



# PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES

turning questions into answers



# Polarization and a Deep Dive on Issues by Party

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# Acknowledgements

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*The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll and its data from 1989 through 2020 and now The NBC News Poll from 2021 and going forward is a unique data set that offers longitudinal data on a host of demographic and public policy questions.*

*Chuck Todd, Mark Murray of NBC News and Jerry Seib and Aaron Zitner of The Wall Street Journal have been committed and careful stewards of using the poll to track attitudes over time. Thank you as well to Al Hunt and John Harwood of the WSJ and all those that came before from both news organizations for the creation and years of support for this unique 30+ year poll.*

*Peter Hart has been the consistent force since 1989 pushing all involved to “look around the corner” for issues and questions that would be emerging for which we would want to have baseline data.*

*Special remembrance for the work of Bob Teeter through 2004. Much of the benchmark data comes from Peter and Bob’s early work which has stood the test of time so well. Remembering as well Tim Russert, his enthusiastic support for the poll and all he did to sharpen the work and the reporting of the results.*



## Overview

*We hear a lot about growing voter polarization and the increasing difference between the Republican and Democratic Party and its candidates on public policy issues.*

*What we do not see, read, or hear enough about is the data to demonstrate the truth in the statement behind the increasing gap between the supporters of the two parties on a host of public policy issues.*

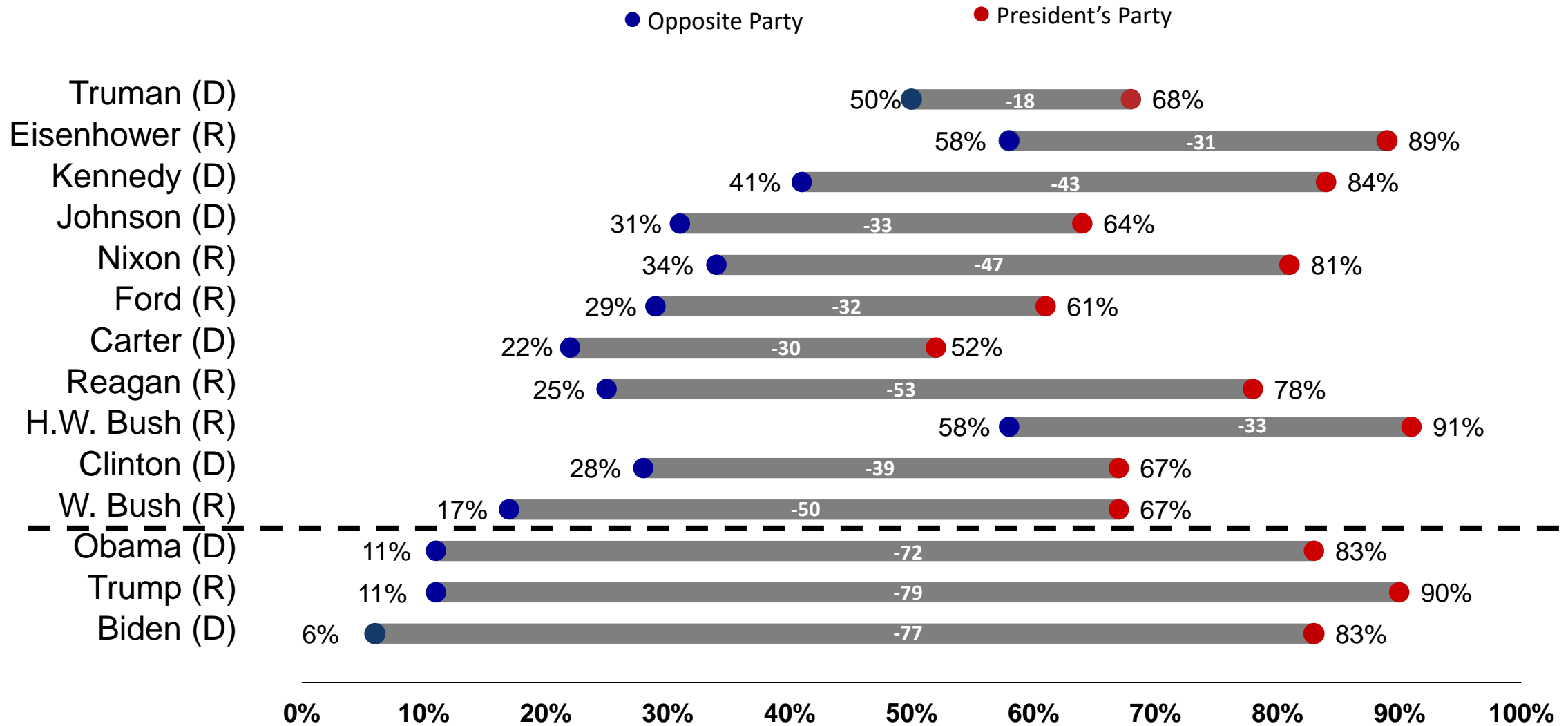
*For this report, we tried to show the initial baseline data, data from roughly a decade ago, and our most recent track(s). In this way, we highlight on so many issues the widening differences between the two political parties.*

