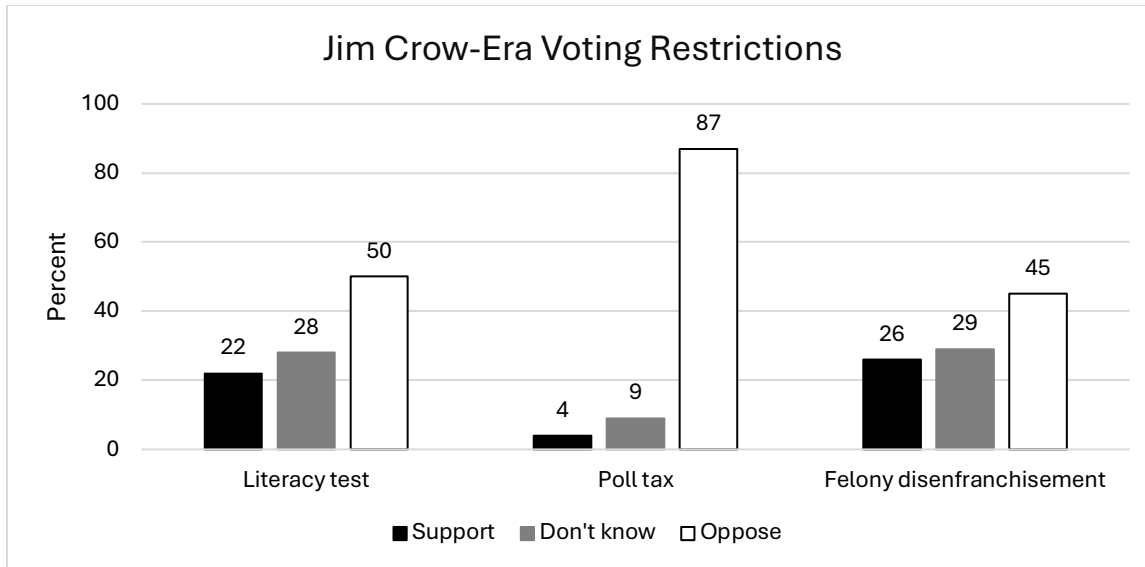
5. Views on Jim Crow-era Voting Restrictions

Questions about racially-motivated voting restrictions gained new relevance this Spring when Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the second of two major components of the Voting Rights Act in *Louisiana v. Callais* (2026), following their action against the first component in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013). The [turnout gap between Black and white Americans grew](#) most in places the *Shelby* decision unbound, and analysts predict a [precipitous drop in Black members of Congress](#) following the new *Callais* decision.

These questions are also related to debates about other [present-day voting restrictions](#) that have disparate impacts on people of color, lower-income people, people with disabilities, and young adults, including voter ID rules, early registration requirements, limited voting times, at-large elections, and more. Considering the Court's decisions and the original purpose of the VRA, we wanted to assess how many Americans still support the same Jim Crow voting restrictions today.

We focused on three kinds of voting restrictions designed and administered to reduce Black political power, prevent representative elections, and maintain white supremacy: literacy tests, poll taxes, and felony disenfranchisement.

The good news is that the voter restrictions white supremacists enacted to establish Jim Crow are very unpopular today.



Note: an extended analysis of these attitudes appeared in the political science Substack [Good Authority](#) on May 6, 2026.

Literacy tests were administered arbitrarily by local white officials to prevent Black Americans from participating, with exemptions for white voters. Some contemporary Americans still complain about low levels of voter knowledge and call for such tests.

We asked, “How would you feel about a law requiring Americans to pass a political knowledge test to vote? Supporters say it makes election outcomes more informed. Opponents say voting tests are designed badly to exclude other types of voters who are informed enough.” Twenty two percent of respondents supported literacy tests, 50% opposed, and 28% were unsure.

Poll taxes targeted poor people, who were disproportionately Black under a Jim Crow economy that reproduced many of the conditions of enslavement. We asked, “How would you feel about a law requiring Americans to pay a \$50 fee to vote? Supporters say voters should show they care enough to choose well. Opponents say voting fees are actually intended to exclude other types of voters who care just as much.” Just 4% of respondents supported poll taxes, 87% were opposed, and only 9% were unsure.

