

DEMOCRACY FOR PRESIDENT

Election Violence Perception Gap Report

October 2020

Summary

In [research](#) More in Common conducted in July and August we found 7 in 10 Americans expressed concern over the risks of election-related violence. In the ensuing weeks Americans learned of a disturbing plot to [capture the governor of Michigan](#) and read headlines such as [“Police Are Preparing for the Election ‘In Ways They Never Would Have Had To’ Before 2020”](#). In order to better understand the situation, we fielded a survey to Americans asking them about actions – ranging from peaceful demonstrations to physical altercation – they would personally justify in a scenario where their party’s candidate was claiming the election was stolen. We then also asked them what percentage of the “other side” they thought would condone those same actions if *their* candidate were to claim the election was stolen.

Here is what we found:

- 1. Americans overwhelmingly reject physical violence**—97% of Republicans and 96% of Democrats rejected the idea that physically attacking their political opponents would be justified.
- 2. Americans significantly exaggerate the proportion of their political opponents who would justify election-related violence.** Republicans believe that 52% of Democrats would justify physical attacks against Donald Trump supporters in a scenario where Joe Biden claims the election was stolen—only 4% of Democrats said they would condone such violence. Similarly Democrats believe that 49% of Republicans would justify physical attacks against Joe Biden supporters in a scenario where Donald Trump claims the election was stolen—in fact only 3% of Republicans said they would condone such violence.

This is not to say Americans should ignore the threat of election related violence. We must take these threats seriously—3% or 4% of people justifying such violence is still unacceptably high. At the same time we can be confident the overwhelming majority of Americans are committed to a peaceful election. This reflects the importance we place as Americans, on working together to ensure free, fair, and safe elections.

Methodology & Additional Resources

Methodology: In October 2020, More in Common in partnership with YouGov, fielded a survey on perceptions around election violence to N=2000 Americans.

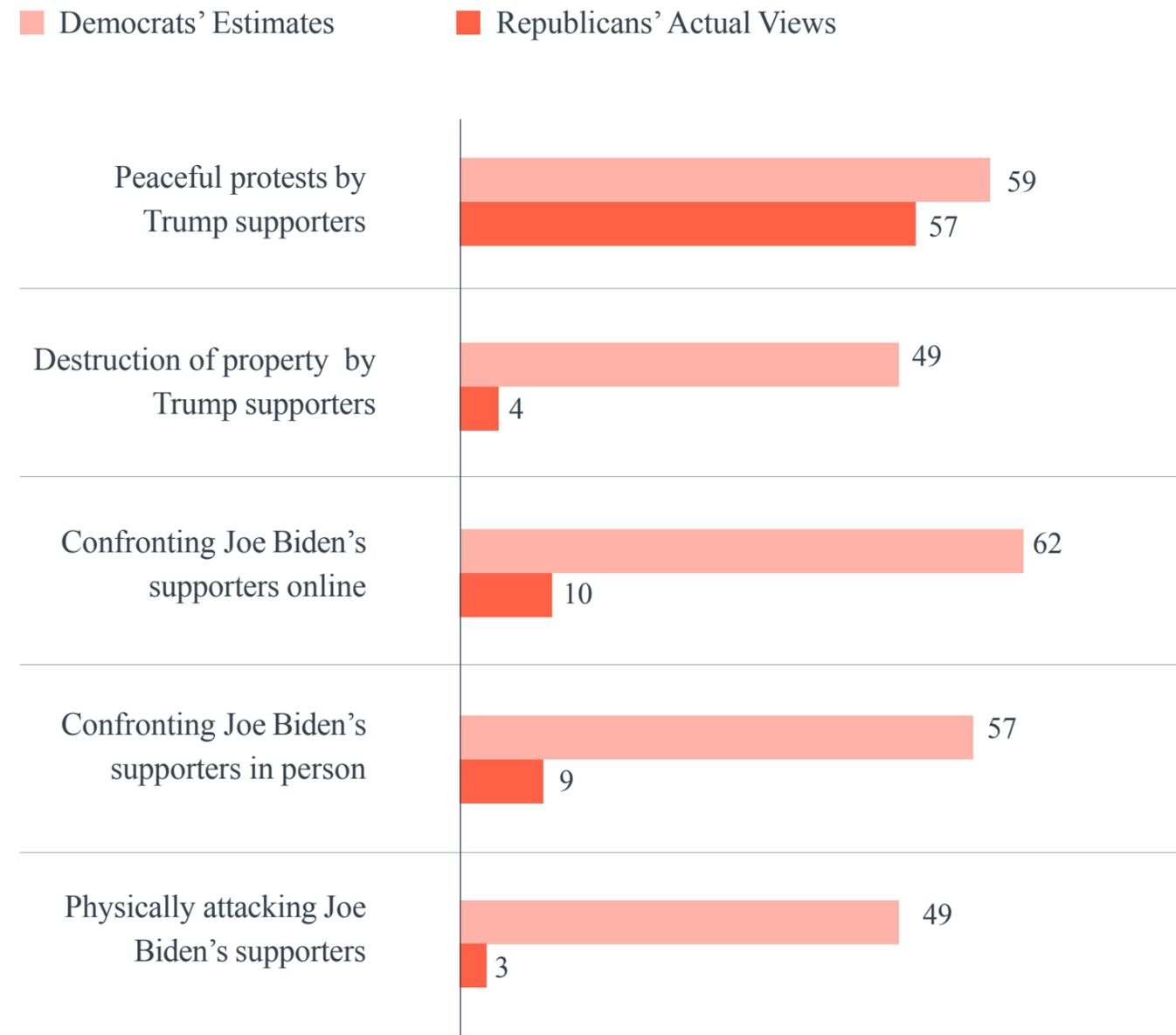
The data was weighted using propensity scores to be representative of American citizens to a sampling frame built from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS). The propensity score function included gender, age, race, education, and region. The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 Presidential vote choice, and on a 4-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories) to arrive at the final weight. Margin of error is +/- 2.37.

