## Shared Ideals, Divergent Realities

Americans' views on democracy under President Trump



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The research in this publication was conducted by More in Common US, a nonpartisan research nonprofit that works to understand the forces driving us apart, find common ground, and bring people together to address shared challenges.

Established in 2017, More in Common US is part of a nonpartisan, international initiative aimed at building societies and communities that are stronger, more united and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarization and social division.

More in Common's work is frequently featured in prominent media and used by senior political leaders, governments and leaders in nonprofits, philanthropy, and business.

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## Overview

Since President Trump's return to office, debates about the strength of American democracy are intensifying. Critics raise concerns that the Trump administrations' actions threaten our democratic systems, <sup>1</sup> with some equating support for President Trump with belief that one no longer cares about the value of American democracy.<sup>2</sup>

To better understand how public attitudes are evolving, More in Common surveyed 2,647 Americans on their views of democracy, the Constitution, and Trump administration policies, including cuts to federal agencies.

While there is broad, bipartisan support for democracy and the Constitution, Democrats and Republicans diverge sharply in how they interpret President Trump's recent actions. Most Republicans view his policies as efforts to fight corruption and serve the public, while most Democrats see them as self-serving and a threat to democratic norms. Independents are mixed, but broadly more concerned or unsure than confident about the current state of our democracy.

These findings suggest that Americans remain committed to the ideals of democracy, but they differ significantly as to whether the administrations' actions uphold or undermine those values. The task ahead for organizations working on strengthening America's democracy lies less in persuading Americans that democracy matters, and more in understanding why some do not currently perceive some of the Trump administration's actions as threats to democracy. This calls for attentiveness to specific issues and moments—particularly around government actions that most Americans across party lines may feel unease with—when precise and non-alarmist pro-democracy arguments can gain traction. These moments can be used to build support for institutional safeguards that constrain future acts of democratic backsliding.

Adrienne LaFrance, "A Ticking Clock on American Freedom," The Atlantic, <u>https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/04/america-trump-authoritarianism-global/682528/</u>; Nicholas Riccardi, "Trump's moves test the limits of presidential power and the resilience of US democracy," AP News, <u>https://apnews.com/article/trump-democracy-autocrats-authoritarian-constitution-threat-542ac437a58880e81c052f8f2df1643f</u>; Jason Lee Steorts, "Trump and Democracy," National Review, <u>https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/trump-and-democracy/</u>.

<sup>2</sup> Bret Stephens, "There's One Main Culprit if Donald Trump Wins," New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/22/opinion/trump-kamala-harris-democrats.html



## Methodology

More in Common conducted online survey interviews among a representative sample of 1,987 adults, with additional oversamples of 220 Gen Z adults, 215 adults who identify as "very liberal," and 215 adults who identify as "very conservative" from February 21 to 27, 2025. The data was weighted to be representative according to gender/age interlocked, ethnicity, education level, region, and 2024 Presidential vote and turnout. The margin of error (adjusted for weighting) is +/- 2 for the U.S. average and higher for subgroups.

Numbers in data visualizations are rounded to the nearest whole number. Figures may total to larger or smaller than one-hundred percent due to rounding.

More in Common also polled 204 Americans from February 22 to March 7 and 202 Americans from February 26 to March 11 on its "Americans in Conversation" online qualitative research panel, which is broadly representative of the American population, about their views on democracy and the new administration's policies regarding government reform.

Quotations from those activities with respondents are included in this report. Where provided, names have been changed to protect their privacy. Quote attributions include respondents' demographics, location, political party ID, and More in Common's <u>Hidden Tribes segmentation</u>. Grammar and punctuation may have been lightly edited for clarity.



## **Key Findings**

- 1. A majority of Americans, across party lines, support upholding democratic principles and constitutional norms.
  - 63% of Americans, including 69% of Republicans and 79% of Democrats, say democracy is "definitely the best" form of government for America.
  - 69% of Republicans think President Trump should always follow the Constitution, even if it means he sometimes can't get things done.
- 2. Yet, Republicans and Democrats diverge on whether the Trump Administration is threatening our democracy. Republicans don't see President Trump's policies and government reforms as undermining democracy, while most Democrats believe they do.
  - 79% of Democrats see Trump's presidency as a greater threat than the courts and bureaucracy, whereas 60% of Republicans view the courts as the greater threat.
  - Most Democrats see federal government cuts as political retaliation, while most Republicans believe they are aimed at improving government efficiency and reducing the budget deficit.
- 3. Overall, Americans are generally more concerned than confident about American democracy under President Trump, and want separation of powers—driven by strong majorities of Democrats, most Independents, and a minority of Republicans.
  - Independents are more likely to be concerned or unsure about the current state of democracy than confident.
    - 49% of Independents believe President Trump hopes to become a dictator, compared to 28% who disagree.
  - Some Republicans are concerned about the Trump administration's impact on our democratic systems.
    - Almost a quarter (23%) of Republicans think Congress is not providing enough oversight and 15% believe the administration's actions on government reform are threatening the country's democracy.

