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Republicans And Democrats Agree On The Protests But Not Why People Are Protesting

By Michael TeslerFiled under Protests

A protester holds up an upside down US flag with names of victims during a demonstration against racism and police brutality in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on June 6, 2020. MARANIE R. STAAB / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Public opinion is now in favor of the protesters who have spent the last three weeks advocating for police reform in response to the death of George Floyd, a black man killed by a police officer in Minneapolis.

This is notable, because [public opinion around the protests was initially split](#). But as the protests have [grown larger](#) and [spread to more parts of the country](#), there's evidence they have become more popular. For instance, in a [Morning Consult survey](#) conducted June

10-12, 64 percent of Americans said they supported the protests, up [10 percentage points from the first time the pollster](#) asked in late May and early June.

[\[Related: There's A Huge Gap In How Republicans And Democrats See Discrimination\]](#)

In fact, the protests are so popular that they're now supported by [majorities of Democrats and Republicans](#). But this bipartisan support masks some of the enormous differences that still exist between the two parties on issues of race and discrimination.

For starters, there's a pretty big gap in just how strongly Democrats and Republicans back the protests. In last week's [Economist/YouGov poll](#), for instance, 73 percent of Democrats said they strongly approve of the nonviolent protests, compared with just 27 percent of Republicans. And according to the most recent [Yahoo News/YouGov poll](#), Democrats and Republicans are also fairly split on how peaceful the protests have been, how long they should last and what's driving them. In that poll, Democrats were 40 points more likely than Republicans to say that the protests have been mostly peaceful and three-quarters of Republicans said they wanted the protests to stop now, compared to less than one-quarter of Democrats. Republicans were also 44 points more likely than Democrats to say the protests were primarily motivated by long-standing biases against the police, whereas most Democrats said the protests were motivated by a genuine desire to hold police accountable.

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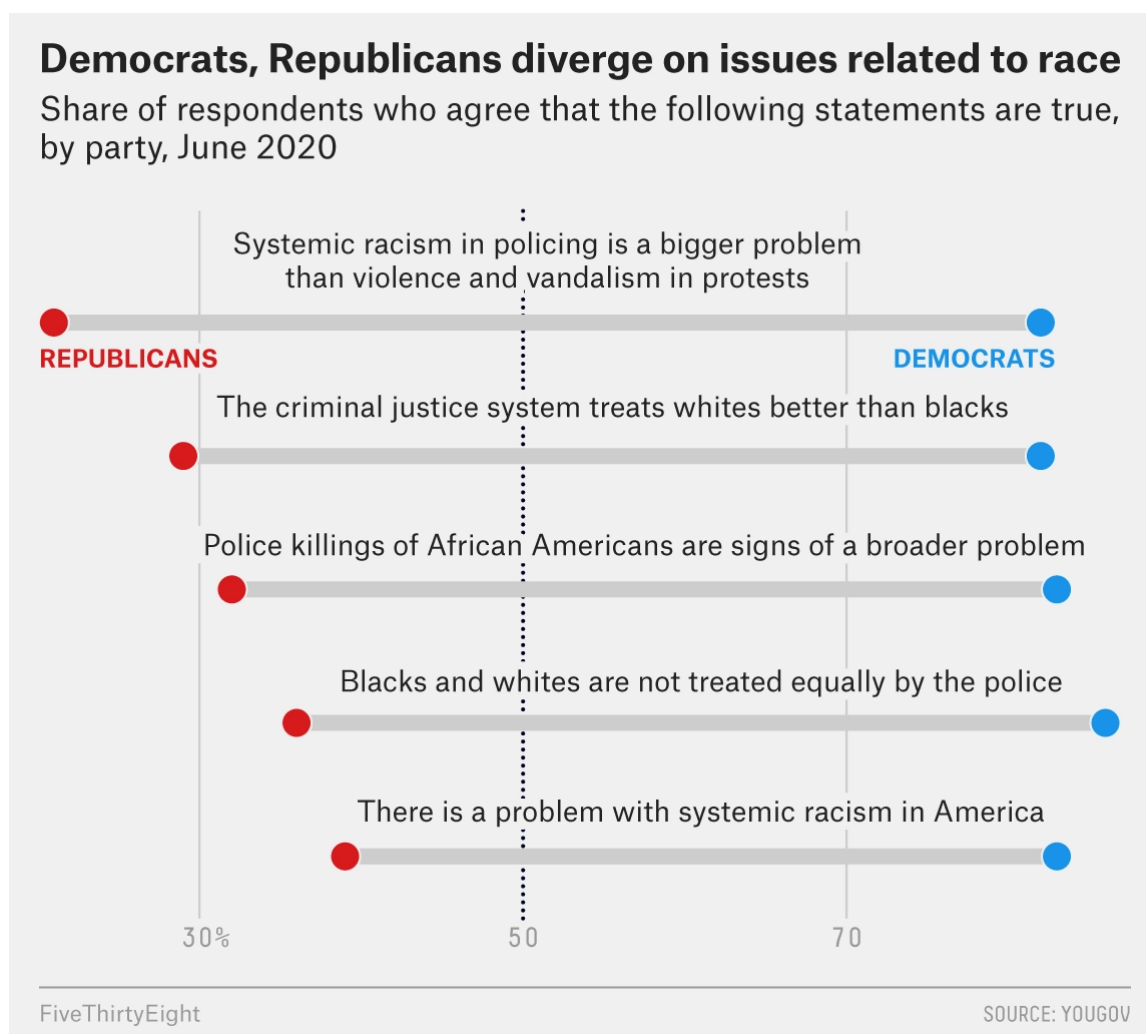