Policies disenfranchising people convicted of felonies are different because those laws are still on the books in several states, most of which are in the South. In a criminal punishment system shot through with racial discrimination, the result is Black disenfranchisement. About five million Americans lack voting rights due to these laws. In some Southern states, 10% of all adults are disenfranchised. And here in Wisconsin, four lawmakers proposed a bill in 2026 to prevent former inmates who had served their prison time from voting unless they had completed paying any fines or fees.

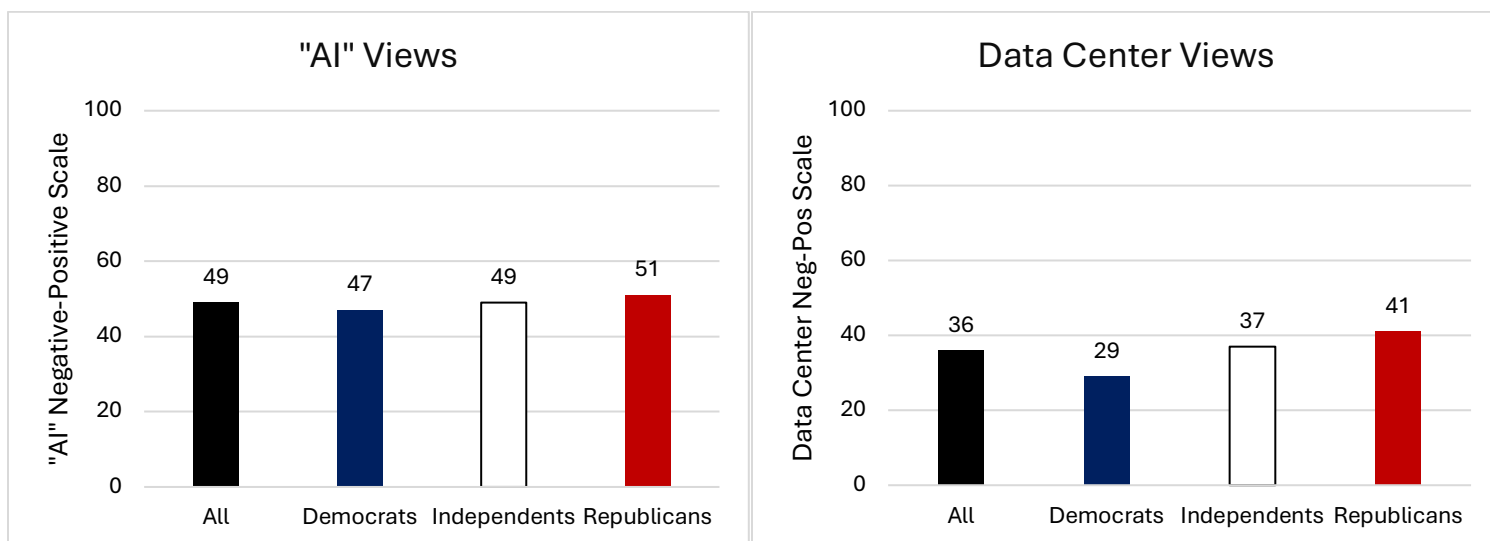
We asked, “How do you feel about laws in some states where Americans convicted of a felony lose the right to vote for the rest of their lives? Supporters say those voters have bad morals that worsen election outcomes. Opponents say those laws are intended to unfairly exclude other types of voters who are moral enough.” Twenty six percent of

respondents expressed support, 45% were opposed, and 29% were unsure. We were surprised to find low support for this contemporary policy – nearly as low as for literacy tests.

6. Views on Artificial Intelligence & Data Centers

“Artificial intelligence” (AI) seems to be everywhere these days as businesses, universities, politicians, and others jump on the bandwagon, whether their patrons like it or not. The public, for its part, is skeptical. We asked ten questions about AI: asking people to rate its effectiveness, usefulness, informativeness, importance, meaningfulness, powerfulness, safety, accuracy, and ethicalness compared to their antonyms. Responses were similar across these items, so we present the results as an index, ranging from 0 (most negative) to 100 (most positive), with 50 as the neutral midpoint.

