U.S. Public Opinion on Accountability for January 6 Insurrectionists

Ideological Influences on Accountability Among the American Public

Research By

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Introduction

On January 6, 2021, a joint session of Congress was scheduled to count electoral votes* that would formally establish Joe Biden's victory over Donald Trump in the presidential election.

That morning, thousands of supporters of President Trump gathered on the national mall, where they heard speeches from Trump and other Republican elected officials and activists, all claiming that the 2020 election had been stolen.

As the speeches concluded, over 2000 attendees marched toward the Capitol, where the extremist group The Proud Boys had already started to assemble, and breached the Capitol building. They attacked police and journalists, vandalized the building, and looked for elected officials, chanting threats of harm for several hours of occupation.

In the wake of the attack, Donald Trump was impeached for a second time, charged with incitement of insurrection, and the Department of Justice launched the most extensive criminal investigation in U.S. history.

Over 830 participants have been charged with crimes, with 43% being sentenced to time in prison. More participants continue to be prosecuted.

There may be further consequences: While several insurrectionists have now run for elected office, a federal appeals court ruled in May 2022 that those charged with participation in the insurrection may be barred from holding public office.

In this report, we present an analysis of public opinion around accountability for the participants in the January 6 attack on the Capitol. Who supports account-ability, who does not, and what sorts of ideologies are related to divisions around public opinion accountability?

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*   The electoral count for every Presidential election happens on January 6, pursuant to the Electoral Count Act.

Summary of Key Takeaways

- Over three-fourths of Americans think accountability is important for people convicted in the January 6 attack on the Capitol. 63% think it is "very important."

- The population of Americans who do not think accountability is important for January 6 insurrectionists is concentrated almost entirely among self-identified conservatives. Virtually all progressives (98%) and liberals (97%) and the vast majority of political moderates (80%) want accountability.

- Roughly half of political conservatives also want accountability. There are specific ideological divisions among conservatives correlated with who thinks accountability is important.

- The two most powerful predictors of not wanting accountability among conservatives are believing the conspiracy theory about rigged voting machines and believing that accepting diversity is not important to being an American. Other factors identified as especially important were distrust of the media, belief in the justifiability of violence, respecting institutions and laws, and belief in the QAnon conspiracy theory.

- Holding Christian nationalist views was not an important factor explaining divisions on views on accountability among conservatives.

- Beyond "accepting diversity," other types of ethnonationalist views did not emerge as important predictors of views on accountability among conservatives.

Data & Methodology

On February 2-4 2022 Public Wise fielded an online poll of 5,028 adults in the United States to better understand the influence of various political movements and ideologies on the events of January 6 and their political aftermath.

The poll was designed to be a nationally representative probability sample weighted by age, gender, and educational background to account for any discrepancies between our sample and the general U.S. population on these measures. The margin of sampling error among the total sample is plus or minus 1.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Our sample was fielded by Change Research, which is a polling organization that recruits respondents through advertisements on websites and social media platforms.

No financial incentives were offered to participants. We restricted our sample to only those who answered a minimum of 12 questions.

We asked a wide-ranging set of questions regarding demographics, political orientations and voting behaviors, views on January 6, Christian nationalist beliefs, U.S. nationalist beliefs, belief in conspiracy theories, and other questions.

The key goals of our research were to discover:

How do Americans who oppose and support accountability for insurrectionists differ from each other?

What specific ideologies are most correlated with opposing accountability for insurrectionists?

We explore four types of ideological factors: Christian nationalism; ethnonationalism and white supremacy; belief in conspiracy theories; and anti-establishment views.

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable is respondents' answer to the question "How important do you think it is that the people who participated in the events of January 6th be held accountable for their actions if a court determines they broke the law?"

Possible responses were "not at all important," "not too important," "not sure," "somewhat important," and "very important." For the core analysis in this paper, we coded this into a binary variable, where "somewhat important" and "very important" were coded as a 1, and the other three possible answers were coded as 0.

Independent Variables

Each categorical variable was recoded to a 0 to 1 numeric scale for use in our main analysis. Some variables were reverse coded to go in the same ideological direction as the other variables.

For example, we reverse coded the answers for the question about accepting diversity so that answers indicating less tolerance for diversity were coded as a higher number, making them consistent with other variables designed to measure ethnonationalist sentiment.

Variables for which the possible responses included "very important," "somewhat important," "not too important," and "not at all important," were coded as 1, 0.66, 0.33, and 0, respectively.

Those for which the possible responses included "strongly agree," "somewhat agree," "neither agree nor disagree," "somewhat disagree," and "strongly disagree" were coded as 1, 0.75, 0.5, 0.25, and 0 respectively.

Our variables of interest fall under four general categories: Christian nationalism, ethnonationalism, belief in conspiracy theories, and anti-establishment views.

Control Variables

In our core model, we control for age, gender, being white[*], and educational attainment. For educational attainment, the categories were high school diploma or less, some college but no degree, associate's degree, bachelor's or other four-year degree, and postgraduate degree.

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[*]   This category includes those who selected "white" as their only racial/ethnic identity and a very small percentage of respondents who selected white and another racial/ethnic identity.

Two of these categories, because they measured a unified concept and were found to be internally consistent[*] were coded as multiple-item scales.

For Christian nationalism, we created a scale based on items used by sociologists who study Christian nationalism.

We also created a multiple-item scale for belief in vaccine-related conspiracy theories. Our other categories were not internally coherent enough to create a multiple-item scale, so we analyzed each item independently.

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[*]   More details about our scale variables can be found in the second half of the paper, where we discuss each category of measures more in depth.

Sample and Missings

Our sample included 5,028 adults, however the number of responses for each question varies due to nonresponse to certain questions and survey attrition.

We experienced an initial dropout[*] of 5% at the question that asked respondents:

"Do you think an elected official should remain in office if they voted against certifying the election?"[**]

An additional 8% dropped out when they encountered questions that asked about QAnon, including:

"How often do you trust Qanon" or the subsequent question which asked for their agreement with the core QAnon theory: "How much do you agree or disagree: The government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation."

Another 1% of respondents dropped out at various points throughout the survey.

After undertaking listwise deletion of all respondents who skipped other questions of interest, our total sample size was 3,932, **of which 1,298 were self-identified conservatives, who are the focus of much of this paper.**

Because it seemed likely that respondents' decision to drop out of the survey was correlated with what their answers would have been on particular questions (i.e. our data was missing not at random), we did not undertake imputation to replace missing data.

We provide a more detailed analysis of missing data issues and treatment in our appendix.

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[*]   "Dropout" is defined as any respondent who answered the question before a certain question and then did not answer that question or any following it.
[**]   Public Wise conducted a shorter version of this survey in October 2021 and found that a similar percentage of respondents dropped out at the elected officials question. We did not ask questions related to QAnon in that version of the survey.

Model and Paper Organization

Our analytical strategy is as follows. First, we examine the individual correlations between views on the importance of accountability and various other ideological beliefs.

Second, we use a classification and regression tree (CART) model to help understand which of these factors most strongly predict reduced support for accountability.

This model lets us understand and visualize complex relationships between the different ideological factors and how they influence views on January 6 accountability. We use this technique following the suggestion of Armely and Enders (2022), who recommend using methods that allow for understanding "the constellation of factors" that lead to support for political violence, rather than studying different factors in isolation.

A CART model produces a decision tree where the root nodes closer to the top are the factors most predictive of the outcome variable (in our case, views on accountability).

The CART model first identifies the variable which produces the largest split in the outcome variable at the top of the tree, then continues to split each subgroup until it can no longer explain the remaining variation in the outcome of interest. Our CART model is run with the R package party (Hothorn, Hornik, and Zeileis, 2006).

In the remainder of the paper, we revisit each category in more detail, exploring and visualizing the relationship between our various categories of ideological beliefs and views on accountability for January 6 participants.

Potential Limitations

Research suggests that online polling offers advantages and disadvantages for our work. On the one hand, online polling may better reach younger people, who do not tend to answer phone surveys or mail (Evans and Mathur, 2018).

On the other hand, online surveys mean our data may be limited to those 93% of Americans with internet connections. Researchers have found that well-executed Internet surveys have the same accuracy as and comparable estimates to telephone surveys (Ansolabehere and Shaffner, 2017).

However, because the landscape of online polling shifts rapidly, its limitations and how they affect sampling and results are not always immediately apparent.

It is also worth noting that many measures used in this study may be subject to social desirability bias. Social desirability bias refers to the tendency of survey respondents to bias their answers away from what are perceived to be more socially unacceptable attitudes, such as explicit racism or belief in conspiracy theories, which can mean that our results are not based on these measures' true values as if the respondents were answering honestly[*].

In particular, if those on the extreme end of these views are not stating their true viewpoints, or if they are skipping these questions, it may be dampening real distinctions that exist between them and those who hold more moderate and/or socially accepted viewpoints.

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[*]   One example of how social desirability bias manifests in the world was by creating potential polling bias in the 2016 presidential elections. Brownback and Novotny (2018) use a list experiment which allows participants to conceal their individual response to a question about candidate preferences, in order to minimize social desirability bias. They found that when explicit polling tended to overstate respondents' preferences for Clinton relative to Trump.

Findings

Over three-fourths of Americans think accountability is important, and nearly two-thirds think it is very important, but political divides are paramount.
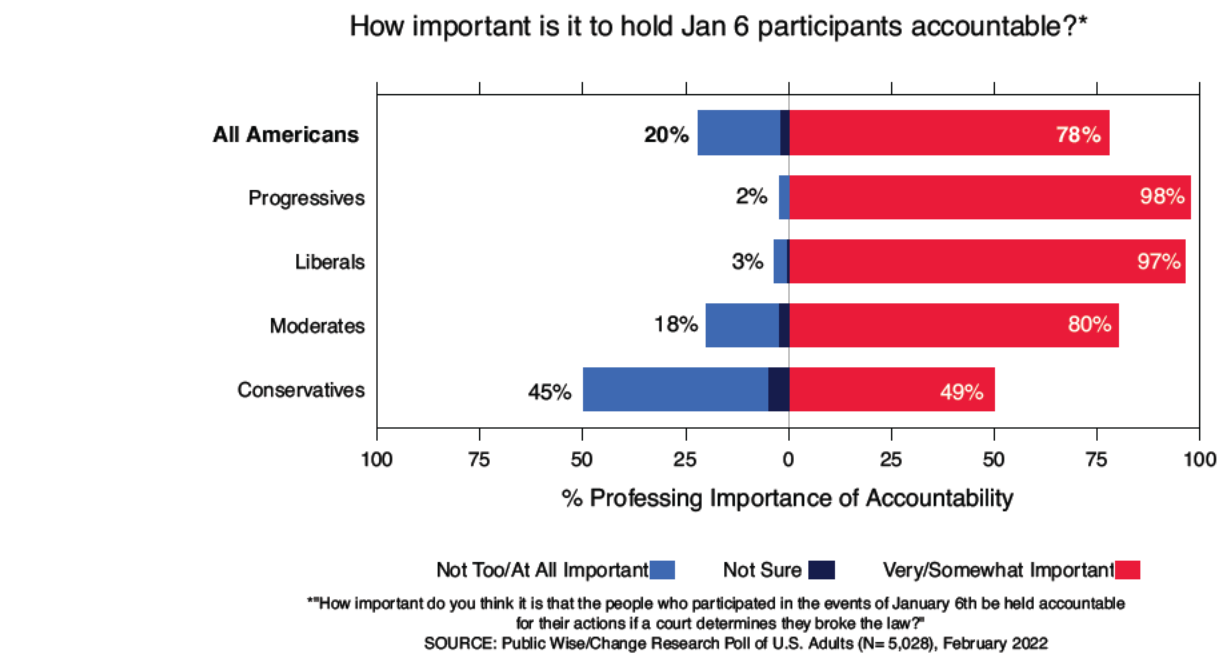
How do views on accountability break down by ideology?

Our survey asked respondents, "when considering politics and government, do you think of yourself as progressive, liberal, moderate, or conservative?"

Among both self-identified progressives and liberals, support for accountability was near-unanimous, and a small minority of moderates did not feel accountability was important.

Conservatives, however, were split into roughly equal parts between those who thought accountability was important and those who did not or were not sure.

Because those who do not want accountability for insurrectionists are concentrated almost entirely among conservatives, we focused our subsequent analysis on conservatives.

How important is it to hold Jan 6 participants accountable?*

Legend: Not Too/At All Important | Not Sure | Very/Somewhat Important

**How important do you think it is that the people who participated in the events of January 6th be held accountable for their actions if a court determines they broke the law?"
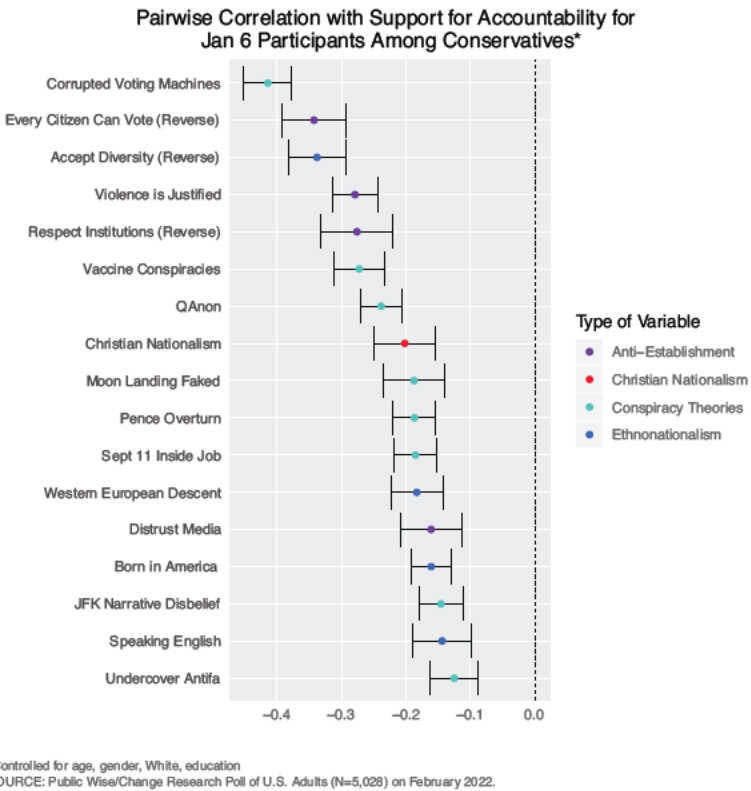SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Within-Conservative Analysis

What ideological differences separate conservatives who want accountability from those who do not? We investigated several different ideological strands within conservative thought to determine whether any were especially important for distinguishing views on the importance of accountability.

Specifically, we focused on four types of factors that have been theorized by scholars and pundits to have played a role as ideological foundations for the January 6 insurrection:
1) Christian nationalism, 2) ethnonationalism and white supremacy, 3) belief in conspiracy theories, and 4) anti-establishment viewpoints.

Below, we display the pairwise correlations (with 95% confidence intervals) of support for accountability and each potential ideological influence among conservatives, controlling for age, gender, being white, and educational attainment. The regression table can be found in the appendix.

Pairwise Correlation with Support for Accountability for Jan 6 Participants Among Conservatives*

Type of Variable: Anti–Establishment | Christian Nationalism | Conspiracy Theories | Ethnonationalism

*Controlled for age, gender, White, education
SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N=5,028) on February 2022.

All the variables we investigated had some correlation with views on accountability. But specific items from three of our categories were the strongest correlates of not thinking accountability is important for January 6 participants.

From the category of conspiracy theory beliefs, believing that the voting machines were switching votes from Trump to Biden was the most strongly associated with not thinking accountability is important.

