Did Political Disunity Change in 2020?

Research Report: CUPES-001 | November 13, 2020

Research Question

This is the first report from our new study, the *Civil Unrest and Presidential Election Study* (CUPES). In this study we examined social and political attitudes in the United States as they relate to the George Floyd protests, the Coronavirus Pandemic, and the presidential election.

In our first study, the Social and Political Attitudes Study (SPAS), we found evidence to suggest that Democrats were more divided than Republicans in 2019. In this new study, we sampled people during the weeks running up to the election. In this report, we investigated whether Democrats are still more divided than Republicans.
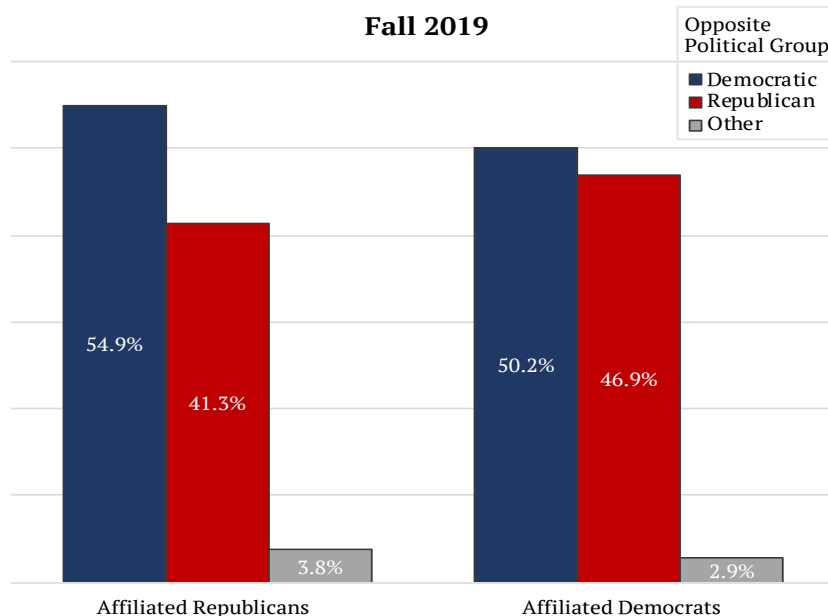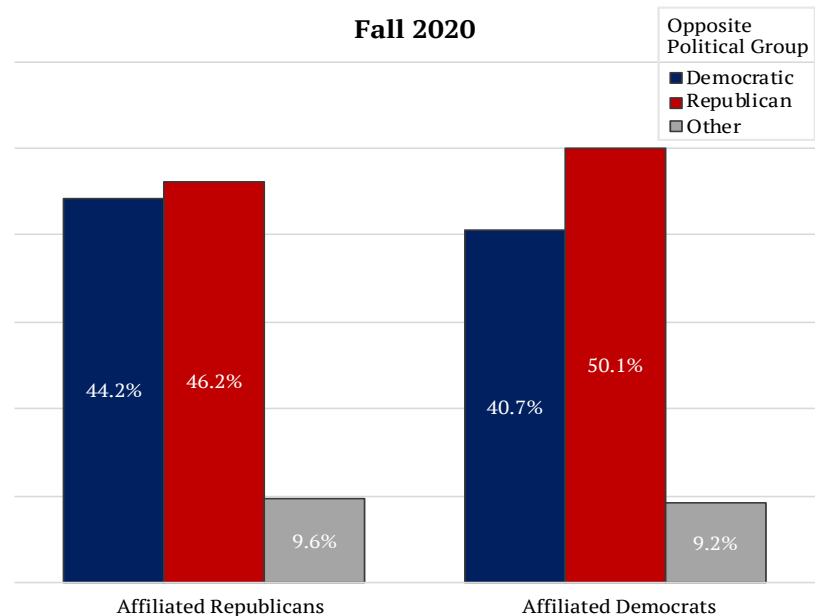
Methodology

Data Sources

1. Social and Political Attitudes Study (SPAS)
   o Collected in 2019; n = 508; 52% Male; Average Age = 48 Years
2. Civil Unrest and Presidential Election Study (CUPES)
   o Collected in 2020; n = 1078; 49% Male; Average Age = 47 Years

Measures

1. Political Affiliation: We asked what political group they affiliate with.
2. Political Opposition: We asked participants which political group has views most different from their own. They could have said the Democratic, Republican, Green or Libertarian Parties.
3. Racism Concern: We asked how concerned people in their community should be about the effects of racism.
4. COVID Concern: We asked how concerned people in their community should be about the spread of Coronavirus.
5. George Floyd Protests: We asked how important the George Floyd protests against police brutality are for achieving social justice.