# 1

Political scientists have used the gap on presidential approval ratings between the president's party and the out party to measure the degree of polarization. By that standard, things look bad, but stable, since the Obama presidency.

Underneath this data though is a growing gap on a host of public policy issues between the two parties.

# Presidential Job Approval by Party At This Stage of Presidency (Spring Year Before Planned Run for Re-election)



Pre-George W. Bush Data from Gallup



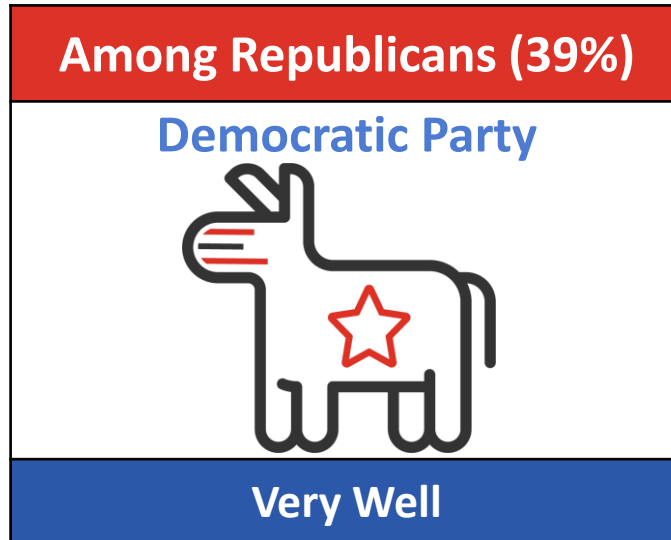
# 2

Just how bad is our political polarization?

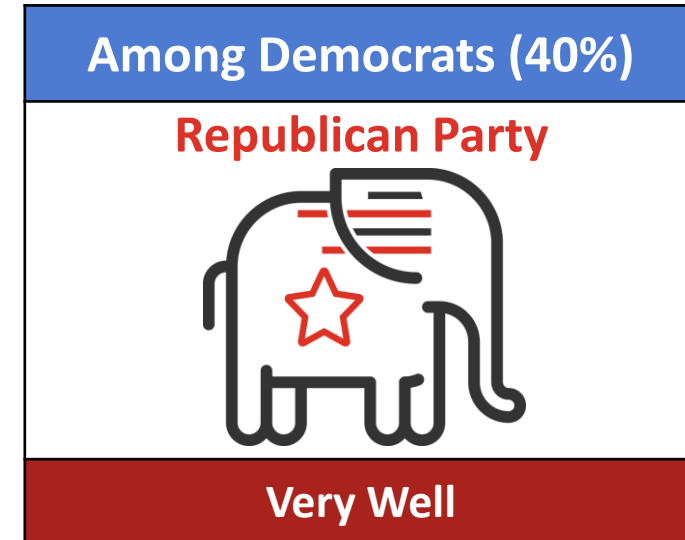
Roughly eight out of ten partisans believe the agenda of the other party poses a threat that if not stopped will destroy America as we know it.