Three out of four of the items from the category of anti-establishment variables were highly correlated with not wanting accountability: 1) thinking it is not important that every citizen can vote; 2) thinking violence is justified to "protect America;" 3) thinking that it is not important to respect institutions and laws.

From the ethnonationalist category, one variable was strongly correlated with not wanting accountability: believing that accepting racial and religious diversity is not important to being an American.

Less strongly correlated with importance placed on accountability were the other three ethnonationalist variables; belief in conspiracy theories less directly connected to the Trump presidency and January 6; level of distrust in the media; and holding Christian nationalist beliefs.

However, it is likely that many of these ideologies are correlated with one another. Indeed, we see a number of moderate and strong relationships in the figure below, which displays pairwise correlations between all of our independent variables.

For example, we can see that belief in various conspiracy theories are correlated with one another, and Christian nationalist beliefs are correlated with ethnonationalist views. If our goal is to understand which of these measures are most correlated with support for accountability, a straightforward regression analysis is likely insufficient.

The larger the circle, the stronger the correlation between two variables. Deeper blue indicates larger positive correlations (as variable x increases, so does variable y), while deeper red indicates larger negative correlations (as variable x increases, variable y decreases). The variables are full blue circles where they measure the (perfect) correlation with themselves.

In order to facilitate interpretation of the decision tree displayed above, we provide an example of how to read one set of nodes. Other nodes can be read similarly. At the bottom of the tree, we can find the boxplot of the distribution of support for accountability for January 6 participants for the respondents who fall into that particular node.

The number of participants in a given node can be found next to the number of the node at the top. So for example, in node 8, we have 53 participants, most of whom think accountability is very important (median score of 1).

If we read up to see how we got to that node, we can see that these 53 participants believe it is very important to respect institutions and laws (score of 0 for this reverse-coded variable), either disagree or strongly disagree that violence is justifiable (score equal to or less than 0.25), tend to distrust the media (score greater than 0.33) and are impartial or do not believe in the rigged voting machines conspiracy theory (score less than or equal to 0.5).

Now, we read the tree from top to bottom, towards a specific subset of nodes. For conservatives, the CART model identified belief in the rigged voting machine conspiracy theory as the most highly predictive of low support for accountability. It appears at the top as the first node of the tree. The model gives 0.5, exactly the midpoint, as the value that explains the greatest degree in variance for views on accountability. 0.5 represents neither agreeing nor disagreeing with belief in the voting machine conspiracy theory.

Therefore, the tree is split at its most important level between those who believe the rigged voting machine theory (the right leg coming off node 1) and those who are either impartial or do not believe it (the left leg coming off node 1).

For those who are either neutral or disagree with the statement (score less than or equal to 0.5), going down to node 2 on the left leg of the partition, the next most important factor is how much they distrust the media, with 0.33 being the dividing point, which indicates trusting the media "some."

Going down the left leg to node 3, for those who trust the media "a lot" or "some" (scoring less than or equal to 0.33), the next most influential node is belief in the importance of accepting diversity to being an American.

Those who are in the subset who "strongly agree" that accepting diversity is important (scoring 0 on this variable) fall into the final node 4, whose median score for the importance of accountability is 1 (with one outlier at 0.75) and N is 37.
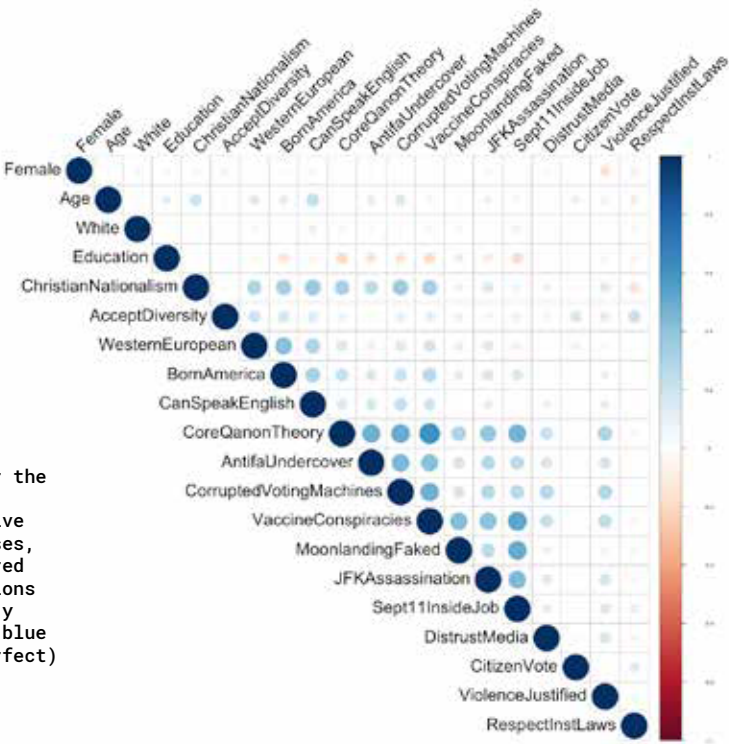
In other words, node 4 tells us that among conservatives in our survey, there are 37 people who 1) are neutral or do not believe in rigged voting machines theory, 2) trust the media some or a lot; and 3) think that accepting diversity is important to being American, and in that subset, they largely think accountability is very important.

Each node is dependent on the outcomes of the previous mode, and these variables are all interacting to most influence views on January 6 accountability.

It is worth noting that the same variable may appear multiple times in one tree. As another example, we walk the reader down the furthest right branches of the graph.

First we go down the first right branch coming off node 1 of the graph, where all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the voting machine conspiracy theory.

Both the second and third level splits of this graph focus on the accepting diversity variable, but for different levels of the variable. At the second level, the model divides respondents into those who scored 0 on the accept diversity variable (those who said accepting diversity is very important) and those who scored more than 0 (those who said it is not important at all, not too important, or somewhat important).

All 548 respondents who answered that they
1) agreed or strongly agreed with the rigged voting
machine conspiracy theory and 2) that they think
accepting diversity is very important are classified
into node 14, where the median score for
accountability is 0.5, the midpoint, and we can see
there is a lot of variation in views on accountability
among this group.

To aid in the identification of a profile that predicts low importance of
accountability for participants in January 6, we turn to a CART model,
the results of which are presented below.
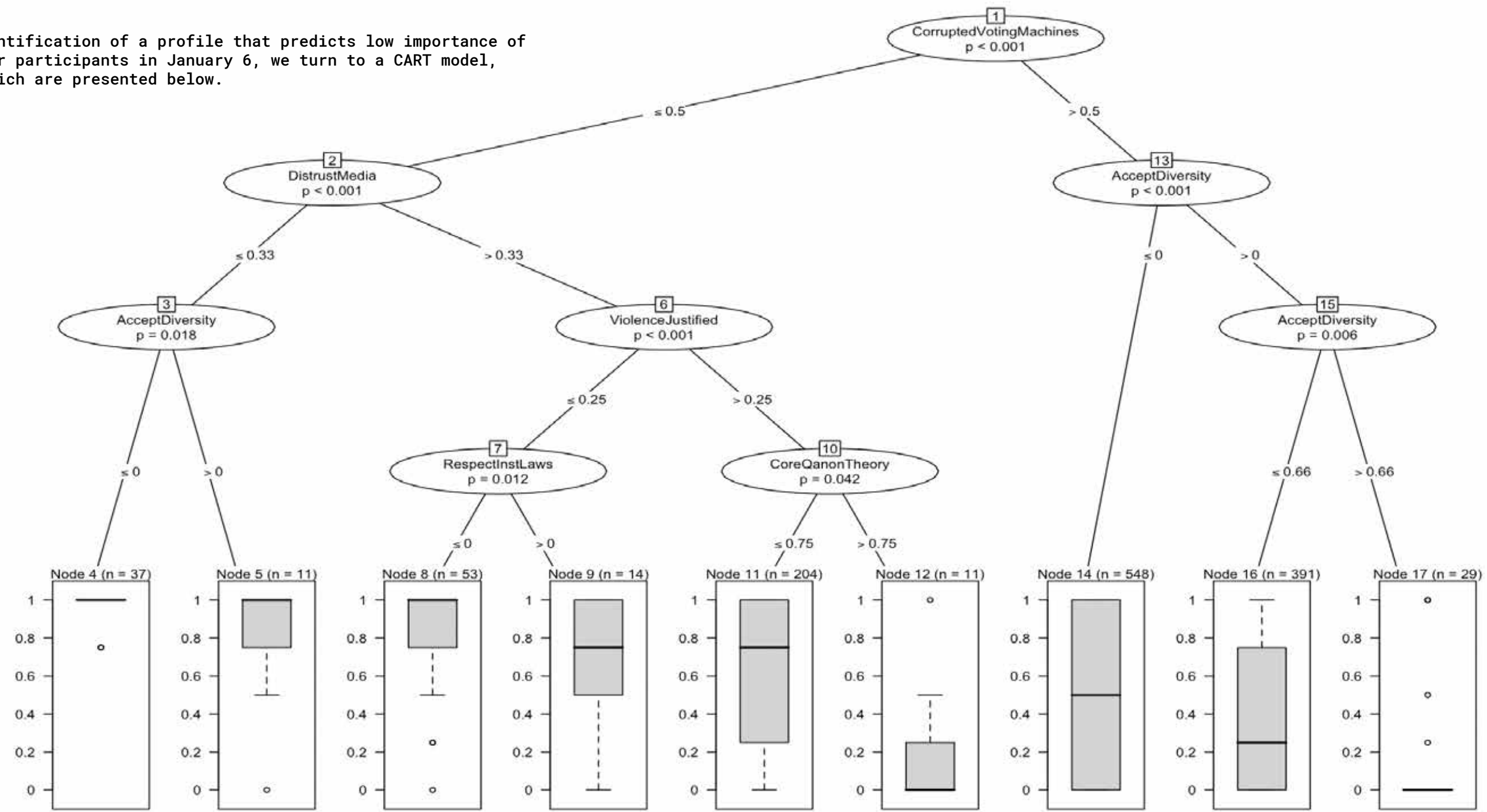
Close up view of the right side of decision tree

Respondents are further split into additional branches among those who scored above 0 for the accepting diversity variable.

It divides between those who scored less than or equal to 0.66 (those who answered that accepting diversity is not too important or is somewhat important) and those who scored greater than 0.66 (those who said accepting diversity is not important at all).
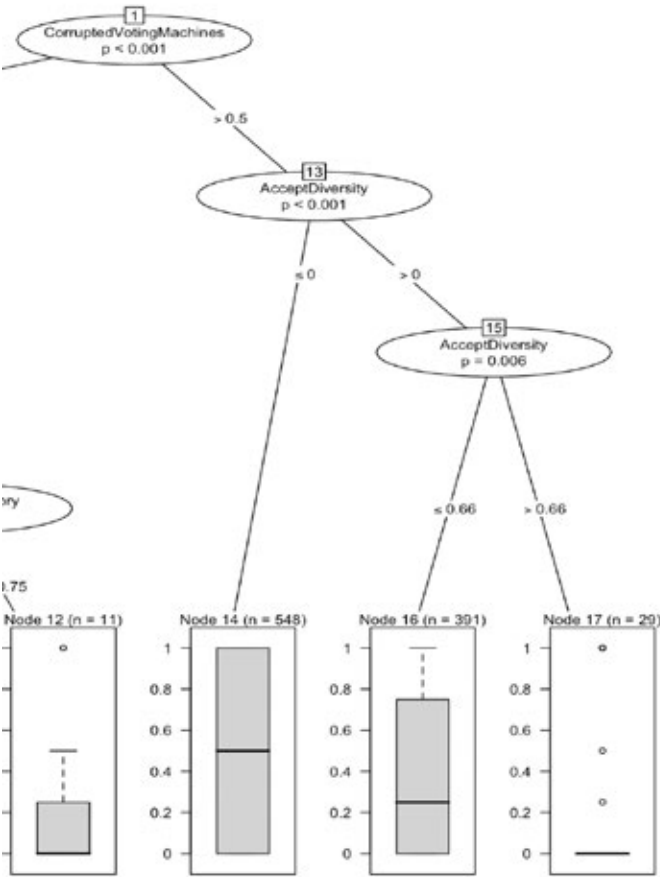
For believers in the rigged voting machine theory, 391 believed that accepting diversity was somewhat or not too important, and within this node (16) they place relatively little importance on accountability, with a median score of 0.25.

Just 29 conservatives who believe the voting machine conspiracy theory also think that accepting diversity is not important at all, and among this group, the median answer on the importance of accountability for January 6 participants is "not at all" (numerical score 0).

Overall, six key variables emerge from this exercise as the most useful in predicting conservatives' level of support for accountability:

1) belief in rigged voting machines;
2) distrust of the media;
3) valuing the acceptance of diversity;
4) believing the core QAnon theory;
5) belief that violence by citizens is justified "to protect America;" and
6) believing that it is important to respect institutions and laws.

The remainder of the paper provides more detailed analysis of the prevalence of all of these variables and their correlation with views on accountability.

In our subsequent analysis, we found that 76% of conservatives believed in the rigged voting machine conspiracy theory. Among conservatives who held this belief, just 43% wanted accountability (in contrast, 82% of conservatives who disagreed with this theory wanted accountability).

While the vast majority of of conservatives thought accepting diversity was important, among the small minority who thought it was "not important at all", just 16% wanted accountability. Trust in the media was low among conservatives – just 8% of conservatives say they trust the media a lot or somewhat.

But over two-thirds of conservatives who trust the media at least somewhat want accountability. Meanwhile well under half of conservatives with low trust in the media believe accountability is important.

Our analysis establishes that belief in conspiracy theories directly relating to January 6; holding certain anti-establishment reviews regarding the media, violence, and institutions; and beliefs about whether or not it is important to accept diversity are the factors which most predict how conservatives fall on beliefs around January 6 accountability.

Importantly, Christian nationalism did not seem to be an especially important factor accounting for divisions in conservatives' views on January 6 accountability.

Having established the relative importance of the different categories of ideological factors, we now explore each of the tested ideological correlates in more detail below.

We discuss the theoretical correlations of Christian nationalism, ethnonationalism, belief in conspiracy theories, and anti-establishment views to January 6 and provide a more in-depth analysis of our findings regarding the correlation between these ideological factors and public opinion on accountability.

Christian Nationalism

Prior research has posited that the insurrection was deeply rooted in Christian nationalism. However, our research demonstrates that the relationship between opinions on those events and Christian nationalist beliefs is not so straightforward among members of the public.

Scholars, journalists, and political commentators have described the January 6 attack on the Capitol as embedded in and bolstered by a rising Christian nationalist movement. Christian nationalism describes the belief that the United States is - and should be - a Christian nation. It does not necessarily refer to especially pious or orthodox beliefs in personal religious practice. Instead, it describes a particular conservative political orientation, rooted in conservative, White communities in the United States. For those who have spent years studying this movement, its connection to the events of January 6 was immediately apparent.

Sociologists Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead drew attention to:

...the Christian banners and flags, the wooden crosses, the impromptu praise and worship sessions, the "Jesus Saves" signs, the Christian t-shirts, and the infamous corporate prayer in Jesus' name in the Senate Chamber. Having stormed the sanctum of American democracy, the "QAnon Shaman" thanked God for "filling this chamber with patriots that love you and that love Christ," allowing them to send a message to their enemies "that this is our nation not theirs. (Time)

Indeed, the conservative Christian right served as a significant pillar of the political base that brought former President Donald Trump into office in 2016.

In a 2018 study, Whitehead, Perry, and Baker found that Christian nationalist beliefs were a predictor of voting for Trump in the 2016 election, even when controlling for class and sexist, racist, and ethnocentric views.

In their follow-up 2020 study, Baker, Perry, and Whitehead find that xenophobia and Islamophobia became more influential factors in Americans' intentions to vote for Trump relative to Christian nationalism. However, Christian nationalism remained influential on its own.