Fall 2019

Opposite Political Group
- Democratic
- Republican
- Other

Affiliated Republicans: Democratic 54.9%, Republican 41.3%, Other 3.8%
Affiliated Democrats: Democratic 50.2%, Republican 46.9%, Other 2.9%

Between 2019 and 2020, Republicans appear to have become somewhat less unified, while Democrats appear to have become somewhat more unified.

Fall 2020

Opposite Political Group
- Democratic
- Republican
- Other

Affiliated Republicans: Democratic 44.2%, Republican 46.2%, Other 9.6%
Affiliated Democrats: Democratic 40.7%, Republican 50.1%, Other 9.2%

The figure to the right represents a comparison of what Republicans chose in 2019 and in 2020 as the political party with views most different from their own.

There was a 4.9% increase in Republicans choosing their own party as having views that most differed from their own, a 10.7% decrease in Republicans choosing the Democratic party, and a 5.8% increase in Republicans choosing the Green or Libertarian parties (i.e., Other).

Among Self-Identified Republicans....
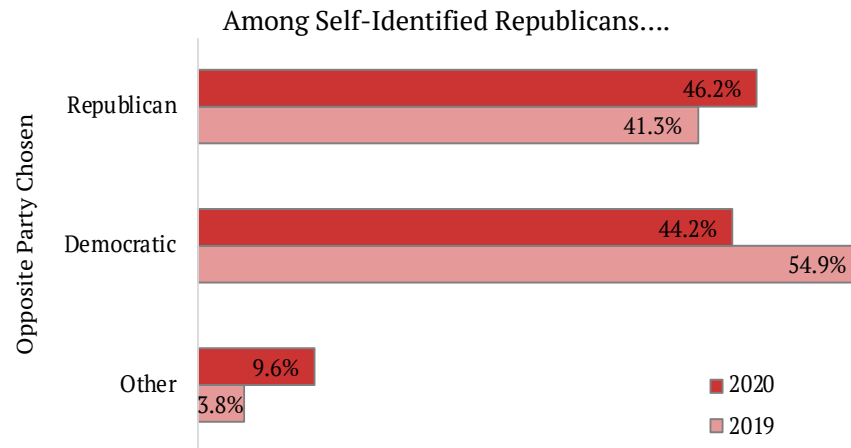
What might account for this shift in out-group and in-group attitudes among Republicans?

Republicans who chose their own party (the Republican Party) as the political group with views most opposed to their own, were also more likely than other Republicans to say that:
1. people in their community should be concerned about the effects of racism
2. people in their community should be concerned about the spread of Coronavirus
3. the George Floyd protests against police brutality are important for achieving social justice

Summary of Findings

1. In our first survey, taken in Fall 2019, we found evidence of division among Democrats. Specifically, Democrats were as opposed to their own party (i.e., the Democratic party) as they were to the Republican party. Republicans, on the other hand, were more likely to choose the Democratic party as the party with political views most different from their own.

2. In our follow-up survey, taken in Fall 2020, we found the reverse trend: Republicans were more likely to mention that the Republican Party had attitudes opposite to their own.

3. It seems that between 2019 and 2020, Republicans' views became *less out-group focused*, while Democrats' views possibly became *more aligned to their in-group*. This could have contributed to rising unity amongst Democrats, and declining unity amongst Republicans. Possibly, some of these shifts were motivated by changing attitudes amongst Republicans about racism, Coronavirus and the George Floyd protests.

4. Interestingly, despite the different attitudes among some Republicans, the overwhelming number of Republicans in our sample still reported that they were going to vote for the Republican presidential ticket (Trump/Pence).

▪ Have an interpretation of this you want to share? Email it to research@skeptic.com

For additional information (e.g., statistical output, full citations) not included in this document, view the supplemental page for this report located at skeptic.com/research-center/civil-unrest-presidential-election-study/