



The New Tribalism: Clashing Views on Who Is a Real American

Discord on Race, Immigration, and the News Media

Washington, DC, October 11, 2017 — A new series of Ipsos surveys shows that Democrats and Republicans are widely divided on issues relating to national identity, race, immigration, the media and free speech – more so than on the role of government in the economy and abortion. Americans’ views on national identity, race and immigration tend to diverge more depending on their party affiliation than on any demographic characteristics, including race, age, gender, level of education, income and region.

The research brings to light a lack of consensus on who is and what it means to be a “real American”, suggesting that political polarization has resulted in a form of tribalism.

The surveys were conducted August 17-18, 2017 and October 3-5, 2017 among 1,021 and 1,003 U.S. adults age 18+, respectively.

Democrats and Republicans Hold Widely Different Views on Race and Immigration-Related Issues

The level of agreement among Democrats and Republicans with each of four views on race and affirmative action differs by over 40 percentage points. In each case, differences by party affiliation are larger than they are by race and ethnicity.

- 72% of Democrats vs. 24% of Republicans agree that “black people do not have the same opportunities as white people in the U.S. (a 48-point gap)
- 71% of Democrats vs. 26% of Republicans agree “race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison” (a 45-point gap)
- 71% of Democrats vs. 30% of Republicans agree that “due to racial discrimination, programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality” (a 41-point gap)
- 66% of Republicans vs. 22% of Democrats agree that “social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against white people” (a 44-point gap)

Partisan polarization is also very strong around immigration-related topics, especially when it comes to immigration’s impact on social services and jobs. Here too, views differ more along partisan lines than they do by race, gender, age, income, education, or region.

- 66% of Republicans vs. 24% of Democrats agree that “immigrants take important social services away from real Americans” (a 42-point gap)
- 52% of Republicans vs. 19% of Democrats agree that “immigrants take jobs away from real Americans” (a 33-point gap)
- 66% of Republicans vs. 35% of Democrats agree that “when jobs are scarce, employers should prioritize hiring people of this country over immigrants” (a 31-point gap)

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- Twice as many Republicans (46%) as Democrats (23%) agree that “American should stop terrorism at all costs, even if that means ignoring Civil rights”
- While only a minority of Republicans (37%) agree that “America would be stronger if we stopped immigration”, it is a view that is three times as prevalent among them than it is among Democrats (13%)
- In reverse, one in three Democrats (34%) agree that “American would be better off if we let all immigrants who wanted to come here” vs. one in eight Republicans (13%)

Party Identification, Perceptions of Free Speech Suppression, and Social Distrust

More than any demographic characteristic, party identification is also a solid predictor of beliefs that free speech and truth are being suppressed. These are far more prevalent among Republicans than they are among Democrats.

- 88% of Republicans vs. 41% of Democrats agree that “the mainstream media is more interested in making money than in telling the truth” (a 47-point gap)
- 72% of Republicans vs. 43% of Democrats agree that “‘Political Correctness’ is just a way for people to shut down people they disagree with
- 64% of Republicans vs. 38% of Democrats agree that “people who talk about their conservative beliefs are often disrespected (a 26-point gap) – whereas 48% of Democrats vs. 36% of Republicans agree that the same is true for “people who talk about their liberal beliefs” (a gap of only 12 points)

Whereas Republicans are significantly more susceptible to feeling slighted, Democrats tend to be more trusting of others: 28% of Democrats say most people can be trusted while only 10% say you can’t be too careful in dealing with people. In contrast, Republicans and Independents are as likely to trust most people as to distrust most people (16% vs. 17% for Republicans, 14% each for Independents). Still, majorities among all three groups say that “it depends”.

Partisan Disagreement on National Identity and Ideals: Diverging on What Defines a “Real American” and the “American Dream”

Traits, groups or individuals that universally thought of as being “real American” touch on the country’s foundational values and history and patriotic behavior. Among 50 suggestions, the three most widely seen as being a “real American” are

- Someone believing in free speech (91%)
- Someone caring about the welfare of all Americans equally (88%)
- George Washington (88%)

However, opinions on who is a “real” American show a great deal of partisan polarization. Republicans and Democrats diverge most on immigration, race-related issues, and on ideology.

Republicans are more likely than Democrats to associate being a “real American” with:

- Believing immigration should be restricted (by a 43-point margin)
- Robert E. Lee (33-point margin)
- Being a Republican (32-point margin)
- Believing in the right to bear arms (27-point margin)
- Believing that fewer laws and regulations are better than more (26-point margin)

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- Being conservative (21-point margin)

In reverse, Republicans are less likely than Democrats to think of someone with the following traits as a “real American”:

- Sympathizing with the “Black Lives Matter” movement (by a 46-point margin)
- Believing in open borders (44-point margin)
- Having lived in the U.S. since being a child without getting legal status – a rough description of a DACA-eligible “Dreamer” (35-point margin)
- Not standing up during the national anthem (34-point margin)
- Being a liberal (31-point margin)
- Being a Democrat (23-point margin)
- Being an immigrant (22-point margin)
- Being a resident of Puerto Rico (18-point margin)
- Receiving government welfare benefits (17-point margin)

Only 84% consider of those surveyed themselves to be “real” Americans. Subgroups most likely do so are those aged 55 and older (94% vs. 73% of those aged 18-34), Republicans (92% vs. 82% of Democrats), and non-Hispanic Whites (88% vs. 72% of others).

The “American Dream” does not mean the same thing depending on one’s party affiliation. When asked to choose between two definitions of the “American Dream”, majorities of Democrats (59%) and Independents (54%) opt for “no matter your religion or ethnicity, you will be treated with respect and dignity” while Republicans (58%) are more likely to choose “it does not matter where you come from, if you work hard you can get ahead”.