**Key Finding 1** 

# Bipartisan consensus on democracy and constitutional norms



## Large majorities from all parties support democracy and constitutional constraints on the president.

	% Agree				
Democracy is definitely the best form of government for the US.	<b>5</b> 963 69 79				
Leaders must always uphold democratic principles (e.g. constitutional checks and balances) even if the economy isn't doing well.	70 67 71 84				
I don't really care about the Constitution.	<b>8 1114</b> 18				
The Constitution should be widely respected because it has helped provide political stability for hundreds of years.	73 <b>75 80 85</b>				
The President should always act within the rules of the Constitution.	72 <b>6</b> <b>71 72</b> <b>83</b>				
President Trump should always follow the Constitution, even if it means he sometimes can't get things done.	73 ••• 6973 89				
Public servants including federal employees should not be subject to threats or harassment.	71 • • • • 65 71 84				
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🔵 U.S. Average 🔵 Democrat 🛑 Republican 🔵 Independent

## 8 in 10 Democrats and 7 in 10 Republicans say democracy is "definitely the best" form of government for the United States.

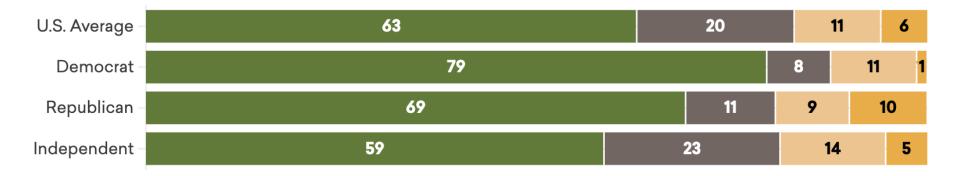


Which of the following best describes your view?

Democracy is definitely the best form of government for the United States.

I am open to non-democratic forms of government in the United States.

I would prefer a non-democratic government in the United States.



Note: Respondents who selected "Not sure" or "Other" when asked about their political party affiliation are not shown as separate categories in the chart, but their responses are included in the U.S. average.



## Most Americans reject bending the rules: less than one third across party lines tolerate leaders setting aside democratic principles to fix the economy.

Which statement do you agree with more?

Leaders must always uphold democratic principles (e.g. constitutional checks and balances) even if the economy isn't doing well

Sometimes it's okay for leaders to set aside democratic principles (e.g. constitutional checks and balances) to fix the economy

U.S. Average –	71	29
Democrat -	84	16
Republican -	70	30
Independent –	67	33

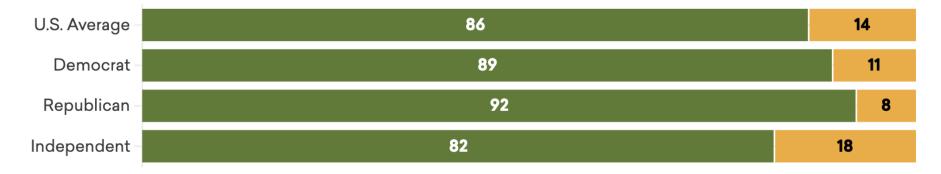
Note: Respondents who selected "Not sure" or "Other" when asked about their political party affiliation are not shown as separate categories in the chart, but their responses are included in the U.S. average.



## Only around 1 in 10 Democrats and Republicans say they "don't really care" about the Constitution.

#### Which of the following do you agree with more?

The Constitution matters to me.



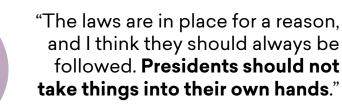
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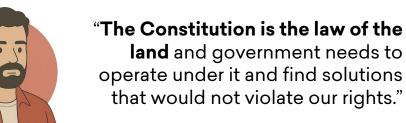
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### Most Americans, regardless of party affiliation, emphasize that the Constitution and democratic principles are the foundation of the country and serve as safeguards against dictatorship.