For these reasons, Christian symbolism and language among the insurrectionists who descended on the Capitol was not surprising.

A puzzling contradiction to this was the minimal involvement of formal religious organizations and leaders of megachurches and large denominations in the attack on the Capitol.

This fact might raise doubts about how much the insurrectionists drew inspiration from the Christian nationalist movement. However, this dovetails with what sociologists of the Christian nationalism movement have noted about the movement's recent evolution.

Over time, the ties between Christian nationalist beliefs and traditional measures of Christian piety – like church attendance – have loosened. A growing percentage of Christian Americans do not identify as belonging to any particular denomination – instead, their Christianity is idiosyncratic and not embedded in official institutions.

These "unchurched Christians" are not necessarily less politically active or less likely to be Christian nationalists. Scholars have found that Christian nationalists who are not churchgoers were more likely to have voted for Trump in 2016 than those who regularly attended services (Stroope et al., 2021).

And what about those not directly at the Capitol? How does Christian nationalism influence public opinion around the January 6 insurrection? Christian nationalists' approval of the January 6 events grew over time. Surveys measuring Americans'adherence to Christian nationalist views and their attitudes towards the attack on the Capitol, showed that from February to August 2021, the percentage of Christian nationalists who felt the rioters should be prosecuted fell from over

three-fourths to 54%. The percentage who said they stood with the rioters doubled from 13% to 27%.

Our research comparing the relative correlation between various ideological strands of conservatism found that Christian nationalism was not an especially important factor in terms of correlation with public opinion among conservatives on January 6 accountability.
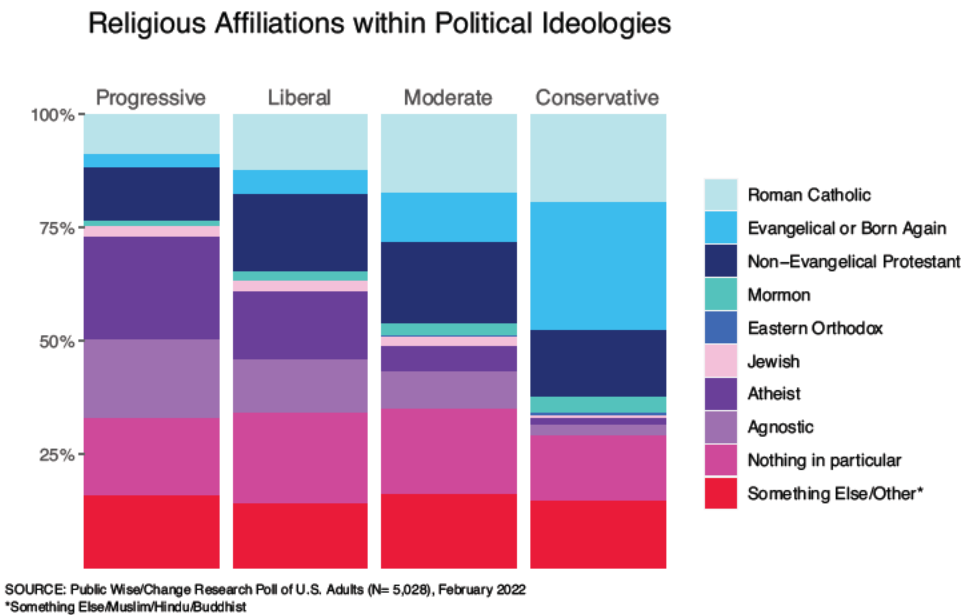
Here, we undertake a deeper analysis of the data to better understand the relationship between Christian nationalism and beliefs around accountability for U.S. conservatives.

Religious Affiliations and Accountability

First, we note that the likelihood of being a Christian is not equally distributed across the political spectrum in the U.S. Christians of various denominations made up a larger share of conservatives than other political ideologies.[*]

[*]	Here we classify Christian denominations as Roman Catholic, Evangelical or Born Again, Non-Evangelical Protestant, Mormon, and Eastern Orthodox.

Religious Affiliations within Political Ideologies

Legend: Roman Catholic, Evangelical or Born Again, Non-Evangelical Protestant, Mormon, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, Atheist, Agnostic, Nothing in particular, Something Else/Other*

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022
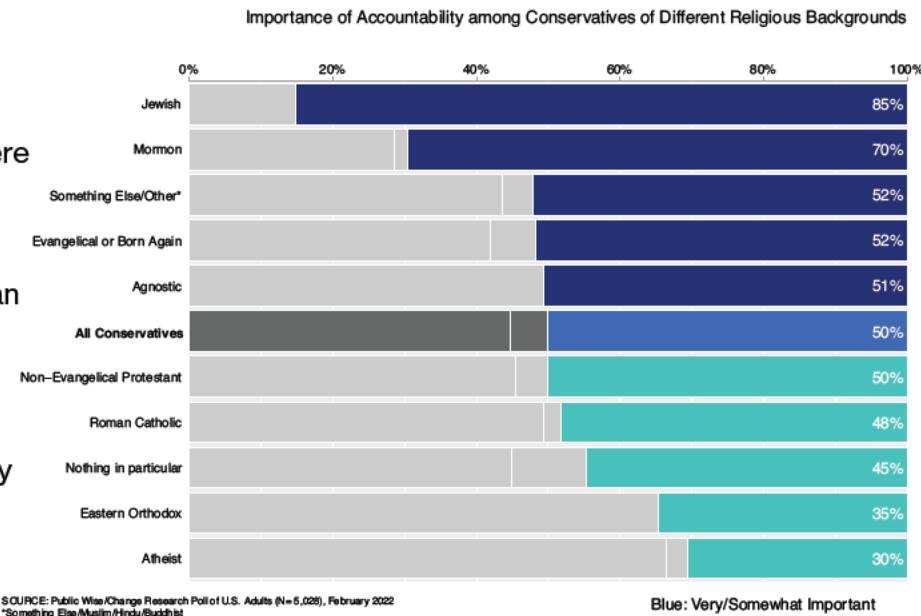*Something Else/Muslim/Hindu/Buddhist

As discussed above, Christian nationalism is not merely about being Christian or even having especially pious Christian attitudes. There does not seem to be an obvious pattern regarding Christian denominations and views on accountability within conservatives.

Jewish and agnostic conservatives were much more in favor of accountability than the median conservative.

However, so were Mormons, a Christian denomination that is also one of the most reliable Republican-voting demographics. Protestants – both evangelical and not – and Roman Catholics were roughly equally as likely to believe in the importance of accountability as the median conservative.

Conservatives who were Eastern Orthodox, atheists, and those with no religious affiliation in particular tended to believe that accountability was less important than the median conservative.

Importance of Accountability among Conservatives of Different Religious Backgrounds

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022
*Something Else/Muslim/Hindu/Buddhist

Blue: Very/Somewhat Important

Christian Nationalism and Accountability

We asked a battery of questions relating more explicitly to Christian nationalist beliefs, broadly following the questions used in the Baylor Religion Survey, the Public Religion Research Institute, and the Public Discourse and Ethics Survey.

These are similar to the questions sociologists of Christian nationalism have used in their work (Whitehead and Perry, 2020; Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs, 2022). They included the following:

- In your opinion, how important do you think being a Christian is to being truly American?

- In your opinion, how important do you think believing in God is to being truly American?

- To what extent do you agree or disagree that the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation?

- To what extent do you agree or disagree that the federal government should advocate Judeo-Christian values?

- To what extent do you agree or disagree that the federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces?

- To what extent do you agree or disagree that the federal government should allow prayer in public schools?

We used these questions to generate a scale of Christian nationalist beliefs ranging from 0 to 1, where 0 represents a total lack of Christian nationalist beliefs, and 1 represents the highest adherence to Christian nationalist beliefs (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.92).

Only 44% of conservatives received a high score for Christian nationalism using this scale (score of 0.8 or higher out of 0 to 1 scale). However, those with the highest Christian national rankings were nearly exclusively conservatives.

In fact, it was very unusual to find any respondents with very high levels of these beliefs who did not identify as conservative.

For this reason, we provide a visualization of the pairwise correlation between holding Christian nationalist beliefs and views on accountability for U.S. conservatives only.

Average Christian Nationalism Scores by Political Ideology
Conservatives are much more likely to hold Christian Nationalist views

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Importance of Accountability According to Christian Nationalism Score Among US Conservatives

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022
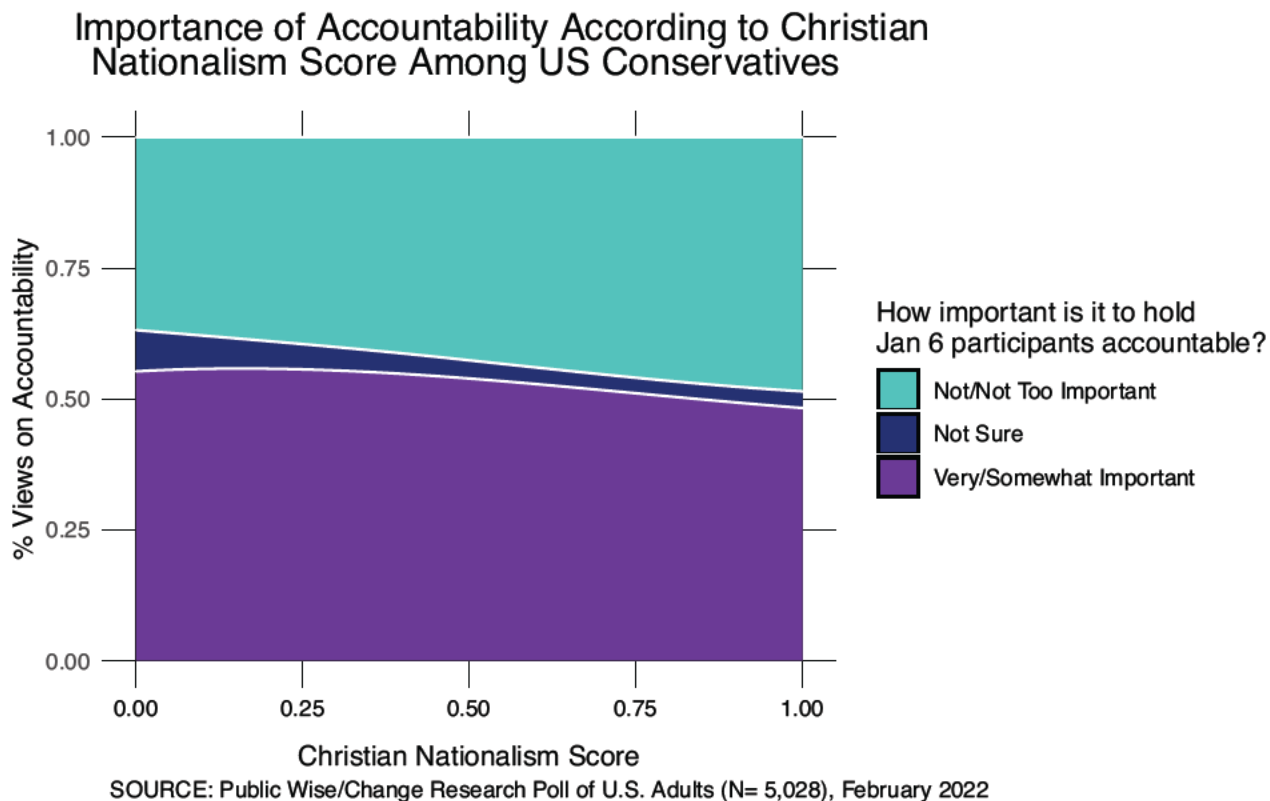
Those conservatives who rate high for Christian Nationalist beliefs are slightly more likely to discount the importance of accountability for insurrectionists than other conservatives.

However, there is not an especially striking difference in views on accountability between the most and least Christian Nationalist conservatives: slightly over half of conservatives who scored 0 for Christian nationalism thought that accountability was important compared to slightly less than half of those who scored one (holding very extreme views on Christian nationalism).

Christian nationalism is weakly correlated with views on accountability on its own, and our CART model did not identify Christian nationalism as an important distinguishing factor at all. This is likely due to the fact that our CART model was able to account for Christian nationalism's correlation with other ideological factors like belief in certain conspiracy theories.

These findings are not necessarily in contradiction to arguments made by sociologists of Christian nationalism. They have argued that Christian nationalism brings together different political ideologies: "Moral traditionalism rooted in hierarchical social arrangements…, authoritarian social control that justifies violence and militarism, and … strict ethnoracial boundaries surrounding national membership, civic participation and social belonging" (Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs, 2022).

Christian nationalism has been linked with intolerant attitudes primarily through the merging of religious and other types of identities, such as ethnic and national identities, rather than through piety or traditionalism on its own (Davis, 2018), and previous research has found that a link between Christian nationalism and support for the Jan 6 attacks is partially conditioned on belief in the QAnon conspiracy theory (Armaly, Buckley, and Enders, 2022).

In other words, any correlation found is not quite about Christian nationalism on its own, but about Christian nationalism's correlation with other more influential factors.

Ethnonationalism and White Supremacy

Opinions on ethnonationalism have become an increasingly important factor for predicting vote choice over time. Ethnonationalism can include a variety of beliefs and is related to other factors often used to predict vote choice. That said, existing research indicates that ethnonationalism remained a significant factor in 2016 even when controlling for other criteria such as racial resentment and sexism (Thompson 2021).

Similarly, racial/ethnic resentment was also found to be a significant predictor of vote choice when controlling for factors such as education (Abramowitz and McCoy 2018).

Recent research examined ethnonationalism and ethnonationalist beliefs in conjunction with the 2016 election and support for former President Donald Trump, who made race and immigration central pillars of his political platform.

First and foremost, research showed that opinions on ethnonationalism have aligned in a partisan fashion (Manza and Crowley 2018) and were strongly associated with vote choice in the 2016 election (Thompson 2021). Racial and immigration attitudes were particularly powerful predictors of vote switching to Republicans among both working-class and non-working class whites in 2016 (Reny et al., 2019).

In line with these trends, many white-supremacist and anti-immigrant nationalist hate groups promoted going to the Capitol and participating in the insurrection. Sociologists like Rashawn Ray have argued that the insurrection "opened a Pandora's box of hate into the American mainstream, giving the permission some racists needed to reveal themselves proudly and wreak havoc on symbols of American democracy."

Public Wise's survey included several questions to evaluate the role played by anti-immigrant and white-supremacist attitudes in influencing views on January 6. We asked the following questions:
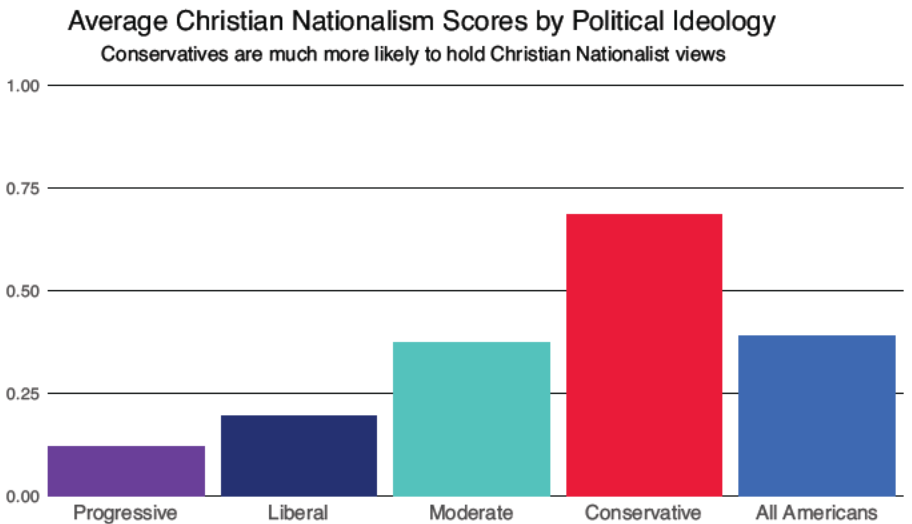
- In your opinion, how important do you think being born in America is to being truly American?
-
- In your opinion, how important do you think being able to speak English is to being truly American?
-
- In your opinion, how important do you think being of Western European descent is to being truly American?
-
- In your opinion, how important do you think accepting people of diverse racial and religious backgrounds is to being truly American?