Personal Connection to Immigration and Party Affiliation

The partisan divide around what defines being a “real American” and all views on immigration is undoubtedly connected to the significant larger proportions of immigrants, relatives and friends of immigrants, and speakers of a foreign language within the ranks of Democrats than among Republicans.

- Democrats (11%) and Independents (13%) are about three times as likely as Republicans (4%) to report being born outside of the United States
- One quarter of Democrats (25%) and one fifth of Independents (21%) count at least one immediate family member who was born outside of the U.S. vs. 15% of Republicans
- One third of Democrats (33%) and Independents (34%) count at least one person born outside of the U.S. among closest friends vs. one fifth of Republicans (20%)
- Democrats (19%) and Independents (25%) are more likely than Republicans (13%) to speak a language other than English fluently, and to report that a close friend of theirs does (respectively, 44% and 39% vs. 32%).
- Interestingly, Democrats and Republicans show similar levels of experience living or have traveled at least once outside the U.S. In fact, Independents are more likely to have lived abroad (21%) than are Democrats (19%) and Republicans (13%). However, both Democrats (72%) and Republicans (76%) are more likely than Independents (61%) to have only traveled outside the U.S. at least once.

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The Old Ideological Divide: Small Government and Abortion

Traditionally, party affiliation could be largely predicted by one's views on the role of the federal government in the economy and/or on social issues such as abortion. This study shows that, while still important, the partisan divide on the role of government and on abortion is not as marked as it is on views pertaining to race-related issues, immigration, and free speech (media fairness, political correctness, etc.)

Asked how much involvement the U.S. government should have on America's economy, Democrats lead Republicans and, to a lesser extent, Independents when it comes supporting a *very* large role of government in the economy: Using a scale of 1 to 10, 34% of Democrats vs. 19% of Republicans and 23% of Independents rate how much involvement the U.S. government should have with an 8, 9 or 10.

Looking at combined support for either a very large role of government in the economy (8, 9 or 10 rating) or a somewhat large role (6 or 7 rating), the gap between Democrats (72%) and Republicans (48%) expands to 23 points. Interestingly, the gap between Democrats and Independents (36%) is even wider.

A more pronounced partisan divide is seen on the level of agreement with the suggestion that "the American economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful". The 31-point difference between the proportions of Democrats (79%) and Republicans (48%) who agree is larger than differences across demographic variables such as income, education or age.

In contrast, belief that "America needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and powerful" (by 75% of Democrats and 63% of Republicans) and that "traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like me" (by 70% of Republicans and 63% of Democrats) show much less differentiation along partisan lines. It is also the case of the view shared by only one quarter of Americans (26%) that "the government should control the price of basic foodstuffs or staples".

On the question of abortion, the survey shows that 72% of Democrats think it should be legal in all or most cases vs. only 40% of Republicans (a 32-point gap) and 57% of Independents (a 15-point gap).

With differences of about 25 to 35 percentage points between Democrats and Republicans, views on the role of government in the economy, opinions on whether the economy is "rigged to advantage the rich and powerful", and being in the pro-life or the pro-choice camp remain strongly indicative of party affiliation. However, those differences of opinion are slimmer than the many 40 to 50-point gaps in attitudes on race (e.g. whether black people have the same opportunities as white people in the U.S., whether race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison, whether programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality or discriminate against white people), immigration (e.g., whether it should be restricted), and the mainstream media's agenda.

The Digital News Divide

Television is the top news source for both Democrats (70%) and Republicans (72%), but not for Independents (59%), who tend to rely more on the Internet (67%). While it is second-most used news source for both, Democrats (64%) get their news online more than do Republicans (55%). Democrats—largely because they skew younger – are more also more likely than Republicans and Independents to get their news from social media (43% vs. 31% and 33%, respectively) and from mobile news apps (25% vs. 15% and 24%).

Democrats are also slightly more likely to say at least half their conversations happen online (33% vs. 29% of Republicans and 27% of Independents).

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Partisan Divide in Consumer Behavior

Consumer behaviors that set apart Democrats from Republicans the most pertain to media and entertainment, sports, and driving. Among 15 behaviors tested, one is reported by nearly three times as many Democrats as Republicans – donating money to NPR – and two are mentioned by twice as many Republicans as Democrats – driving a pickup truck and enjoying NASCAR.

Republicans are 46% more likely to have learned to drive before 15, 41% more likely to love baseball, and 32% more likely to have ever lived in a rural area. Democrats are 36% more likely than Republicans to shop at Whole Foods regularly and 22% more likely to watch HBO.

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About the Study

For both surveys, a sample of adults age 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii was interviewed online in English. The samples of the August 17-18 and October 3-5 surveys include 401 and 390 Democrats, 363 and 362 Republicans, and 149 and 141 Independents, respectively.

The samples for this study were randomly drawn from Ipsos's online panel (see link below for more info on "Access Panels and Recruitment"), partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling (see link below for more info on the Ipsos "Ampario Overview" sample method) and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. Population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2013 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, and education. Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls.

All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error.

The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents. Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). Each survey had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following (n=1,021 and 1,003, DEFF=1.5, adjusted Confidence Interval=5). Both polls also have a credibility interval plus or minus 5.6 percentage points for Democrats, plus or minus 5.9 percentage points for Republicans, and plus or minus 9.2 percentage points for Independents.

Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding.

For more information about conducting research intended for public release or Ipsos' online polling methodology, please visit our [Public Opinion Polling and Communication](#) page where you can download our brochure, see our public release protocol, or contact us.

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