On balance, the public is neutral on “artificial intelligence,” and Democrats feel slightly more negatively toward AI than Republicans.



New computing techniques like AI demand vast new data centers, which are also encountering strenuous local resistance in most places they are proposed. We asked whether data centers’ benefits outweigh the costs or vice versa on a 5-point scale between 0 (very negative) and 100 (very positive). The average responses was fairly negative – 36 on the 0 to 100 scale. Democrats were more negative (29) than Independents (37) and Republicans (41).

About the 2024-26 Wisconsin Communication & Election Study

The 2024-26 Wisconsin Communication & Election Study is a multi-wave survey panel administered online by [YouGov](#). Wave 1 was fielded before the presidential election from October 17 to November 4, 2024. Wave 2 fielded in April and May of 2025 with reinterviews of Wave 1 participants plus a supplemental fresh cross-section. Wave 3 fielded March 23 to April 14, 2026, with prior participants plus a supplemental fresh cross-section. We also fielded Midwestern regional surveys with many of the same questions.

In Wave 1, YouGov supplied a demographically weighted representative opt-in sample of 2,000 American residents. For Wave 2, we successfully reinterviewed 52% of Wave 1 national participants, with a sample refresh up to 2,000 respondents. Wave 3 include 41% of the original Wave 1 respondents, with another refresh to 2,000 respondents. We apply demography-based survey sample weights in each wave to better align estimates with state populations.

Although non-probability samples do not have traditional margins of error, percentages from the full sample have a virtual margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points for estimates near 50%, with smaller margins for estimates as they move toward 0% or 100%. Estimates for Democrats in the two states have margins of error of +/- 3 percentage points, and estimates for Republicans are +/- 3 percentage points.

The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, education, and party ID. The sampling frame is a politically representative "modeled frame" of US adults, based upon the American Community Survey (ACS) public use microdata file, public voter file records, the 2020 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration supplements, the 2020 National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll, and the 2020 CES surveys, including demographics and 2020 presidential vote.

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, years of education, region, and home ownership. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. The main weights were then post-stratified on 2020 and 2024 presidential vote choice, as well as four-way stratification on gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final main sample weight.

The 2024-26 Wisconsin Communication & Election Study was supported by the John S. and James L. [Knight Foundation](#), which advances research at the intersections of media and democracy.

About the Center for Communication & Civic Renewal

The Center for Communication & Civic Renewal (CCCR) is an interdisciplinary research team housed in the School of Journalism & Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. CCCR's research aims to understand Wisconsin public opinion and the state's broad political communication ecology, drawing upon frameworks and methods foundations in communication, political science, sociology, psychology, and computer science. Dr. Michael Wagner leads the Center as Faculty Director, Dr. Dhavan Shah is the Center's Research Director, and Dr. Nathan Kalmoe serves as Executive Administrative Director for the Center.

The Center's public opinion polling is one of three analytical components in its broader efforts studying political communication in Wisconsin, the Midwest, and beyond. Over the years, we have also conducted in-depth interviews with hundreds of citizens throughout the state to understand how they're talking and thinking about politics. And we have conducted large-scale computational analyses of social media and news media content throughout the Wisconsin, the United States, and the world.

CCCR's past research is synthesized in the book, [*Battleground: Asymmetric Communication Ecologies and the Erosion of Civil Society in Wisconsin*](#), published by Cambridge University Press in 2022, along with several peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals, and public-facing essays published in national news outlets including the *Washington Post*, *Vox*, and *TechStream* as well as local outlets like the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, the *Capital Times*, and the *Wisconsin State Journal*

Our January 2025 report, "[The American Voter in 2024](#)," assessed a large national pre-election public opinion survey to investigate partisan agreement and division in attitudes, behaviors, and media consumption patterns that determined pivotal election outcomes. We examined party loyalty, identity group attitudes and prejudices, economic perceptions and experiences, foreign policy attitudes, and partisan news diets.

Our June 2025 report, "[100 Days Under Trump](#)," analyzed a large national public opinion survey from April & May 2025 to investigate public views of Trump's first 100 days, along with how media consumption patterns shape views among Republicans. We found little public support for Trump's seismic policy changes overall, negative national economic and personal finance evaluations, low levels of institutional trust, and substantial party gaps in all of those views.