Similar to our measures of Christian nationalist attitudes, views on each measure are highly correlated with self-professed political ideology. While most Americans, including conservatives, believe that having Western European origins is not important and that accepting diversity is important, those with diverging views were disproportionately likely to be conservative.

As for the importance of being born in America, few liberals or progressives found this important, while a third of moderates and most conservatives did. A majority of progressives and liberals did not think it was essential to be able to speak English to be truly American. However, a strong majority of both moderates and conservatives thought it was.

Because political ideology is already such a dividing line between those who want accountability for insurrectionists and those who do not and a dividing line for ethnonationalist attitudes, we focused our remaining analysis on conservatives.

"How important is the following to being an American?"

Have Western European origins

Progressives	1%
Liberals	3%
Moderates	7%
Conservatives	13%

Be born in America

Progressives	11%
Liberals	20%
Moderates	33%
Conservatives	57%

Can speak English

Progressives	27%
Liberals	38%
Moderates	68%
Conservatives	89%

Accept diversity

Progressives	2%
Liberals	2%
Moderates	4%
Conservatives	9%

Percent

Not Too/At All Important ■ Very/Somewhat Important ■

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Most ethnonationalist attitudes are weakly correlated with conservatives' views on January 6.

Below, we provide a visualization of the cross tabulations for holding ethnonationalist beliefs and views on accountability for U.S. conservatives.
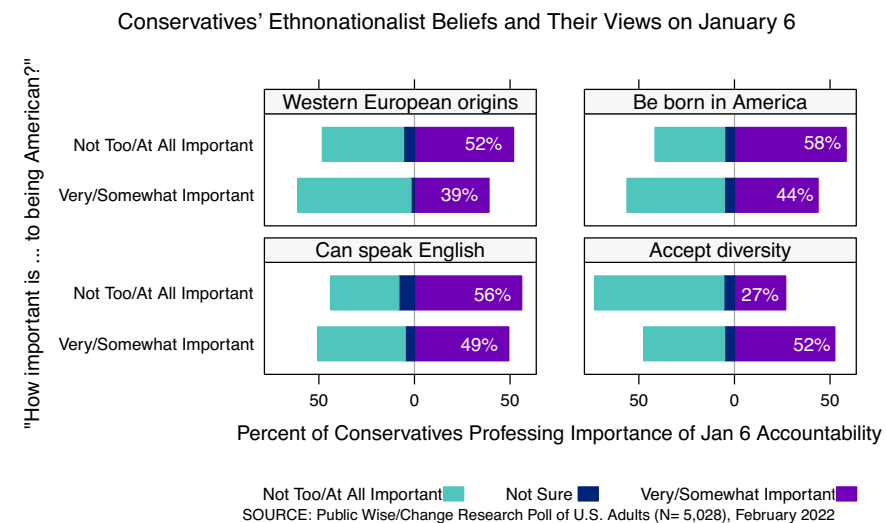
We can see a correlation with views on accountability for our Christian nationalist measure that most explicitly focuses on a white-supremacist facet of ethnonationalism.

This measure asked about the importance of having Western European origins to being truly an American. A slight majority of conservatives who thought this was mostly unimportant also wanted accountability for those who attacked the Capitol. Only 39% of conservatives who believed this was important wanted accountability.

Conservatives' views on the importance of being born in America was less strongly correlated with their attitudes towards January 6. Of those who thought this measure was mostly unimportant, 58% wanted accountability, whereas only 44% of conservatives who thought being born in America was

important wanted accountability. The weakest correlation was the importance of being able to speak English to being an American. Of those who thought this measure was mostly unimportant, 58% wanted accountability compared to 49% of conservatives who thought it was important, the same as the average for conservatives in general.

One question stood out as having a more dramatic impact on support for accountability. We asked: "In your opinion, how important do you think accepting people of diverse racial and religious backgrounds is to being truly American?"

Conservatives' Ethnonationalist Beliefs and Their Views on January 6

Western European origins

Not Too/At All Important	52%
Very/Somewhat Important	39%

Be born in America

Not Too/At All Important	58%
Very/Somewhat Important	44%

Can speak English

Not Too/At All Important	56%
Very/Somewhat Important	49%

Accept diversity

Not Too/At All Important	27%
Very/Somewhat Important	52%

Percent of Conservatives Professing Importance of Jan 6 Accountability

"How important is … to being American?"

Not Too/At All Important ■ Not Sure ■ Very/Somewhat Important ■

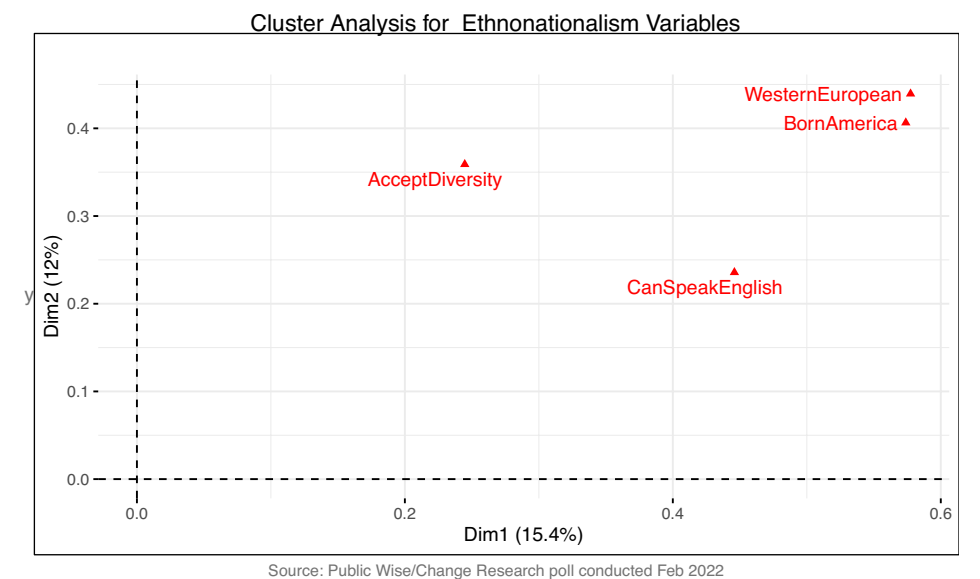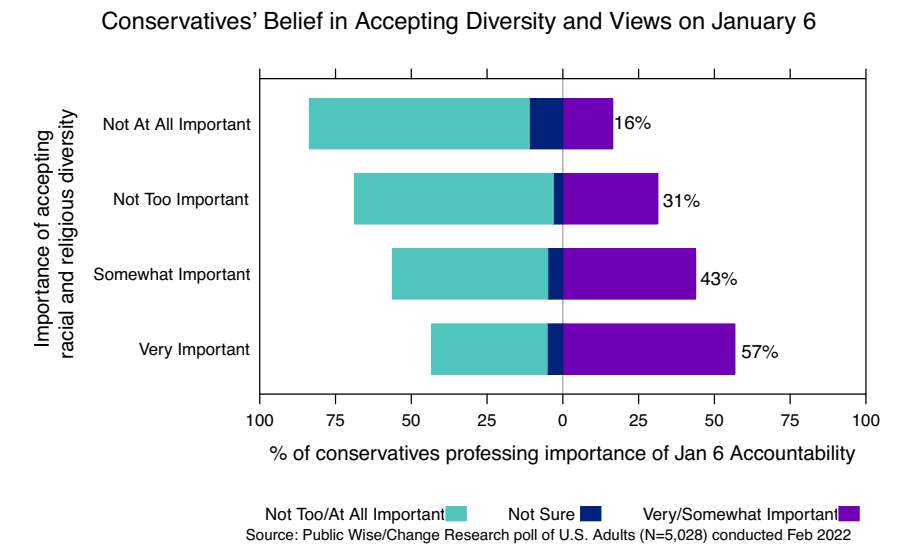SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N = 5,028), February 2022

Of those who thought this was very important (in line with most Americans), 57% wanted accountability for insurrectionists. But for those who thought this was not important at all, just 16% wanted accountability.

Our CART model, which allowed us to account for interactions between all the ideological measures in our dataset, only identified one of the ethnonationalist measures as especially important for predicting conservatives views on accountability: the importance of accepting diversity.

In fact, our model showed that those conservatives who agreed or strongly agreed that the voting machines were corrupted and also answered that accepting diversity was "not at all important" almost uniformly believed that accountability for January 6 participants was not at all important.

Why different ethnonationalist measures have different effects

Our different ethnonationalist measures were not strongly correlated with each other the way our Christian nationalist measures were, which we combined into a multiple-item scale. The Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of internal reliability, between these 4 measures is only 0.69. Additionally, Multiple Cluster Analysis, which describes how similar certain variables are to one another, shows that the "accept diversity" question stands apart from the other ethnonationalism questions.

Conservatives' Belief in Accepting Diversity and Views on January 6

Importance of accepting racial and religious diversity	
Not At All Important	16%
Not Too Important	31%
Somewhat Important	43%
Very Important	57%

% of conservatives professing importance of Jan 6 Accountability

Not Too/At All Important ■ Not Sure ■ Very/Somewhat Important ■

Source: Public Wise/Change Research poll of U.S. Adults (N=5,028) conducted Feb 2022

Cluster Analysis for Ethnonationalism Variables

Source: Public Wise/Change Research poll conducted Feb 2022

Why was "accepting diversity" such a distinctively important variable? One possible explanation is that the moral bar for the "accepting diversity" question is higher than for the other three questions. Accepting diversity implies changing one's own attitudes and behavior towards others, while the former three questions involve an assessment of other people.

Alternatively, perhaps the question's invocation of both "religious" and "racial" diversity results in a stronger effect than when looking at just ethnonationalist and Christian nationalist ideologies separately. Interestingly, in his study of the January 6 insurrectionists, political scientist Robert Pape found that believing in the Great Replacement Theory was among the strongest predictors of sentiments related to January 6.

Great Replacement Theory is the rightwing conspiracy theory that says Democrats attempt to gain power by replacing the electorate with "more obedient voters from the Third World."*

Pape's finding could result from asking about ethnonationalist attitudes in a distinct way which captures different facets of nuance around these attitudes. Different ways of asking about ethnonationalist attitudes may be subject to different degrees of social desirability bias.
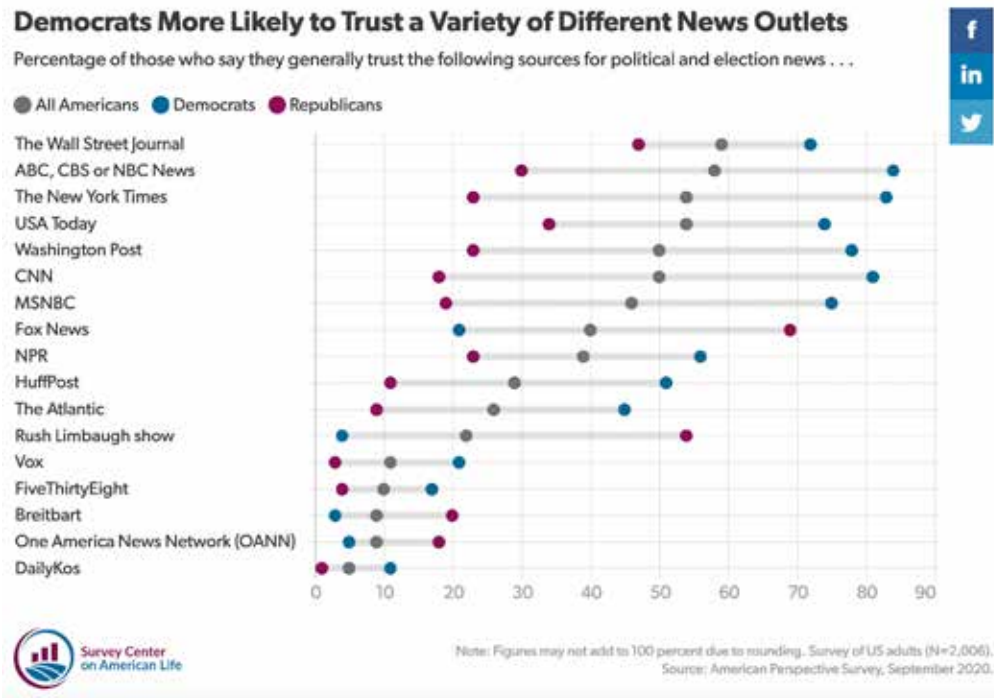
Belief in Conspiracy Theories

Many at the Capitol were motivated by a belief that nefarious forces inside the government had conspired to steal the election which was rightfully won by Donald Trump.

This belief was encouraged in no small part by the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories in the conservative movement in the years leading up to the election. How do conspiracy theories influence public opinion on accountability for the January 6 insurrection?

First, it is crucial to note that belief in conspiracy theories is not a phenomenon isolated to the right wing of the American political spectrum. An October 2020 study by the Survey Center on American Life and the Center for American Progress found that Democrats and Republicans both believe in conspiracy theories, but they believe in different ones (Cox & Halpin, 2020). Even mistrust around the legitimacy of an election outcome is not the unique purview of one party. In the 2020 survey, more Democrats than Republicans voiced mistrust in the 2016 presidential election, with over a third of Democrats believing that widespread voter fraud had occurred.

Democrats More Likely to Trust a Variety of Different News Outlets

Percentage of those who say they generally trust the following sources for political and election news . . .

● All Americans ● Democrats ● Republicans

The Wall Street Journal
ABC, CBS or NBC News
The New York Times
USA Today
Washington Post
CNN
MSNBC
Fox News
NPR
HuffPost
The Atlantic
Rush Limbaugh show
Vox
FiveThirtyEight
Breitbart
One America News Network (OANN)
DailyKos

Note: Figures may not add to 100 percent due to rounding. Survey of US adults (N=2,006).
Source: American Perspective Survey, September 2020.

Survey Center on American Life

However, a readiness to believe conspiracy theories more broadly may be dampened among progressives and liberals, who tend to be more educated, a trait associated with a lower likelihood of belief in conspiracy theories (Cox, 2021). Enders et al. (2020) suggest that we should expect to see belief in all sorts of conspiracy theories to be correlated. According to their research, belief in a range of conspiracy theories are driven by a shared type of conspiracy thinking, low science literacy, and lack of trust in scientists. Conservatives of different stripes have professed declining trust in science over time (Kozlowski, 2022).

New conspiracy theories were especially ascendant among conservatives in the period of Trump's presidency. Research has shown that Trump supporters in particular, more so than Republicans in general, are inclined to be misinformed and believe conspiracy theories. Li and Wagner (2020) distinguish between "uninformed" and "misinformed" citizens. The former are those who simply admit to not knowing a particular fact, and the latter are those who assert wrong information. They found that for Trump voters in particular, being told Trump made a statement was strongly associated with citizens being misinformed, as they were more likely to rate statements made by Trump as accurate.

Most notably, the last few years have witnessed the rise of the conspiracy theory known as QAnon. The QAnon conspiracy theory alleges that the world, particularly the U.S. government, is led by a circle of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who engage in child sex trafficking.

QAnon's narratives continually evolve through cryptic posts on online message boards by a pseudonymous figure named Q, who plays the role of a sort of leaker and oracle. Donald Trump plays a central role in Q's posts.