This research builds off prior work we have conducted to diagnose the extent to which we exaggerate our differences and assign negative character attributes to our political opponents. For more information on this research, please see our [Perception Gap website](#).

Additional Resources: One way to contribute to the prevention of violence or unrest is to engage individuals in your friend, family, or close network in conversation. Use [this discussion guide](#) to speak about violence and the election.

Election Violence Perception Gap

Biden win but Trump claims “stolen”



Republicans were asked the following: *Imagine that Joe Biden appears to win the presidential election, but President Trump claims the election was “stolen.” Under those circumstances, which of the following actions would be justified?*

- Actions included: peaceful protests, destruction of property, online and in-person confrontation, and physical attacks against Joe Biden supporters

Democrats were asked the following: *What percentage of Republicans do you think would condone the following actions if Joe Biden seems to win the presidential election but Donald Trump claims the election was stolen?*

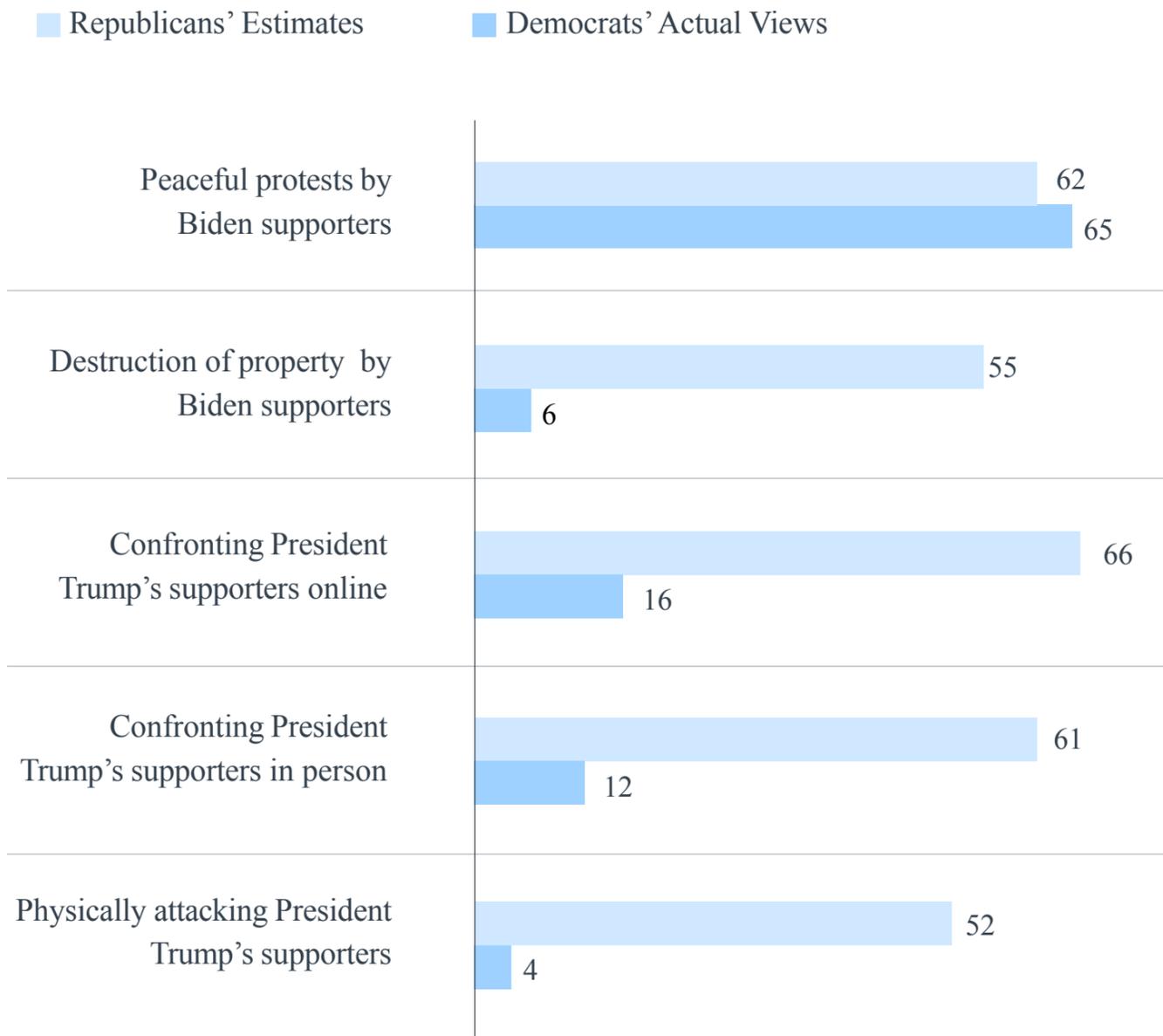
- Actions included: peaceful protests, destruction of property, online and in-person confrontation, and physical attacks against Joe Biden supporters
- For each action, Respondents provided their estimate for what percentage of Republicans would justify the action

Key findings:

- **Republicans overwhelmingly reject physical violence**—97% rejected the option of justifying physically attacking Joe Biden supporters
- Democrats believe that almost 50% of Republicans would condone violence—a Perception Gap of 46 percentage points

Election Violence Perception Gap

Trump win but Biden claims “stolen”



Democrats were asked the following: *Imagine that Donald Trump appears to win the presidential election, but Joe Biden claims the election was “stolen.” Under those circumstances, which of the following actions would be justified?*