# The Democratic/Republican party agenda poses a threat that if not stopped will destroy America

*The **Democratic Party's** agenda poses a threat that if not stopped will destroy America as we know it*



*The **Republican Party's** agenda poses a threat that if not stopped will destroy America as we know it*



**61%**

**Total Well**

**79%**

**57%**

**Total Well**

**81%**

NBC News Poll – October 2022

Next I will read you a statements. Please tell me if this describes what you think very well, somewhat well, not too well, or not well at all. The (first/next) one is...

# Red and Blue America no longer even agree on the country's issue agenda.



## Most Important Issue Net Difference by Party

### Maximum Difference 17%

### Maximum Difference 19%

### Maximum Difference 39%

2002	GOP- Dem
Fighting terrorism	+17%
Dealing with tax cuts	+8%
Dealing with Iraq	+3%
Strengthening regulations on business	+2%
Protecting Social Security	+12%
Strengthening the economy	+14%
Dealing with health care costs	+15%

2012	GOP- Dem
The economy	+14%
Foreign policy & the middle east	+14%
The federal deficit	+14%
Terrorism	+4%
Social issues and values	+11%
Health care	+14%
Social Security & Medicare	+19%

2022	GOP- Dem
Immigration/Border	+39%
Jobs/economy	+28%
Crime	+19%
Cost of living	+18%
Guns	+11%
Healthcare	+12%
Climate change	+20%
Abortion	+21%
Threats to democracy	+33%



# 3

America the divided.

Red and Blue America *do* agree our national government can no longer solve the major issues facing the country.

# A Consensus on Division



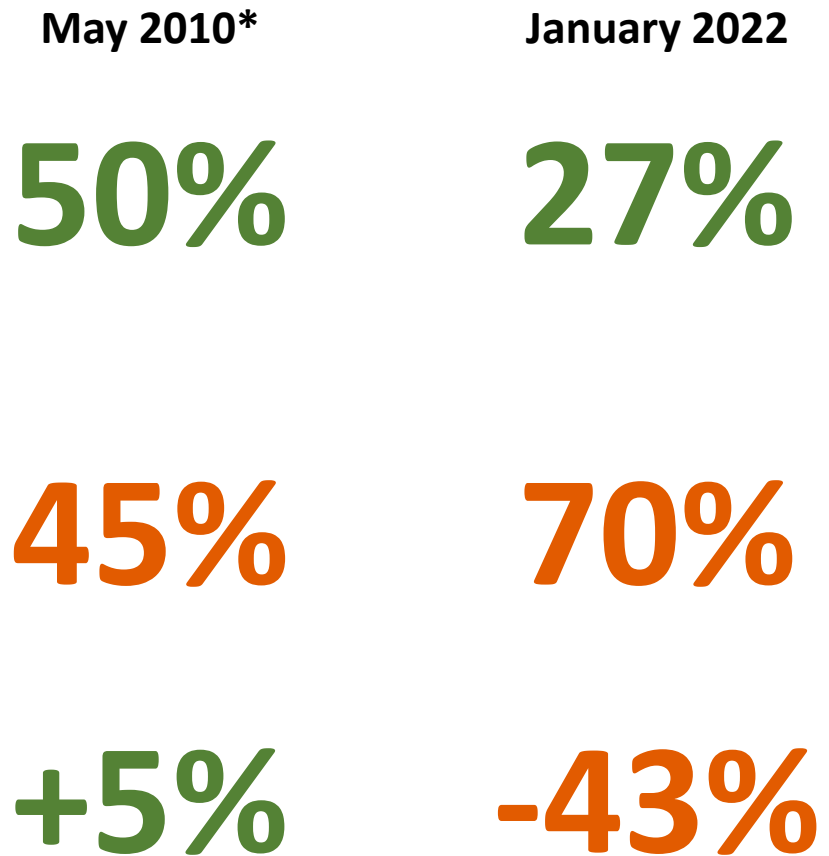
January 2022 - %Divided	
GOP	70%
Ind	79%
Dem	67%

*Which of the following statements is closer to your own view?*

**Strong partisan differences have always made America dynamic. Yet in tough times we always come together as a nation--to solve our greatest challenges--and we will continue to do so.**

**America has become so deeply divided and politically polarized that our national government can no longer solve the major issues facing our country--and these differences will only continue to grow.**

**Net Difference**



\* May 2010 survey conducted by Marttila Strategies for IMS Health.