In the QAnon narrative, Trump is the wily underdog patriot selected to expose and root out this alleged global cabal of pedophiles.

In the months leading up to the election, Q foretold that Trump would spend his second term in office completing the mission of vanquishing these foes after handily winning re-election. QAnon has also grown to incorporate other conspiracy theories, like the September 11 truther conspiracy. The QAnon conspiracy theory gained popularity during the Trump years, according to scholars who have been tracking public support of the movement for years (Tollefson, 2021).

A pre-election survey found that just 4 percent of Democrats believed the information QAnon promotes is reliable or accurate. In contrast, 1 in 10 Republicans believed it to be an accurate source of information. However, much of this was due to a lack of exposure among the general population. The partisan gap was larger the more exposure one received: among those who reported being at least slightly familiar with QAnon, more than one-third (35 percent) of Republicans said the claims made by the group are accurate, while only 8 percent of Democrats who had heard about QAnon said the same (Cox & Halpin, 2020).

When Q's forecast did not match the election results, many QAnon supporters claimed the election had been rigged, echoing and encouraging Trump's claims of rigged electronic voting machines and unchecked fraudulent voting.

There is good precedent to the suspicion that conspiratorial beliefs helped motivate the January 6 attack on the Capitol. Conspiratorial thinking has been linked to abstract support for violence (Uscinski and Parent 2014), and is correlated with a lower likelihood to participate in mainstream democratic processes like voting and a higher likelihood of non-mainstream activities like committing an act of violence against an elected official (Imhoff et al, 2021).

Conspiracy theories clearly had a role to play in the events of January 6. But how are they related to views on January 6 accountability in the general public?
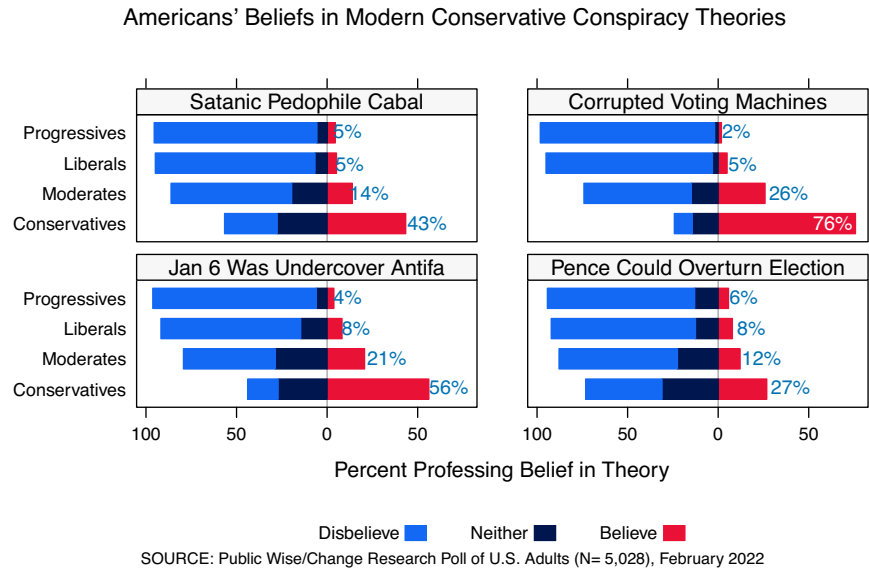
Conservatives' belief in conspiracy theories

How is belief in conspiracy theories related to belief in the importance of accountability for Jan 6 insurrectionists?

To understand the association between different types of conspiracy theories and attitudes towards the Jan 6 insurrection, we asked a series of questions about conspiracy theories, including those promoted by QAnon and people on the right as well as long-standing conspiracy theories about different events in history.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?:

• The government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation.

• Vice President Pence did not have the constitutional power to overrule the Senate and change the presidential election results (reverse coded)

• The people who broke into the U.S. Capitol were actually undercover members of Antifa

• Electronic voting machines changed votes for Trump into votes for Biden in the November election

• Vaccines cause autism.

• The COVID 19 vaccines are dangerous because they alter your DNA

• The COVID 19 vaccines are a plot to implant microchips into people

• The moon landing was faked

• I don't believe the official story of the assassination of John Kennedy in 1963

• 9/11 was an inside job

Modern Conservative Conspiracy Theories

Americans' Beliefs in Modern Conservative Conspiracy Theories

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Belief in conspiracy theories around the election, the January 6 events, and the core QAnon theory skew conservative. Because much of the population has been exposed to the QAnon theories without necessarily knowing about QAnon itself, and also because admitting to trusting QAnon may be subject to social desirability bias, we asked about belief in the core QAnon theory regarding a cabal of Satan-worshiping pedophiles.

Forty-three percent of conservatives ascribe to the core QAnon conspiracy theory that "the government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation."

Conservative news outlets like One America News Network as well as high-level Trump supporters pushed claims that Dominion Voting System's voting machines were rigged in order to change votes for Trump to votes for Biden, a view promoted heavily by Donald Trump and Rudy Giuliani in the lead up to the attack on the Capitol.

Previous research by Public Wise found that while nonvoters of all stripes had mistrust in election processes in the US, white Republican nonvoters were much more likely to insist that outright fraud or deception had occurred. Here, we identify that a large majority of conservatives believe electronic voting machines were rigged.

Many social media users asserted that the rioters at the Capitol were in fact undercover members of the left-wing antifa movement attempting a sort of false-flag attack. This belief has persisted despite the lack of any evidence emerging from the extensive investigation into the January 6 events. We found that a majority of conservatives and a fifth of moderates agreed that the insurrectionists at the Capitol were undercover Antifa.

Despite Trump's assertions, a majority of conservatives did not agree that former Vice President Pence was allowed to change the election results underconstitutional law.

Vaccine Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories around vaccines have become more widespread during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in conservative circles. One conspiracy theory asserts that the Covid-19 MRNA vaccines work by permanently altering DNA. Another conspiracy theory contends that the vaccines are a plot to inject people with microchips that can be used as tracking devices. Even before the pandemic, a widespread conspiracy theory linked vaccines in general to autism.

These beliefs tend to skew conservative, with a fifth of conservatives believing that the Covid 19 vaccines are part of a microchipping plot; 35% believing that the Covid 19 vaccines alter DNA; and just under a fourth believing that vaccines cause autism. 2% or less of progressives or liberals hold any of these views on vaccines.

Because these variables were closely conceptually related, with a relatively high internal consistency (Cronach's alpha = 0.89), we combined these three measures into a scale variable for use in the main analysis, where 1 represents the highest possible belief in vaccine conspiracy theories, and 0 represents total disagreement to all vaccine conspiracy theories.

Americans' Beliefs in Vaccine Conspiracy Theories

Source: Public Wise/Change Research poll of U.S. Adults (N = 5,028), February 2022.
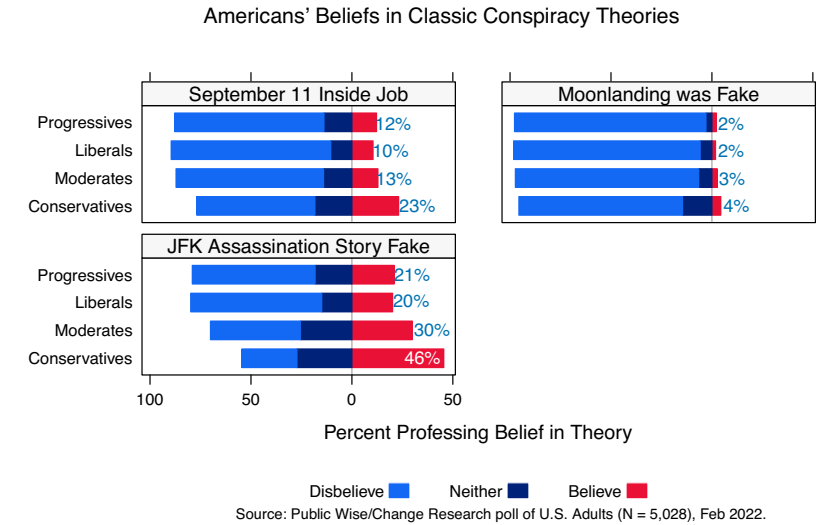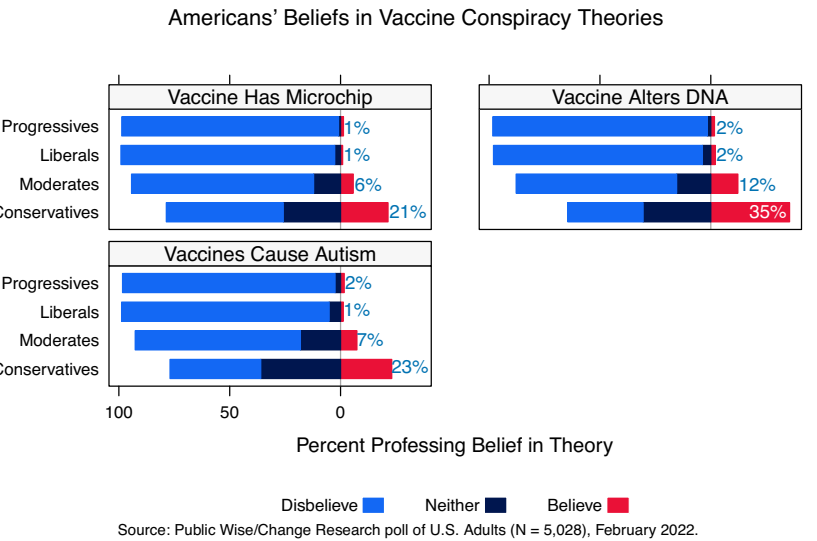
Classic Conspiracy Theories

The effect of believing in conspiracy theories relevant to elections or vaccines has a direct connection to the attack on the Capitol. But what about other conspiracy theories with no apparent connection to attitudes about the insurrection? We also wanted to examine whether believing in seemingly unassociated conspiracy theories was associated with attitudes and beliefs about Jan. 6th.

We included three such theories. First, the conspiracy theory that September 11 was an inside job now has an over two-decade history in American politics. This theory contends that insider elites in the Bush administration either conducted a false flag operation or knew about the attacks and did not take action to stop them in order to justify an invasion of Iraq. Historically, liberals and progressives have been much more inclined to believe this view than conservatives.

Similarly, the belief that the moon landing was faked has not been ascribed to any particular political or ideological group, but has historically been believed slightly more by those who lean left.

Lastly, the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy has spanned a number of conspiracy theories. In 1964, the Warren Commission concluded that Oswald acted alone in assassinating Kennedy. However, many polls,

Americans' Beliefs in Classic Conspiracy Theories

Source: Public Wise/Change Research poll of U.S. Adults (N = 5,028), Feb 2022.

depending on wording, find that a large percentage of Americans have doubts about the lone gunman theory, and Republicans were more likely to believe the theory than Democrats.

Although findings may differ due to a variety of factors like specific wording, our survey found that partisan leanings on these conspiracy theories, compared to historical trends, had flipped. The beliefs that the September 11th attack was an inside job, the moon landing was faked, and the official John F. Kennedy assassination narrative is fake all tend to skew somewhat conservative.

Few Americans believe the moon landing was faked, regardless of ideology, but twice as many conservatives believe it than liberals and progressives. Between 10% and 23% of Americans believe that September 11th was an inside job, but this view is much more likely to be held by conservatives. And while 21% of progressives do not believe the official story of the JFK assassination, the percentage of conservatives who disbelieve the official story is almost half.

Modern Conservative Conspiracy Theories

Belief in the QAnon core theory was correlated with views on accountability. Two-thirds of conservatives who do not believe the core QAnon theory think accountability is important.

Those who claimed they 'neither believe nor disbelieve" wanted accountability at about the rate of the median conservative. For those who believe the conspiracy theory, just 40% want accountability for insurrectionists.
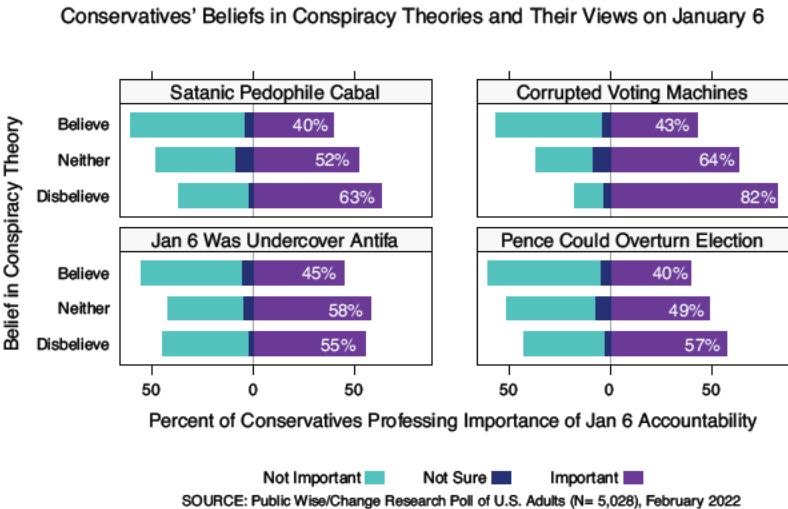
Belief in the rigged voting machine conspiracy theory was a very strong divider of conservative viewpoints on accountability for insurrectionists. 82% of conservatives who did not believe this conspiracy theory said they wanted accountability, a rate slightly higher than moderates.

Just 43% of conservatives who believed that the voting machines were rigged for Biden wanted accountability.

We might expect that the undercover Antifa conspiracy belief –if held by conservatives who presumably oppose Antifa –would result in wanting more accountability for insurrectionists among conservatives. But curiously, those who professed to believe this were less likely than the average conservative to want accountability.

Desire for Accountability Among Conservatives Is Strongly Correlated with Belief in Certain Conspiracy Theories

We again focused our analysis on conservatives, who are divided roughly in half on views on accountability. We found that overall, conservatives who believe in conspiracy theories are less likely to want accountability for insurrectionists, but certain types of conspiracy theories were more strongly correlated with views on accountability.

Conservatives' Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories and Their Views on January 6

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Additional insight into this finding is difficult to glean from available data. One explanation could be that those who believe this theory are the most conspiracy theory-minded in general, correlated with other beliefs that lead to decreased desire for accountability. Alternatively, professed belief in this theory could be disingenuous.

Lastly, 40% of those who believed that Pence had the right to overturn the election wanted accountability, whereas 57% of those who disagreed thought accountability was important.

Vaccine Conspiracy Theories

We find that belief in the vaccine microchipping conspiracy theory is correlated with views on accountability, but not strongly.Among conservatives who strongly disagree with all vaccine conspiracy theory views (scoring 0), more than half think accountability is important, and among those who strongly agree with all vaccine conspiracy theories, less than half want accountability.

Vaccine conspiracy theory beliefs are more strongly correlated with views on accountability than other factors like Christian nationalism, but less than other more directly-related conspiracy theories.
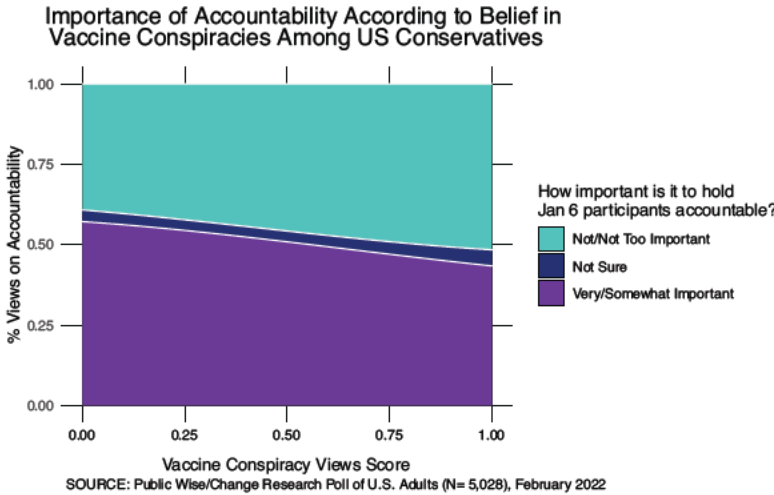
Classic Conspiracy Theories

All the previous conspiracy theories can be connected in some direct way to the 2020 election, but what about conspiracy theories that are unrelated? We found that even conspiracy theories with no clear connection to the election were correlated with views on accountability.