Sheila, 24-year-old white woman, Traditional Conservative, Republican from Ocala, Florida



Luca, 48-year-old Hispanic man, Traditional Conservative, Independent from El Paso, Texas "You can't pick and choose what laws to follow. We are a nation of rules-how is this even a question? Rules provide direction and protection."

Jacie, 50-year-old Hispanic woman, Traditional Conservative, Democrat from Bluffton, South Carolina

"Democratic principles are what help keep our country in balance. If we set those aside (even for good reasons) it means that we can no longer operate on those principles in the future or trust the system to function as it should."

James, 37-year-old white man, Progressive Activist, Democrat from Allen, Texas





### 3 in 4 Americans believe the Constitution should be widely respected for providing political stability. This view particularly resonates with Republicans, 85% of whom agree.

Which of the following do you agree with more?

The Constitution should be widely respected because it has helped provide political stability for

hundreds of years.

Don't know

The Constitution should not be given too much weight because it was written in a completely different period of history.

U.S. Average –	75	12	13
Democrat -	80	6	14
Republican -	85		5 10
Independent -	73	13	14

Note: Respondents who selected "Not sure" or "Other" when asked about their political party affiliation are not shown as separate categories in the chart, but their responses are included in the U.S. average.



## Over 7 in 10 Americans across all parties believe the president should always act within the rules of the Constitution.

Which of the following do you agree with more?

The President should always act within the rules of the Constitution.
Don't know
The President should be able to do good things for the country regardless of whether they fit the rules of the Constitution.



Note: Respondents who selected "Not sure" or "Other" when asked about their political party affiliation are not shown as separate categories in the chart, but their responses are included in the U.S. average.



## 7 in 10 Americans, including as many Republicans, say President Trump should always follow the Constitution, even if it means he can't get things done.

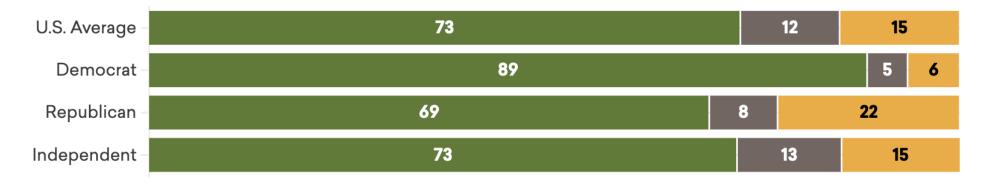
With regards to the Constitution, how do you think President Trump should govern?

He should always follow the Constitution, even if it means he sometimes can't get things

done

Don't know

He should get things done, even if it means sometimes ignoring the Constitution



Note: Respondents who selected "Not sure" or "Other" when asked about their political party affiliation are not shown as separate categories in the chart, but their responses are included in the U.S. average.



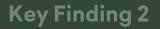
## 7 in 10 Americans across all parties say federal employees should not be subject to threats or harassment.

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

Public servants including federal employees should not be subject to threats or harassment.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Strongly disagree

U.S. Average –	48	23	21	4 4
Democrat -	66	18	13 2 <mark>2</mark>	
Republican -	36	30	22	6 7
Independent –	48	24	20	) 4 5



## Sharp partisan divides exist on whether President Trump's government reforms threaten democracy



Democrats and Republicans sharply disagree on who is violating democratic norms. Democrats point to President Trump, while Republicans blame Democratic leaders.



"Checks and balances were intentionally written in to our Constitution to avoid exactly what the president is trying to do – centralize power under him. **No one person should have absolute control over all government operations**."

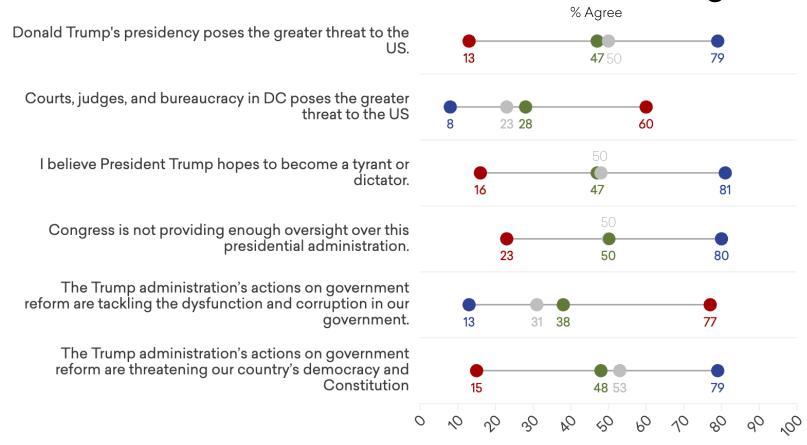
Melissa, 41-year-old white woman, Traditional Liberal, Independent and 2024 Harris voter from Durham, North Carolina "The core principles must be upheld, however, I find it hypocritical to accuse Trump of unconstitutional acts when **the prior administration broke** every norm to prevent him from being able to run for office again."