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The fact that Democrats and Republicans are so polarized when it comes to the motives driving the protests is important because it conveys just how differently Republicans and Democrats view racism in America.

In its polling, YouGov asked respondents a number of questions on whether systemic racism was a problem or whether police killings signaled a bigger issue within American life. As you can see in the chart below, Democrats and Republicans are divided, with as much as a 60-point gap separating them on some of these issues. Recent surveys by [CBS](#), [CNN](#) and [Monmouth University](#) have found equally large partisan divides on race and policing as well.



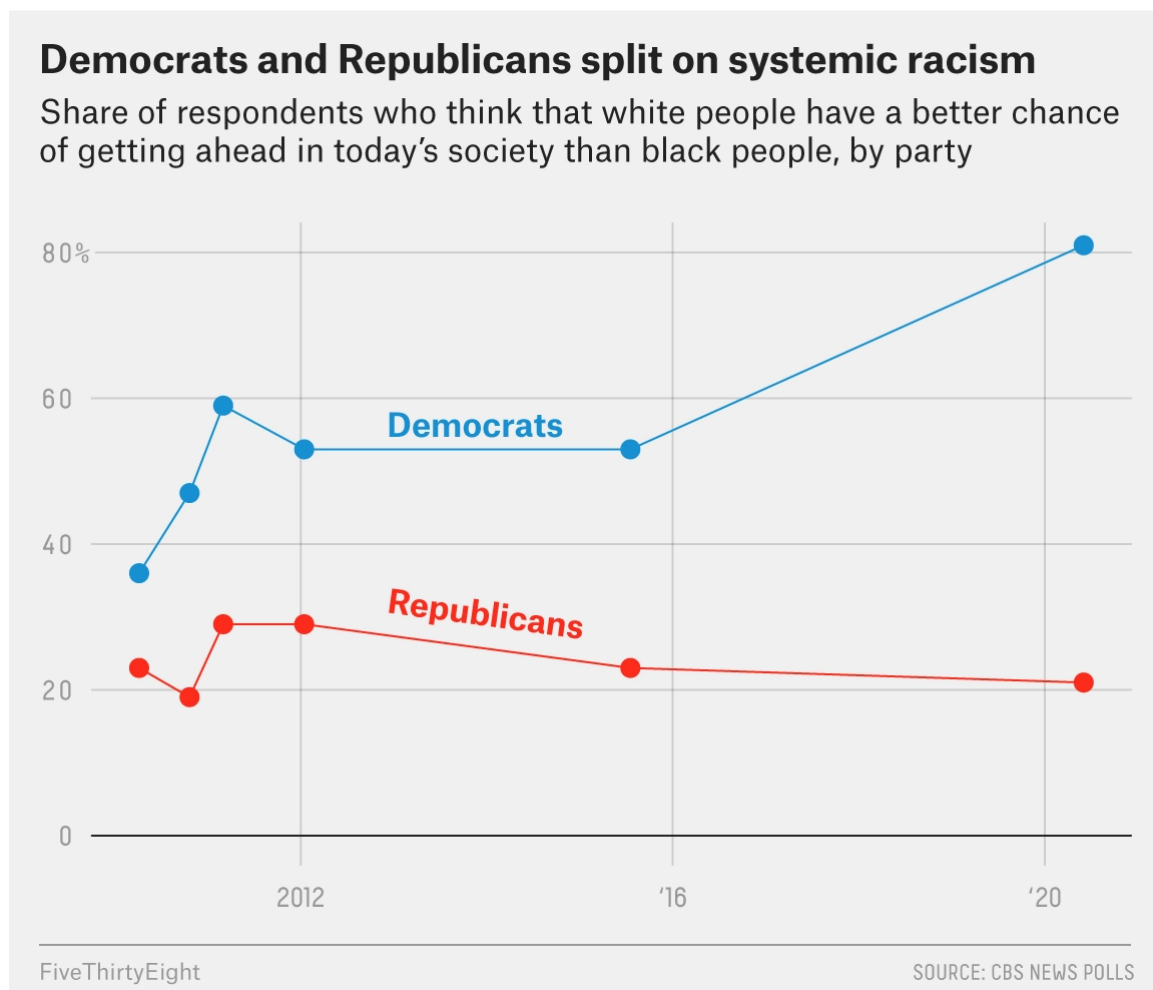
The thing is, public opinion about race hasn't always been this polarized.