Belief in traditional conspiracy theories totally unrelated to the Trump presidency and current day politics were still correlated with views on accountability. Just 39% of conservatives who think September 11 was an inside job want accountability for insurrectionists versus 58% who do not believe this theory.

The theory that the moon landing was faked is also correlated with views on accountability. However, a very small number of Americans held this belief, especially among progressives and liberals, so we are hesitant to declare this finding conclusive.

Importance of Accountability According to Belief in Vaccine Conspiracies Among US Conservatives

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Conservatives' Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories and Their Views on January 6

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022
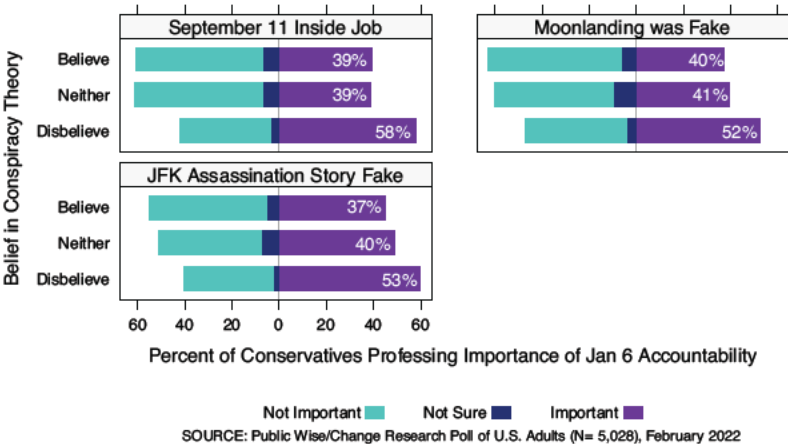
JFK assassination conspiracy theories precede the 2020 election and January 6 attack on the Capitol by over a half century, so we might assume they have a weak connection to belief in the importance of accountability.

However, we find that conservatives who disbelieve the official story of Kennedy assassination are also much less likely to want accountability.

Which Theories Really Matter?

While all the conspiracy theories we investigated were correlated with views on accountability, a problem for understanding the true relationship is that belief in all of these conspiracy theories tends to be intercorrelated, as we demonstrated earlier.

The CART model reveals the relationship between belief in conspiracy theories and our other variables while accounting for potential interactions between them.

We found that belief in two particular conspiracy theories were important for predicting views on January 6 accountability:

1. belief in rigged voting machines that gave votes to Biden; and
2. Belief in the core QAnon conspiracy theory about a cabal of Satan pedophile elites.

Anti-Establisment Views

A lack of faith in institutions – and in democracy itself – may be the most salient factor helping to explain why some conservatives are willing to pardon the insurrectionists of January 6. While there has been a slow decline in trust over the past several decades, this decline was accelerated during the Trump presidency.

In particular, the question of trust in authorities became especially heated with the Covid pandemic, where professed "belief in science" became adopted as a political moniker.

Now, over three-fourths of conservatives believe that the voting machines were rigged against their candidate and the two sides of the political spectrum do not even agree on the simple point of who won the election.

In a context of such low trust in our public institutions, an attack on the physical symbol of our democracy is seen in a forgiving – or at least sympathetic – light

by a surprisingly large (but still minority) segment of the population.

In recent years, Republicans have become more likely to have negative views on the social influence of a number of major institutions, like K-12 schools, large corporations, labor unions, and tech companies. Conservatives of different stripes have professed declining trust in science over time (Kozlowski, 2022).

Sympathy towards the use of political violence has not been found to have a particular partisan bent; rather, strong partisans are more likely to encounter violent political rhetoric (Miller and Conover 2015).
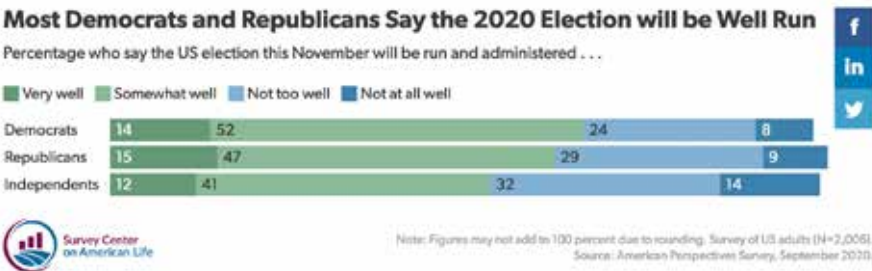
Certain political orientations, in particular towards authoritarianism (Faragó, Kende, and Krekó 2019) and populism (Berlet 1995) have been connected to political violence.

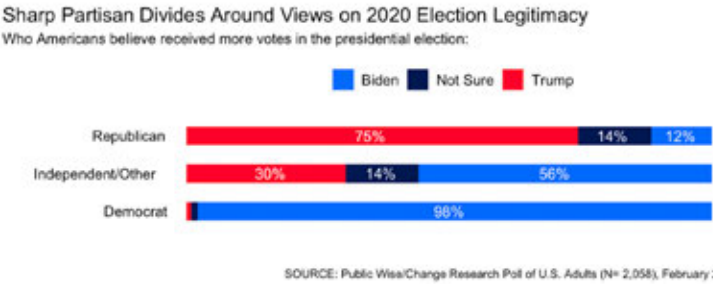Higher levels of anger about politics is linked to a weakened commitment to democratic

norms and values and trust in the national government (Webster 2020). This may result in a higher willingness to break the law in order to achieve political aims. In particular, supporters of Trump's "America first" brand of populism are more likely to have been arrested at some point in the past (Levi, Sendroiu, and Hagan, 2020).

Lack of trust in national institutions is not historically the purview of the left or the right in the United States. Recently, Republicans and Democrats have essentially reversed previous positions in confidence in elections – Democrats used to be more skeptical of elections, but now 69% of Democrats say they believe the coming 2022 election will be open and fair compared to just 37% of Republicans.

Interestingly, before the 2020 election, Republicans and Democrats were both about equally trusting of the upcoming elections, with a majority of both saying they believed the election would be well run (Cox and Halpin, 2020).

Most Democrats and Republicans Say the 2020 Election will be Well Run

Percentage who say the US election this November will be run and administered . . .

Very well | Somewhat well | Not too well | Not at all well

	Very well	Somewhat well	Not too well	Not at all well
Democrats	14	52	24	8
Republicans	15	47	29	9
Independents	12	41	32	14

Note: Figures may not add to 100 percent due to rounding. Survey of US adults (N=2,008). Source: American Perspectives Survey, September 2020.

But this majority trust in the elections among Republicans changed when Trump lost the election. Three-fourths of Republicans say they believe that Trump actually received more votes in 2020, with just 12% asserting that Biden won more votes.

Sharp Partisan Divides Around Views on 2020 Election Legitimacy

Who Americans believe received more votes in the presidential election:

Biden | Not Sure | Trump

	Trump	Not Sure	Biden
Republican	75%	14%	12%
Independent/Other	30%	14%	56%
Democrat			98%

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 2,058), February 2022

This belief appears to be genuine, not just facetious. In a 2020 study, Peterson and Iyengar undertook a list experiment, which is a method to help uncover respondents' true beliefs that they may feel they have a reason to lie about when asked directly.

They found that just 28% of Republicans genuinely believed that Biden won the election. This belief was heavily encouraged by Trump himself, who insisted on promoting a variety of false claims about the election, which he alleged on Fox News was "the greatest fraud in history." Clayton et al. (2021) found that exposure to Trump tweets questioning the integrity of US elections reduces trust and confidence in elections and increases beliefs that elections are rigged, although only among his supporters.

Efforts to "fact check" Trump's statements were largely unsuccessful in reaching or

swaying his core base of supporters (Guess, Neihan and Reifler, 2018), in part due to an alarmingly low level of trust in the media, especially among strong conservatives. Low trust in media has been linked to lack of faith in government institutions (Jones 2004). Some scholars have argued that historically high levels of competition in the media in the United States have given rise to information confusion and eventually, distrust in the media in general, with grave consequences for our political system as a whole (Ladd 2012).

To understand the association between different types of anti-establishment beliefs and attitudes on January 6 accountability, we asked a series of questions capturing different kinds of anti-establishment attitudes.

• How much do you trust the news media in general?

• In your opinion, how important do

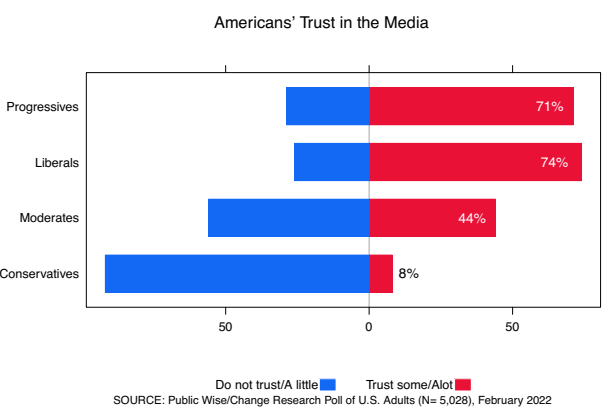you think respecting institutions and laws is to being truly American?

• In your opinion, how important do you think believing that every citizen should be able to vote in elections is to being truly American?

• How much do you agree or disagree: If elected leaders won't protect America, the people would be justified in resorting to violent action to do it themselves, even if people could get hurt in the process?[*]
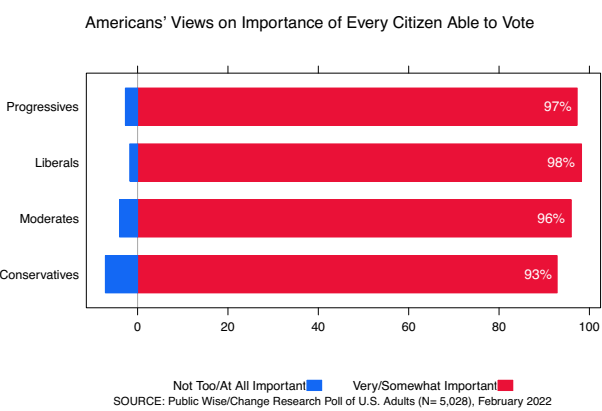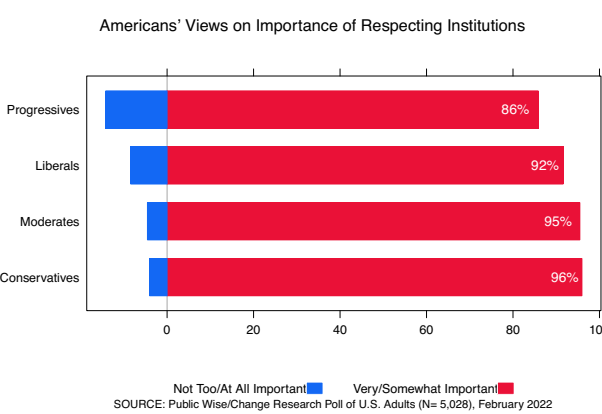
Anti-Establishment Beliefs by Ideology

Trust in the media is highly politically polarized. While over two-thirds of progressives and liberals say they trust media some or a lot, just 8% of conservatives do.

Americans' Trust in the Media

Progressives	71%
Liberals	74%
Moderates	44%
Conservatives	8%

Do not trust/A little ■   Trust some/Alot ■
SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

The vast majority of Americans think that it is important to believe that all citizens should be able to vote, although conservatives were slightly less likely to think so.

Americans' Views on Importance of Every Citizen Able to Vote

Progressives	97%
Liberals	98%
Moderates	96%
Conservatives	93%

Not Too/At All Important ■   Very/Somewhat Important ■
SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

The vast majority of Americans think that respecting institutions and laws is important, but conservatives were more likely to think so.

Americans' Views on Importance of Respecting Institutions

Progressives	86%
Liberals	92%
Moderates	95%
Conservatives	96%

Not Too/At All Important ■   Very/Somewhat Important ■
SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Beliefs on the justifiability of violence were highly split along ideological lines, with a majority of progressives and liberals disagreeing strongly or somewhat that violence could be justified if elected officials will not protect America.

Americans' Views on Justifiability of Violence

Progressives	59%
Liberals	72%
Moderates	45%
Conservatives	17%

Strongly/Somewhat Agree ■   Neither Agree Nor Disagree ■   Strongly/Somewhat Disagree ■
SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022
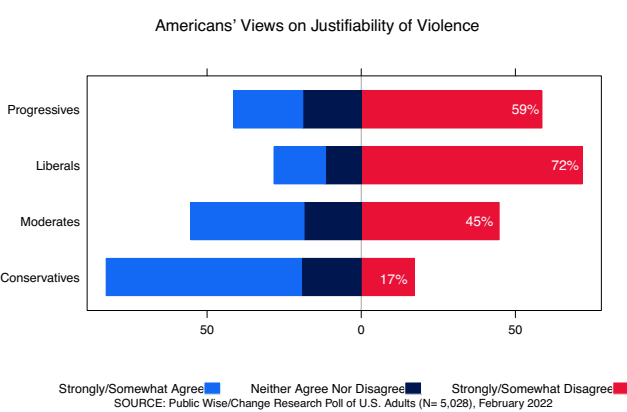
Desire for Accountability and Anti-Establishment Beliefs

Distrust in media was highly correlated with views on January 6th accountability among conservatives. Conservatives who trust the media were much more likely to want accountability.

Conservatives' Distrust of Media and Their Views on January 6

Trust some/Alot	71%
Do not trust/A little	48%

Percent of Conservatives Professing Importance of Jan 6 Accountability

Not Important ■   Not Sure ■   Important ■
SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022
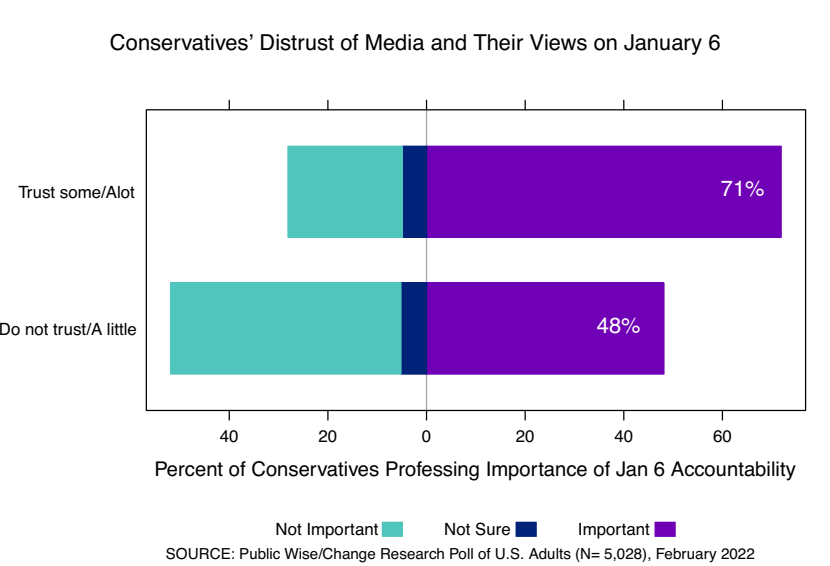
The 7% percent of conservatives who thought that it was not important to believe that every citizen should be able to vote had much less desire to see accountability for January 6 participants.