# 4

Another change impacting our politics is the shift in the Republican coalition. Over a decade plus, the composition of the Republican party has moved decisively to be comprised of non-college White voters. These voters and their concerns are what underlies the policy dynamics of the Republican party.

The composition of the Republican party has shifted significantly over the decade to non-college Whites.



*Self-Described Republicans by Ethnicity/Education*

	2012 Merge	2014 Merge	2016 Merge	2018 Merge	2020 Merge	2022 Merge
<b>Total Republican Non-College Whites</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>Total Republican College+ Whites</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Republicans of Color</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>12%</b>

There are significant policy impacts of this demographic change.  
Can you imagine this data during the Reagan years?!

*Feelings towards  
policies Congress may  
consider.*

Providing  
more funding  
and weapons  
to Ukraine

	Congress Should Do	Congress Should Not Do	Net Difference
Total	49%	47%	+2%
Republicans	32%	63%	-31%
Independents	47%	49%	-2%
Democrats	67%	30%	+37%

The sharp increase in White non-college voters means it is the Democrats who are now much more supportive of free trade.



*Statement A: I think free trade with foreign countries is good for America because it opens up new markets and we cannot avoid the fact that it is a global economy*

<i>Shown by %Good</i>	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Net Difference (GOP – Dem)
<b>December 2015</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>+8%</b>
<b>August 2019</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>+21%</b>

Which of the following statements comes closer to what you think... **Statement A:** I think free trade with foreign countries is good for America because it opens up new markets and we cannot avoid the fact that it is a global economy **Statement B:** I think free trade with foreign countries is bad for America because it has hurt manufacturing and other key industries and there is no proof more trade creates better jobs

# 5

This past decade has seen an important shift in the Democratic Party as well. A comfortable majority of Democrats now describe themselves as “liberal.” There has been a ten-point jump in the percentage of Democrats who say they are “very liberal.”

The ideological composition of the Democratic party has become significantly more liberal over the past ten years.



<i>Self-Described Democrats by Ideology</i>	2012 Merge	2014 Merge	2016 Merge	2018 Merge	2020 Merge	2022 Merge
<b>Total Very Liberal Democrats</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Total Liberal Democrats</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>55%</b>



# 6

There are any number of demographic differences between Republicans and Democrats. Two notable items though: the difference in the percent with a gun in the household and the percent who say “none” as regards their religious belief.

# Have a Gun in Household by Party

*Do you, or does anyone in your household, own a gun of any kind?*

<i>Shown by %Yes</i>	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Net Difference (GOP – Dem)
March 2004	57%	41%	33%	+24%
February 2013	55%	49%	30%	+25%
August 2019	64%	46%	33%	+31%

# Concern that the Government Will Not do Enough to Regulate Guns by Party



*Statement B: The government will not do enough to regulate access to firearms*

<i>Shown by %Yes</i>	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Net Difference (GOP – Dem)
June 1995	48%	59%	67%	+19%
December 2015	20%	29%	73%	+53%
August 2019	22%	45%	75%	+53%

Which of the following statements concerns you more - **Statement A:** The government will go too far in restricting the rights of citizens to own guns

**Statement B:** The government will not do enough to regulate access to firearms.

# Americans Who Do Not Follow a Religion – By Party

*What is your religion? – None*

**April 2023 - %Religion None**

White Democrats	45%
People of Color Democrats	28%

	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Net Difference (GOP – Dem)
April 2013	7%	13%	10%	+3%
April 2023	12%	26%	38%	+26%



Underlying the differences between the two parties continues to be the attitude about the role of government. It is the same net difference compared to Republicans as a decade ago, but now fully 80%+ of Democrats believe the government should be doing more.

# Government Should Do More

I'm going to read you two statements about the role of government, and I'd like to know which one comes closer to your point of view. Statement A: Government should do more to solve problems and help meet the needs of people, Statement B: Government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals.