In fact, some attitudes about race were entirely unrelated to partisanship before Barack Obama was elected president in 2008. But after he was elected, [racial attitudes](#) and [party identification](#) became [increasingly intertwined](#) to the extent that by 2012, opposition to interracial relationships or overtly negative views of African Americans predicted whether [someone identified as Republican](#) for the first time in decades.

[Related: [Do You Know How Divided White And Black Americans Are On Racism?](#)]

Of course, Donald Trump's political rise took this growing partisan polarization over race to [new heights](#). Democrats, in particular, quickly [consolidated their views](#) in reaction to Trump's [offensive statements](#) about racial and ethnic minorities.

CBS News polls from the last 10 years underscore just how much Democrats have changed their opinion of systemic racism in a relatively short period of time. As you can see in the chart below, it wasn't that long ago when Democrats and Republicans responded pretty similarly to the question of whether white Americans had an easier time of getting ahead.



Democrats, however, are now much more likely to agree that societal advantages exist for white Americans than they were five years ago. A similar shift has happened on questions of police brutality and institutional racism within the criminal justice system. For instance, the percentage of Democrats who think that the police disproportionately use deadly force against black Americans increased by more than 30 points since [CBS News first asked the question in August 2014](#). Meanwhile, Republicans' views have remained steady — just 24 percent think the police disproportionately use deadly force against African Americans.

It's certainly not surprising, then, that Democrats and Republicans are so divided over race and policing after Floyd's death. The upshot of this growing polarization is that Democrats and Republicans increasingly inhabit [separate realities about race in America](#), worlds apart on everything from the [causes of racial inequality](#) to the [Confederate flag's meaning](#) to [the N-word's offensiveness](#) to the [value of teaching black history in schools](#).

[\[Related: How Black Americans View Their Racial Identity\]](#)

The current partisan divide over race may be predictable, but it's still incredibly important — especially considering this is a presidential election year. Race has long been [an effective wedge issue](#) for the Republican Party, as demonstrated by the 2016 election, when Republicans [split up the Democrats'](#) diverse coalition of nonwhite voters, white racially liberal voters and racially conservative white voters. But after 12 years of Obama and Trump, racially conservative Democrats have [mostly defected or converted](#). That means Democrats are now united about many of the racial issues that once splintered the party.

Take the Black Lives Matter movement, for example. In a [June 2016 Pew Research Center poll](#), only 64 percent of white Democrats and 20 percent of white Republicans supported the Black Lives Matter movement. Those numbers are now up to 92 percent among white Democrats and 37 percent among white Republicans in the [latest Pew survey](#).

[\[Related: Public Opinion Of The Black Lives Matter Movement Has Shifted. What Happens Next?\]](#)

The fact that Republicans experienced a nearly 20-point increase in support since 2014 doesn't bode well for them either, considering polls at this point indicate that it is Democrats — and not Republicans — who are now more unified on many issues of race.

In fact, [congressional Democrats' efforts](#) to pass sweeping legislation to help remedy some of the racial biases in the criminal justice system could even be an effective racial wedge issue for the Democratic Party heading into November.