Brandon, 44-year-old white man, Moderate, Independent and 2024 Trump voter from Cincinnati, Ohio





### Most Republicans see President Trump's policies as fighting corruption and serving the country, while most Democrats view his actions as anti-democratic and self-serving.



U.S. Average Democrat Republican Independent



# Nearly 8 in 10 Republicans see Trump's government reforms as fighting corruption, while 8 in 10 Democrats see the reforms as threats to democracy.

Which do you agree with more?

#### The Trump administration's actions on government reform are...

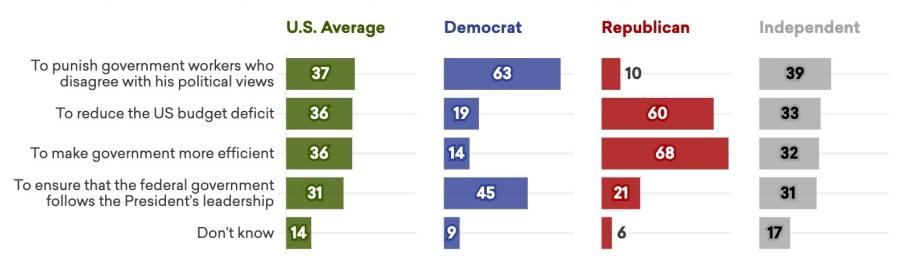
Tackling the dysfunction and corruption in our government
Don't know
Threatening our country's democracy and Constitution





### Partisan divisions shape whether Americans view the Trump administration's federal cuts as reducing the deficit or political retaliation.

In your opinion, which of the following describe why President Trump is reducing funding or eliminating some federal government agencies? Select all that apply.





## Many Republicans and Independent Trump voters support federal budget cuts, citing concerns about waste, overspending, and fraud.



"I think it is great that someone is looking at the crazy amount of wasteful spending that our government is doing. I would like to keep knowing how much they are saving and what that means for the American people overall. My brother is in the military, and they fired all the civilians in his department. He is having to work really hard to make up for the missing people, but overall feels like it will help with waste."

Kate, 43-year-old white woman, Traditional Conservative, Republican and 2024 Trump voter from Modesto, California

#### "We have **36 trillion in debt**. Obviously we need to make cuts."

Chip, 38-year-old white man, Traditional Conservative, Independent and 2024 Trump voter from Clemmons, North Carolina



Adam, 41-year-old Black man, Traditional Conservative, Republican and 2024 Trump voter from Belmont, Massachusetts





### However, some Trump voters support the cuts but question their criteria, scope, and execution, describing the process as chaotic and uninformed.

"The cuts have not come after careful scrutiny. They need more planning and evaluation. They have discovered a number of poor decisions due to **not** understanding the full complexity and effects of their high-level decisions. I agree that some cuts are needed, but not in the haphazard methods deployed at the start."

Art, 62-year-old white man, Traditional Conservative, Independent from Batavia, Ohio they are nonessential and wasteful spending instead of just cutting." Talia, 41-year-old Hispanic woman, Disengaged, Republican and 2024 Trump voter from San Diego,

California

money but I want to know exactly why

"I support cuts that are just wasting

"I support cuts to government in just about any way we can do it. I wish the communication and method being employed was more structured and clearer than making X posts though."

Jaria. 35-year-old Black man, Traditional Conservative, Republican and 2024 Trump voter from Sneads Ferry, North Carolina









### Many Democrats and Harris voters oppose the cuts, citing limited evidence of waste, risks to vital services, and concerns about political motives.

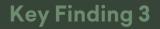


"I don't believe the cuts are doing done in a smart, efficient or caring way. I also believe many of the cuts have been done as political retaliation, just for a headline and/or to divert government funding to his businesses. I would want to see all of the honest research done, the other options discussed and reasoning for the final decision before I can get on board with any of the decisions."

Benjamin, 40-year-old white man, Disengaged, Independent and 2024 Harris voter from Ridgefield, Connecticut "Musk and company have very stupidly ignored the fact that the government provides vital services. They are **merrily cutting personnel with NO thought about who will perform the services** done by the people they are cutting."