- Actions included: peaceful protests, destruction of property, online and in-person confrontation, and physical attacks against Donald Trump supporters

Republicans were asked the following: *What percentage of Democrats do you think would condone the following actions if President Trump appears to win the presidential election but Joe Biden claims the election was stolen?*

- Actions included: peaceful protests, destruction of property, online and in-person confrontation, and physical attacks against Donald Trump supporters
- For each action, Respondents provided their estimate for what percentage of Democrats would justify the action

Key findings:

- **Democrats overwhelmingly reject physical violence**—96% rejected justifying physical attacks on President Trump supporters
- Republicans believe that over half of Democrats would condone violence – a Perception Gap of 48 percentage points

Messaging for bolstering peaceful elections

Times are difficult and our country is hurting. But turning to despair and violence isn't the path forward. The way to move from anger or fear is to remember that first, **we are neighbors**, and that ultimately, we are all Americans. This election brings many unknowns - turning against each other cannot be one of them.

- We tested messaging to identify how Americans – from across the political spectrum – can speak to one another in ways that bolster commitment to peaceful elections.
- Agreement scores, broken down by party and race, show that a “we are neighbors” message resonates strongly across the different groups.
- This message acknowledges the difficulty of the current times and makes an appeal to move away from anger and fear to a more neighborly path forward.

Agreement scores							
All	Dem	Rep	Ind	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
81	82	84	81	83	76	75	78