Conservatives' Responses to Every Citizen Can Vote Question and Views on January 6

Very/Somewhat Important	51%
Not Too/At All Important	33%

Percent of Conservatives Professing Importance of Jan 6 Accountability

Not Important ■   Not Sure ■   Important ■
SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022
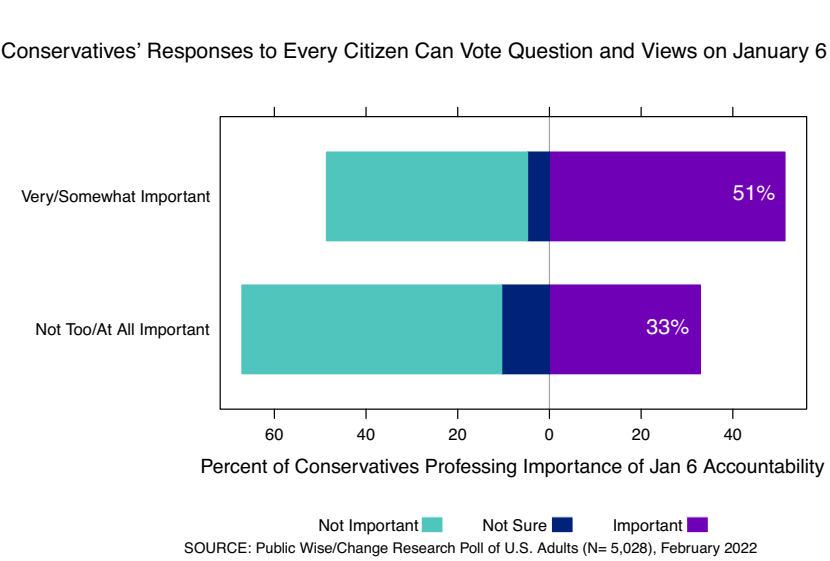
Views on respecting institutions and laws were strongly correlated with views on accountability for January 6. Only one-fourth of conservatives who did not think this is important wanted accountability.

As noted above, respect for the rule of law tends to be more important for conservatives than for other political ideologies.

Anti-accountability sentiments appear to be especially concentrated in the small minority of conservatives who do not place importance on institutions and laws, and our CART model confirms that this factor marks an important split in the conservative movement.

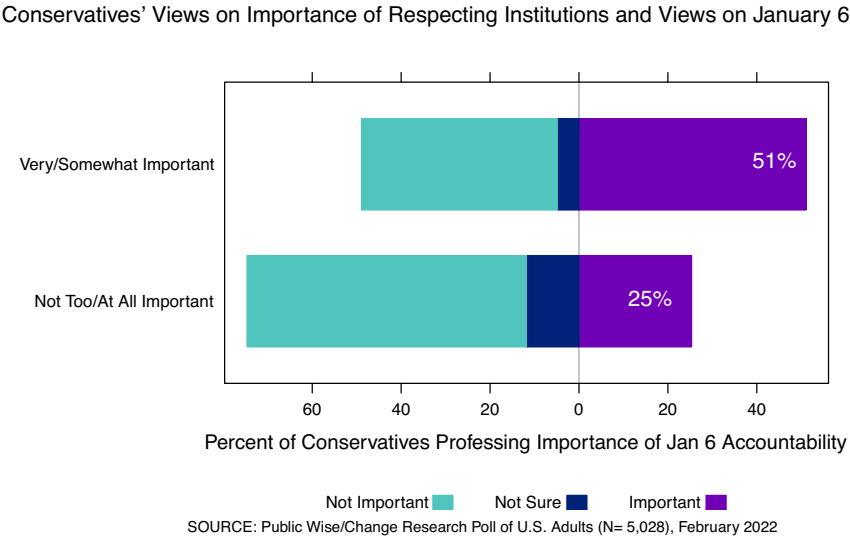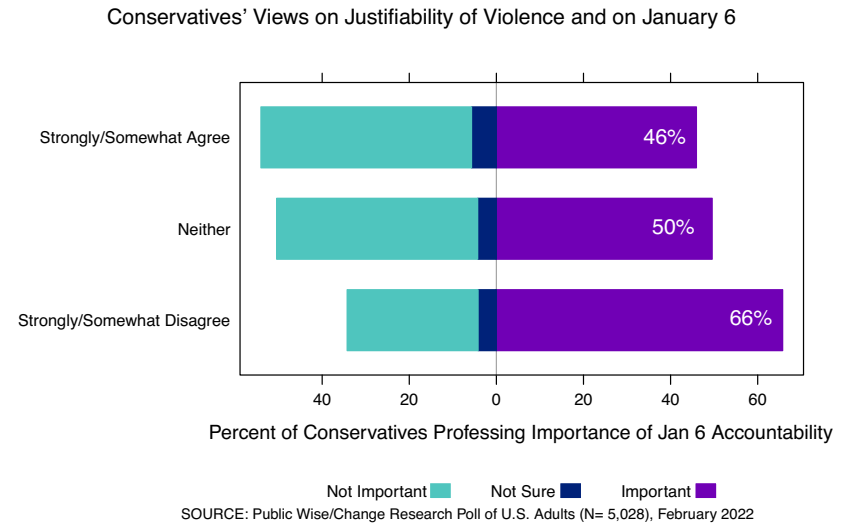Conservatives who disagreed that violence is justifiable were much more likely to want accountability for January 6 participants.

While all four variables pertaining to anti-establishment attitudes were correlated with views on January 6 accountability on their own, only three were identified as especially predictive of views on accountability in the CART model:
1) Distrust of the media;
2) Justifiability of violence; and
3) Respecting institutions and laws.

That three out of four of our anti-establishment items helped explain variance in conservatives' views on January 6 points to this being an especially important category of beliefs for understanding public opinion around the attack on the Capitol.

Conservatives' Views on Justifiability of Violence and on January 6

Percent of Conservatives Professing Importance of Jan 6 Accountability

Not Important ▢ Not Sure ▢ Important ▢
SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Conservatives' Views on Importance of Respecting Institutions and Views on January 6

Percent of Conservatives Professing Importance of Jan 6 Accountability

Not Important ▢ Not Sure ▢ Important ▢
SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Conclusion

Our research into public opinion on the January 6 insurrection explores what ideological factors help explain lack of support for accountability.

First, we found that views on the January 6 insurrection are highly politically polarized. Virtually all progressives and liberals, and the vast majority of moderates, say that if an insurrectionist is found to have committed a crime related to the attack on the Capitol, they should be held accountable. Americans who do not think accountability is important are almost all conservatives. However, even many conservatives profess the importance of accountability - views on January 6 among conservatives tend to be split roughly in half.

So what accounts for the half of conservatives who do not think accountability is important? Pundits and scholars have pointed to different strands of thought prominent within the broader conservative movement as being the base of January 6 apologism.

We investigated four distinct theories about what ideological factors are most strongly correlated with lack of interest in accountability for January 6 participants among America conservatives: 1) Christian nationalism; 2) Ethnonationalist attitudes; 3) Belief in conspiracy theories; and 4) Antiestablishment views.

We found that belief in two specific conspiracy theories – the belief that voting machines in the 2020 election were rigged to change votes from Trump to Biden, and belief in the core QAnon theory about a cabal of Satanic pedophile elites – was especially important for predicting conservatives' views on accountability.

Among the different measures of ethnonationalism we investigated, one particular measure stood out as explaining a great deal of the variance in conservatives' views on accountability: the importance of accepting racial and religious diversity to being an American. Lastly, we found that distrust in the media, views on the justifiability of citizen violence, and belief in the importance of respecting institutions and laws were all important predictors of conservative views on accountability.

Christian nationalism, though its symbolism was highly present throughout the attack on the Capitol, was not a strong predictor of conservatives' views on accountability.

Furthermore, while the January 6 attack was carried out at the behest of Donald Trump, whose political brand was built around a nativist and white-supremacist strain of conservatism, we found that other ethnonationalist views were not especially strong predictors for variation in views on accountability among conservatives.

However, the notion that accepting diversity is important to being an American was a strong predictor of conservative views on accountability. It is unclear what accounts for this difference. Perhaps accepting diversity is seen as a higher bar, as it imposes a behavioral standard upon the respondent, versus our other measures which relate to how other people should be. It is also hard to ignore the more subtle racial implications of some other predictive variables, like the conspiracy theory about rigged voting machines.

Belief in this theory, which emerged as an important predictor, had undeniable racial undertones, especially with its particular focus on counties with a large percentage of Black voters. Belief in the rigged voting machines in the election was positively correlated somewhat with ethnonationalist beliefs in our survey.

Indeed, the difficulty of carrying out a study that tries to determine which factors matter most is that these factors interrelate in complicated ways. For example, the popularity of QAnon among Christian nationalists has enabled the spread of anti-semitic conspiracy theories among the Right. Initial media coverage of the attacks on the Capitol tended to view it as a protest that got out of hand.

In subsequent months, and especially with the new information released as part of the January 6 committee hearings, we now know that the attacks were planned and strategically coordinated for weeks in advance between various right-wing groups and independent actors, all encouraged by Donald Trump.

The prosecution of individuals at the center of the largest criminal investigation in U.S. history has drawn polarized reactions from the U.S. public. While the vast majority of Americans support these efforts, our results help to clarify the ideological underpinnings of the minority that believe participants in the attack should not face consequences.

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Appendix

Toplines

All toplines here are weighted using the following weighting categories: race (White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, other); age; education (high school diploma, some college but no degree, associates degree, bachelor's degree, graduate degree); county density; census region; and 2020 vote.

In our reporting of the findings, percentage points are rounded off to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages in a given table column may total slightly higher or lower than 100%.

1. When considering politics and government, do you think of yourself as:

Progressive	23%
Liberal	17%
Moderate	28%
Conservative	31%

2. How important do you think it is that the people who participated in the events of January 6th be held accountable for their actions if a court determines they broke the law?

	Total	Conservatives
Very important	66%	28%
Somewhat important	12%	22%
Not sure	2%	5%
Not too important	8%	18%
Not important at all	12%	27%

Religion and Christian Nationalism Variables

3. Which of the following best matches your religious affiliation?

	Total	Conservatives
Agnostic	9%	2%
Atheist	9%	2%
Buddhist	1%	<1%
Catholic	15%	19%
Eastern Orthodox	<1%	<1%
Ev. Protestant	14%	30%
Hindu	<1%	<1%
Mormon	2%	3%
Muslim	<1%	<1%
N-Ev. Protestant	14%	13%
Nothing	18%	14%
Something else	15%	16%

4. In your opinion, how important do you think being a Christian is to being truly American?

	Total	Conservatives
Very important	13%	31%
Somewhat important	14%	27%
Not too important	15%	19%
Not at all important	58%	23%

5. In your opinion, how important do you think believing in God is to being truly American?

	Total	Conservatives
Very important	23%	48%
Somewhat important	15%	25%
Not too important	13%	13%
Not at all important	49%	15%

3. Which of the following best matches your religious affiliation?

	Total	Conservatives
Agnostic	9%	2%
Atheist	9%	2%
Buddhist	1%	<1%
Catholic	15%	19%
Eastern Orthodox	<1%	<1%
Ev. Protestant	14%	30%
Hindu	<1%	<1%
Mormon	2%	3%
Muslim	<1%	<1%
N-Ev. Protestant	14%	13%
Nothing	18%	14%
Something else	15%	16%

4. In your opinion, how important do you think being a Christian is to being truly American?

	Total	Conservatives
Very important	13%	31%
Somewhat important	14%	27%
Not too important	15%	19%
Not at all important	58%	23%

5. In your opinion, how important do you think believing in God is to being truly American?

	Total	Conservatives
Very important	23%	48%
Somewhat important	15%	25%
Not too important	13%	13%
Not at all important	49%	15%

6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation?

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	10%	27%
Somewhat agree	7%	15%
Neither agree nor disagree	16%	29%
Somewhat disagree	6%	10%
Strongly disagree	61%	20%

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the federal government should advocate Judeo-Christian values?

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	14%	36%
Somewhat agree	11%	21%
Neither agree nor disagree	22%	28%
Somewhat disagree	7%	6%
Strongly disagree	45%	10%

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces?

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	27%	57%
Somewhat agree	16%	23%
Neither agree nor disagree	21%	15%
Somewhat disagree	9%	2%
Strongly disagree	27%	3%

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the federal government should allow prayer in public schools?

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	29%	63%
Somewhat agree	15%	18%
Neither agree nor disagree	19%	13%
Somewhat disagree	8%	2%
Strongly disagree	29%	4%

Ethnonationalism Variables

10. In your opinion, how important do you think being born in America is to being truly American?

	Total	Conservatives
Very important	16%	32%
Somewhat important	17%	25%
Not too important	24%	23%
Not at all important	43%	19%

11. In your opinion, how important do you think being able to speak English is to being truly American?

	Total	Conservatives
Very important	30%	60%
Somewhat important	29%	30%
Not too important	17%	6%
Not at all important	23%	4%

12. In your opinion, how important do you think being of Western European descent is to being truly American?

	Total	Conservatives
Very important	2 %	60%
Somewhat important	5%	30%
Not too important	16%	6%
Not at all important	76%	4%

13. In your opinion, how important do you think accepting people of diverse racial and religious backgrounds is to being truly American?

	Total	Conservatives
Very important	80%	61%
Somewhat important	15%	30%
Not too important	3%	7%
Not at all important	1%	3%

Conspiracy Theory Beliefs

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?:

14. The government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshiping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation.

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	9%	20%
Somewhat agree	10%	10%
Neither agree nor disagree	17%	28%
Somewhat disagree	8%	22%
Strongly disagree	56%	21%

15. Vice President Pence did not have the constitutional power to overrule the Senate and change the presidential election results.

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	53%	26%
Somewhat agree	12%	16%
Neither agree nor disagree	21%	31%
Somewhat disagree	7%	13%
Strongly disagree	8%	13%

16. The people who broke into the U.S. Capitol were actually undercover members of Antifa.

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	10%	25%
Somewhat agree	15%	31%
Neither agree nor disagree	20%	27%
Somewhat disagree	6%	6%
Strongly disagree	49%	11%

17. Electronic voting machines changed votes for Trump into votes for Biden in the November election.

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	21%	54%
Somewhat agree	11%	22%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%	14%
Somewhat disagree	4%	3%
Strongly disagree	55%	7%

18. Vaccines cause autism.

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	4%	9%
Somewhat agree	6%	14%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%	37%
Somewhat disagree	7%	9%
Strongly disagree	66%	32%

19. The COVID 19 vaccines are dangerous because they alter your DNA.

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	8%	20%
Somewhat agree	7%	15%
Neither agree nor disagree	15%	31%
Somewhat disagree	6%	10%
Strongly disagree	64%	24%

20. The COVID-19 vaccines are a plot to implant microchips into people

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	4%	10%
Somewhat agree	5%	11%
Neither agree nor disagree	12%	26%
Somewhat disagree	7%	13%
Strongly disagree	72%	40%

21. The moon landing was faked.

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	1%	2%
Somewhat agree	2%	2%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%	15%
Somewhat disagree	7%	9%
Strongly disagree	82%	72%

22. I don't believe the official story of the assassination of John Kennedy in 1963.

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	12%	21%
Somewhat agree	18%	24%
Neither agree nor disagree	22%	27%
Somewhat disagree	14%	12%
Strongly disagree	32%	16%

23. 9/11 was an inside job.