Caleb, 79-year-old Other race man, Traditional Liberal, Independent and 2024 Harris voter from Arlington, Virginia





## Overall, Americans are more concerned than confident about democracy under President Trump

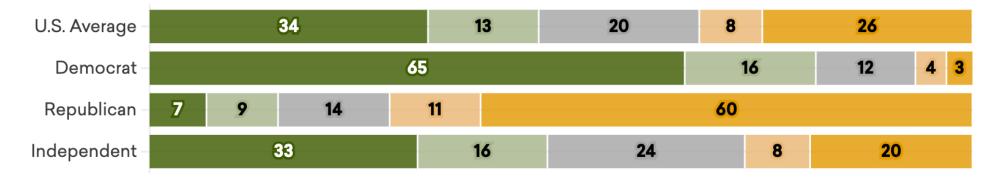
## More Americans than not fear authoritarianism under Trump. 4 in 5 Democrats believe President Trump aspires to be a dictator, as do 1 in 2 Independents and 1 in 6 Republicans.



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

#### I believe President Trump hopes to become a tyrant or dictator.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Strongly disagree



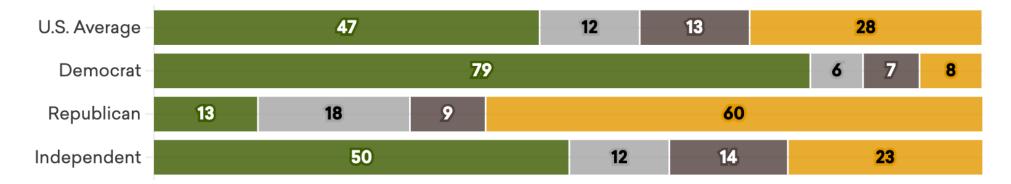
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## Less than a third of Americans believe our judiciary and bureaucracy pose a greater threat to the US than the Trump administration.

Which of the following do you think poses the greater threat to the United States?

Donald Trump's presidency
Neither poses a threat
Don't know
Courts, judges, and bureaucracy in Washington DC



Note: Respondents who selected "Not sure" or "Other" when asked about their political party affiliation are not shown as separate categories in the chart, but their responses are included in the U.S. average.



## Half of Americans, including 1 in 4 Republicans, say Congress isn't providing enough oversight of the Trump administration.

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

#### Congress is not providing enough oversight over this presidential administration.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Strongly disagree

U.S. Average –		32		18		29		10	11
Democrat -	57		23		14	4 2			
Republican -	9	14	34		17		26		
Independent -		33		17		30		10	9



## Many Democrats and Independents are alarmed by what they see as Congress's failure to constrain the president's actions.



"The GOP, who is in charge of the house and senate, is **letting the presidential administration do whatever it wants, without setting guardrails**. They are afraid to do otherwise. I would like to see them step up and do the right thing."

Kenzy, 67-year-old white woman, Progressive Activist, Democrat and 2024 Harris voter from Brookline, Massachusetts



"I think Congress is **letting him get his way** and they are scared to go against him."

> Tara, 41-year-old Black woman, Traditional Liberal, Democrat from Lithonia, Georgia

"There seems to be little to no oversight from Congress as it confirms Trump's cabinet and **allows his Executive Orders to go on unchallenged**."

Chris, 38-year-old white man, Passive Liberal, Independent and 2024 Harris voter from Rutherford, New Jersey

"We have a system of checks and balances, but WHERE is it being applied today? Never have I seen someone with as much power as Elon Musk, almost as if DOGE is the White House itself! I'm distraught just thinking about this."

Ava, 54-year-old white woman, Traditional Conservative, Independent (did not vote in 2024) from Pollok, Texas





## While many Trump voters and Republicans believe Congress is doing its job, some wish it would take a stronger lead on legislation rather than deferring to the White House.



"Congress is who creates laws and they need to be a part of the decisions that are being made by the White House; but I don't even see the Republicans being engaged, it's ridiculous to not have your own party involved, and there also needs to be at least a small set of the other party involved too, if you want things to be lasting.

Ryan, 65-year-old white man, Traditional Conservative, Republican and 2024 Trump voter from Fort Worth, Texas "I'm honestly not sure how much oversight Congress is giving. I think they should be working with the President to make sure things are done the right way though."

Scott, 41-year-old white man, Disengaged, Republican and 2024 Trump voter from Brick, New Jersey

## "I think Congress is **doing exactly** what they should be doing."

Jill, 47-year-old white woman, Traditional Conservative, Republican and 2024 Trump voter from Oregon, Wisconsin