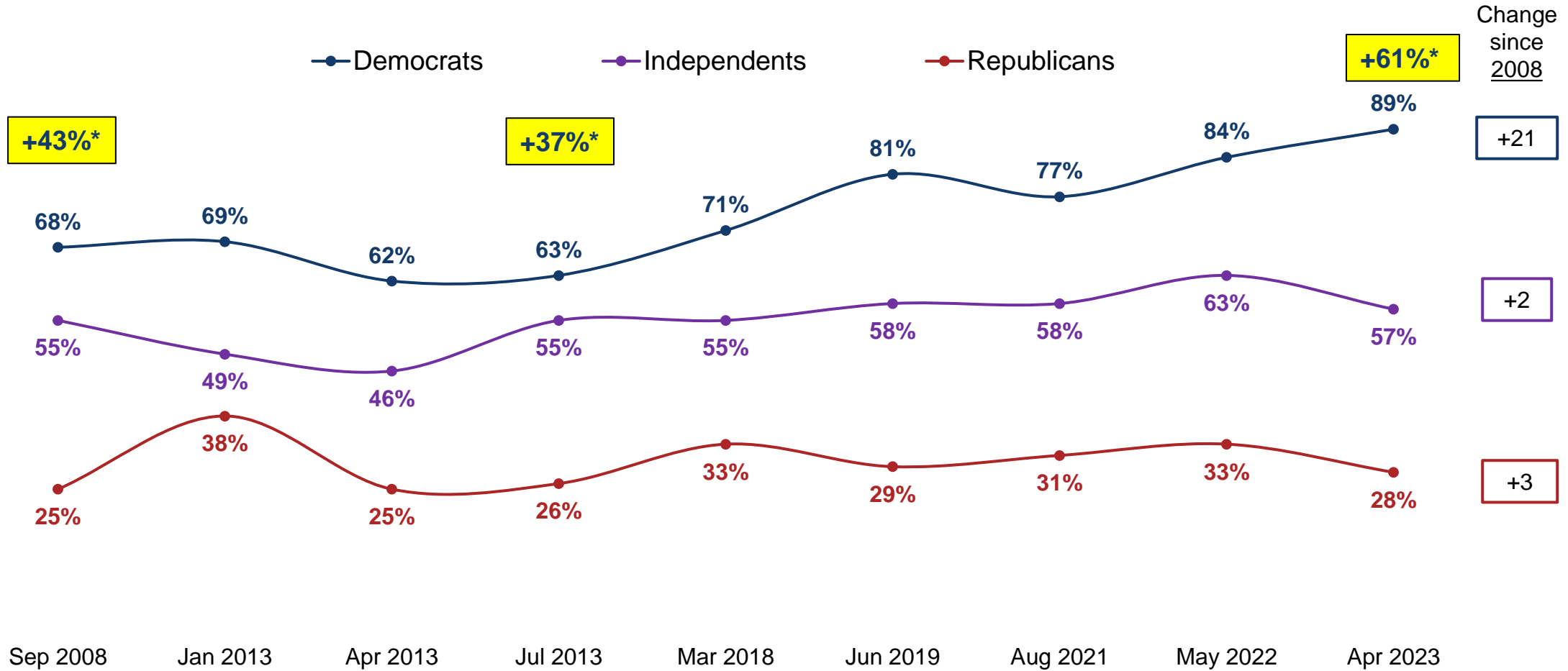
<i>Shown by %Do More</i>	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Net Difference (GOP – Dem)
<b>December 1995</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>+28%</b>
<b>March 2007</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>+47%</b>
<b>June 2013</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>+60%</b>
<b>April 2021</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>+59%</b>



The most stable finding over a decade: Republicans barely budge on a host of issues while Democrat's positions on abortion, climate change, immigration, and affirmative action have fundamentally shifted.