	Total	Conservatives
Strongly agree	6%	9%
Somewhat agree	10%	14%
Neither agree nor disagree	15%	18%
Somewhat disagree	11%	11%
Strongly disagree	58%	48%

Demographic Questions

	Total	Conservatives
Mean Age	51	54
Female	55%	48%

Educational Attainment

	Total	Conservatives
High school diploma or less	22%	29%
Some college, but no degree	24%	25%
Associate's degree, or two-year college	12%	15%
Bachelor's degree, or four-year college degree	24%	20%
Graduate degree	17%	11%

Regression Table Results

| Variable	Pairwise Correlations with Controls
Christian Nationalism	-0.202*** (0.047)
Ethnonationalism	
Western European Origins	-0.183*** (0.040)
Born in America	-0.169*** (0.030)
Can Speak English	-0.144** (0.045)
Accept Diversity	-0.338*** (0.044)
Conspiracy Theories	
Corrupted Voting Machines	-0.414*** (0.037)
Core QAnon Theory	-0.239*** (0.032)
Pence Overturn Election	-0.187*** (0.453)
Undercover Antifa	-0.125*** (0.037)
Vaccine Conspiracies	-0.272*** (0.039)
JFK Assassination	-0.146*** (0.033)
Moonlanding Faked	-0.188*** (0.047)
9/11 Inside Job	-0.185*** (0.032)
Anti-Establishment	
Distrust in the Media	-0.161*** (0.047)
Every Citizen Able to Vote	-0.343*** (0.050)
Respecting Institutions	-0.276*** (0.056)
Justifiability of Violence	-0.279*** (0.034)

Robustness Check

We set no minimal terminal node size in our main model, but we might be concerned that having too small node sizes reduces our models generalizability.

For this reason, we provide the results of our CART model while setting the minimum terminal node size to 25. As can be seen, many of the results and indeed nodes are identical.

For example, the right side of the graph (respondents who believe the rigged voting machine theory) is the same.

The differences are that accepting diversity does not appear as an important factor among those who are neutral or disagree with the rigged conspiracy theory, and the importance of respecting institutions and laws is not found to be an important factor.
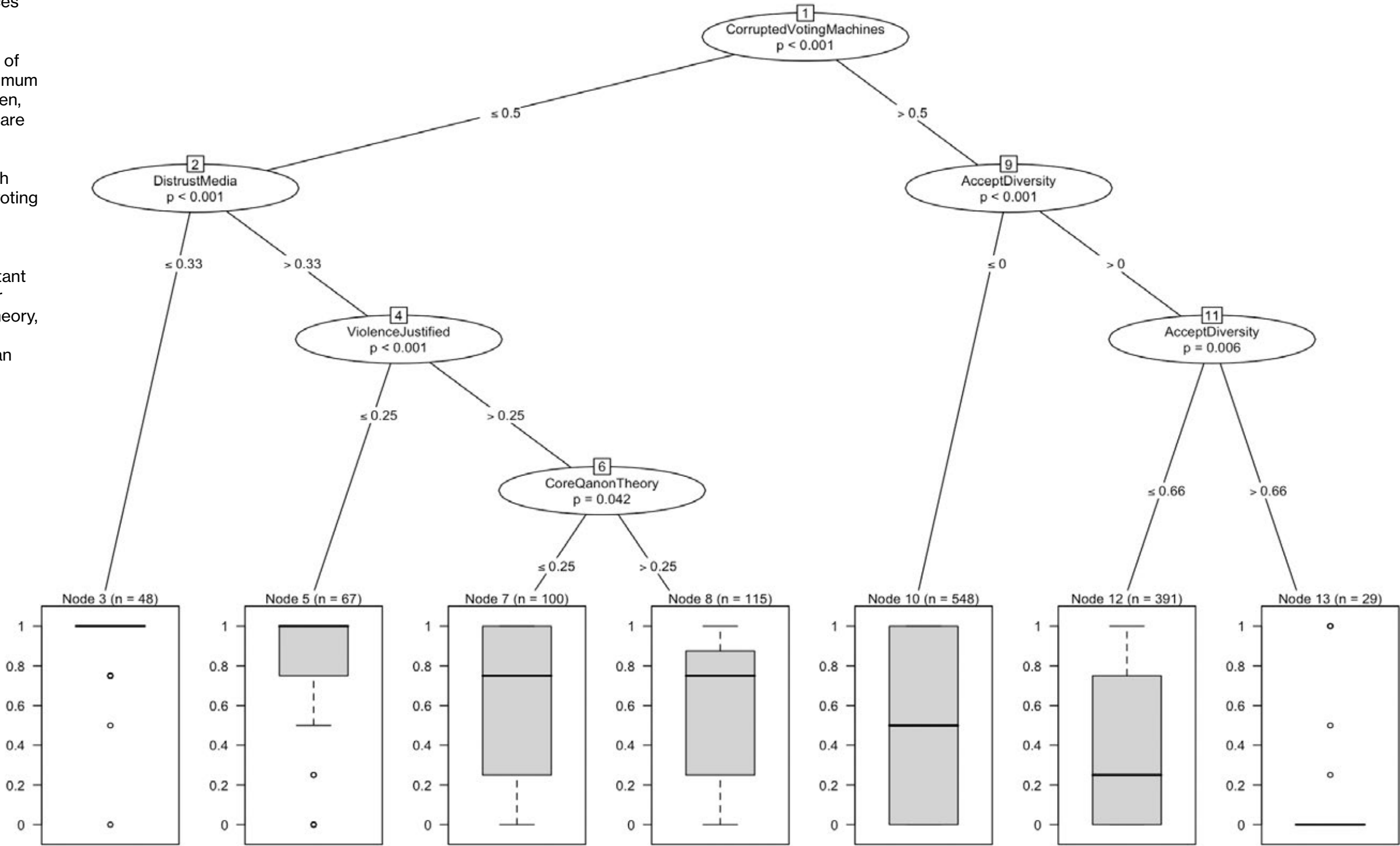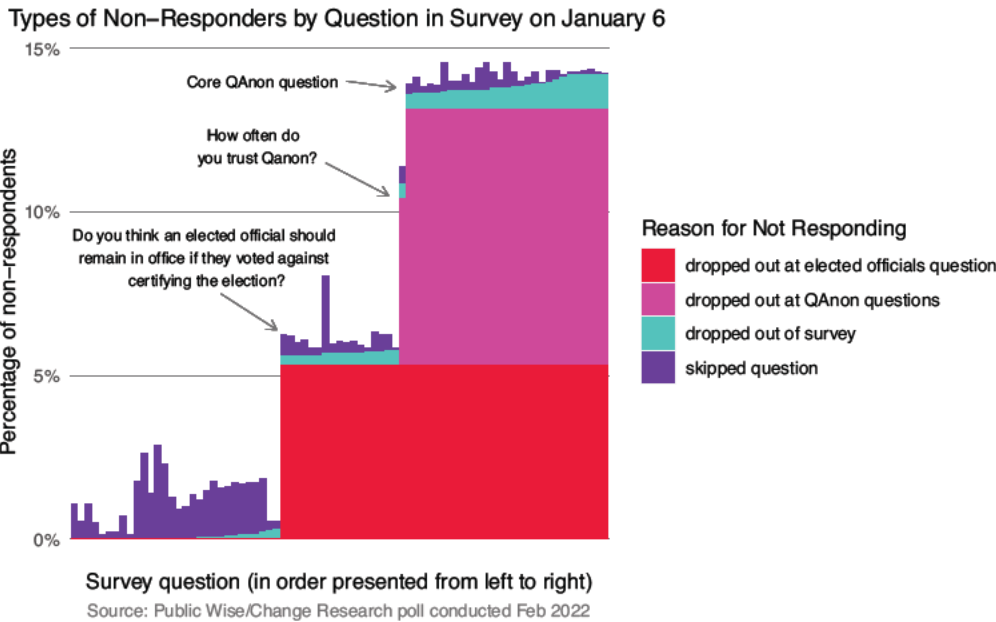
Notes on Missing Data

First, 5% of our total survey respondents stopped answering questions after reaching the question "Do you think an elected official should remain in office if they voted against certifying the election?"*

An additional 8% stopped answering questions after they reached either "How often do you trust Qanon" or the subsequent question, which asked for their agreement with the core QAnon theory: "How much do you agree or disagree: The government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation."
Around 1% of respondents dropped out of the survey at any other point in the survey.

This meant that we were missing more data for particular types of questions in the survey that came after these dropout points. The figure below illustrates what kinds of questions were more impacted by survey dropout.

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* Public Wise conducted a shorter version of this survey in October 2021 and found that a similar percentage of respondents dropped out at the elected officials question. We did not ask questions related to QAnon in that version of the survey.

Types of Non–Responders by Question in Survey on January 6

Core QAnon question

How often do you trust Qanon?

Do you think an elected official should remain in office if they voted against certifying the election?

Reason for Not Responding
- dropped out at elected officials question
- dropped out at QAnon questions
- dropped out of survey
- skipped question

Survey question (in order presented from left to right)
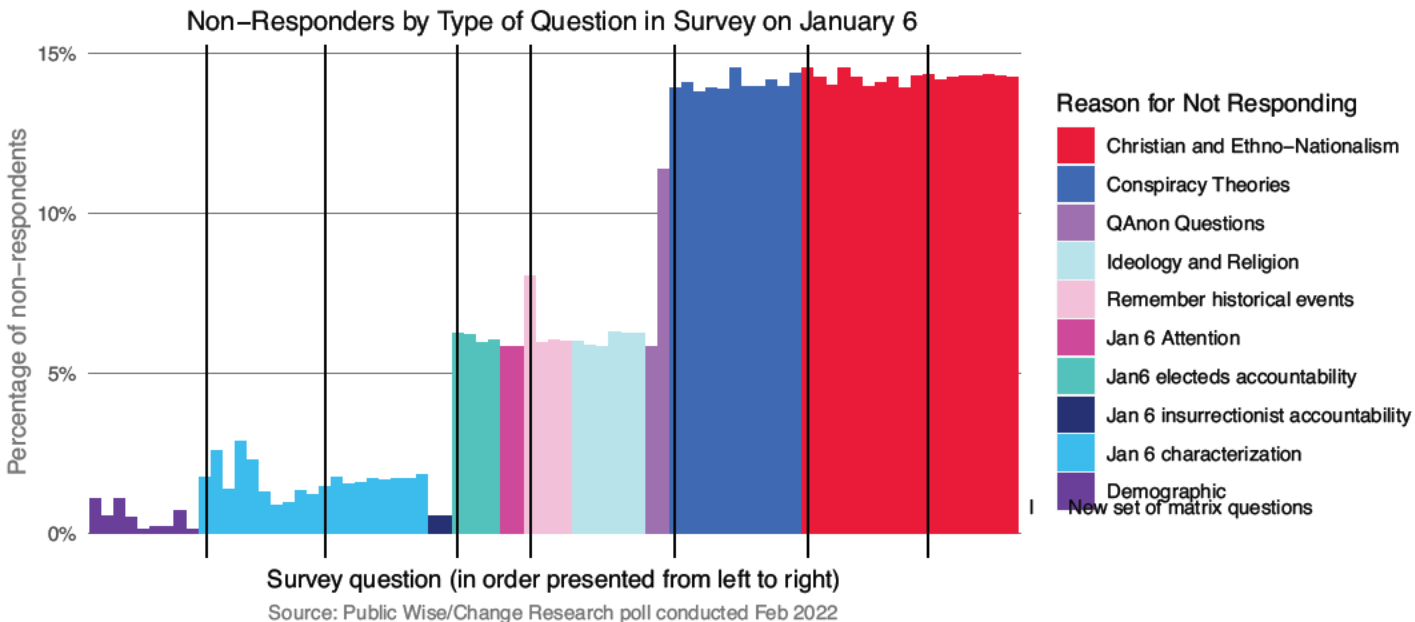Source: Public Wise/Change Research poll conducted Feb 2022

Questions on Christian nationalism, ethnonationalism, and conspiracy theories came at the end of the survey, and were thus the most impacted by survey dropouts. We had relatively complete data for the basic demographic questions, characterizations of January 6, and views on accountability for insurrectionists. There was relatively more missing data for the sections on ideology and religion, accountability for elected officials, and media attention on January 6.

We undertook an analysis of who dropped out of the survey and skipped questions. (See blog post here for figures). Women were slightly more likely to drop out at some point in the survey other than the Qanon questions or the elected officials questions.
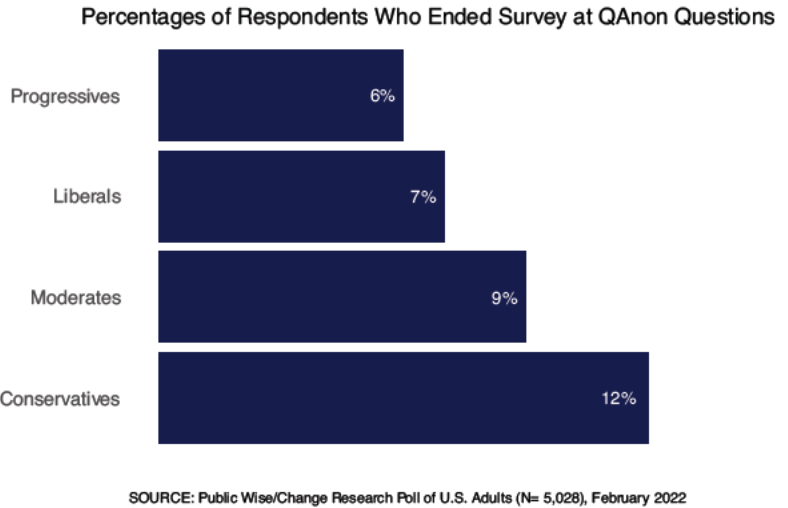
Compared to those who completed most of the survey, people who dropped out at the two key questions were much more likely to be under 30 years old, and those who dropped out at any of the other questions were much more likely to be over 70 years old. Compared to those who completed most of the survey, those who dropped out at the elected officials question or another question were more likely to have not attended college.

Conservatives were much more likely to drop out of the survey at the QAnon question, and progressives were much more likely to complete the whole survey. Similarly, strong Democrats were much better represented among those who completed most of the survey, whereas strong Republicans were much better represented among those who dropped out at the QAnon questions or earlier in the survey.

Non–Responders by Type of Question in Survey on January 6

Reason for Not Responding
- Christian and Ethno–Nationalism
- Conspiracy Theories
- QAnon Questions
- Ideology and Religion
- Remember historical events
- Jan 6 Attention
- Jan6 electeds accountability
- Jan 6 insurrectionist accountability
- Jan 6 characterization
- Demographic
- New set of matrix questions

Survey question (in order presented from left to right)
Source: Public Wise/Change Research poll conducted Feb 2022

While those who completed the survey were roughly equally likely to have voted for Trump versus Biden in the 2020 election, Trump voters were more represented among those who dropped out of the survey at any point. Those who dropped out at either of the key dropout questions tended to be slightly less motivated to vote.

Percentages of Respondents Who Ended Survey at QAnon Questions

Progressives	6%
Liberals	7%
Moderates	9%
Conservatives	12%

SOURCE: Public Wise/Change Research Poll of U.S. Adults (N= 5,028), February 2022

Because our analysis is especially concerned with views around January 6 among conservatives, we wanted to explore how our missing conservative respondents had answered on January 6 questions before dropping out.

Public Wise asked: "How important do you think it is that the people who participated in the events of January 6 be held accountable for their actions if a court determines they broke the law?"

We found that conservatives who dropped out of the survey at the QAnon question had approximately the same views on accountability as those who completed or almost completed the entire survey. While we are missing responses regarding views on Christian nationalism, ethnonationalism, belief in conspiracy theories, and antiestablishment views for those who dropped out at that part of the survey, we are able to still make use of the missing data to add to our understanding of the issues we are studying.

Conservatives: How important is accountability for Jan 6 participants?
(Responses Between QAnon Dropouts and Non-Dropouts)

Not Important ▮ Not Sure ▮ Important ▮
Source: Public Wise/Change Research poll conducted Feb 2022