# Change in Support for Abortion by Party Over Time

*% who say abortion should be always legal/legal most of the time*



*\*Net Difference Republicans – Democrats*

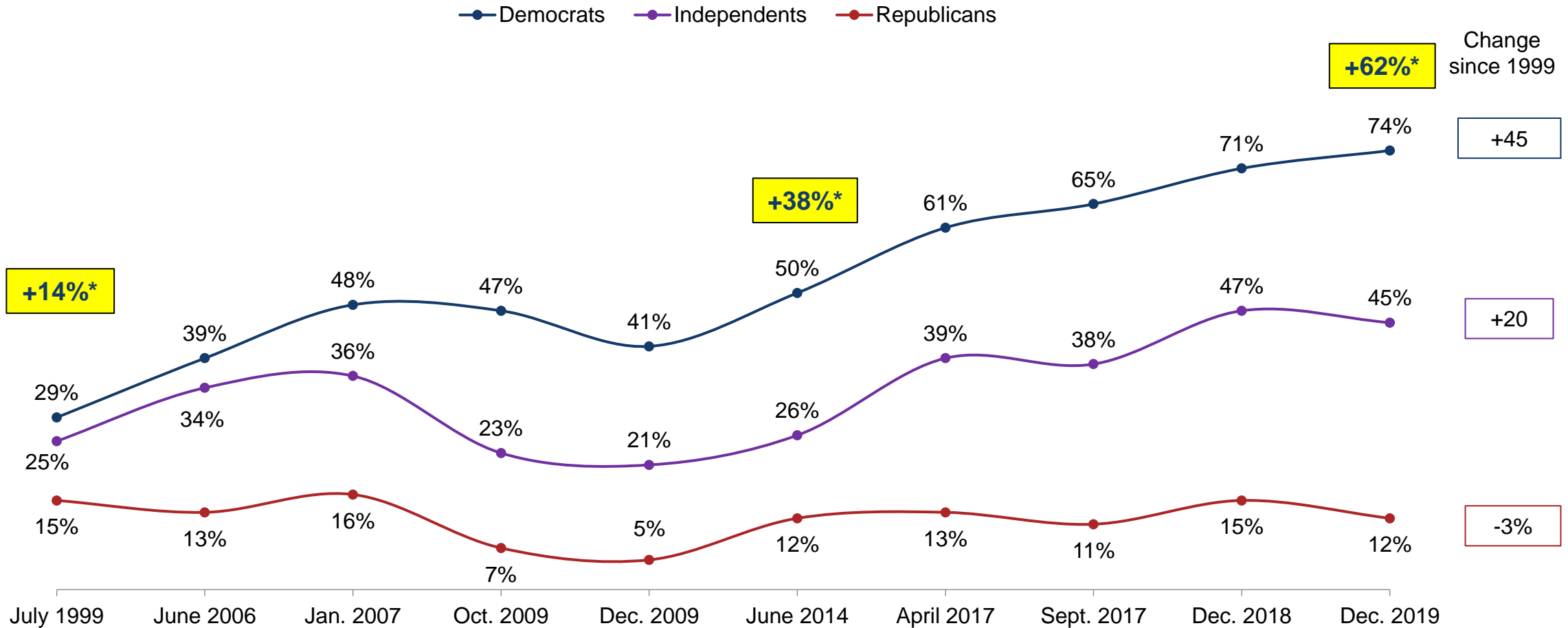
*Which comes closest to your view on abortion — abortion should always be legal; should be legal most of the time; should be made illegal except in cases of rape, incest and to save the mother's life; or abortion should be made illegal without any exceptions?*





# Climate Change Urgency by Party Over Time

% that say global climate change has been established as a serious problem and immediate action is necessary



\*Net Difference Republicans – Democrats

From what you know about global climate change or global warming, which one of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?



# Immigration Strengthens the U.S. by Party

*Statement A: Immigration adds to our character and strengthens the United States because it brings diversity, new workers, and new creative talent to this country.*

<i>Shown by %Agree</i>	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Net Difference (GOP – Dem)
April 2005	37%	42%	45%	+8%
April 2013	37%	53%	68%	+31%
August 2019	44%	65%	81%	+37%

Which of these statements comes closer to your point of view? **Statement A:** Immigration adds to our character and strengthens the United States because it brings diversity, new workers, and new creative talent to this country. **Statement B:** Immigration detracts from our character and weakens the United States because it puts too many burdens on government services, causes language barriers, and creates housing problems.

# Support for Affirmative Action by Party



*Statement A: Affirmative action programs are still needed to counteract the effects of discrimination against minorities and are a good idea as long as there are no rigid quotas.*

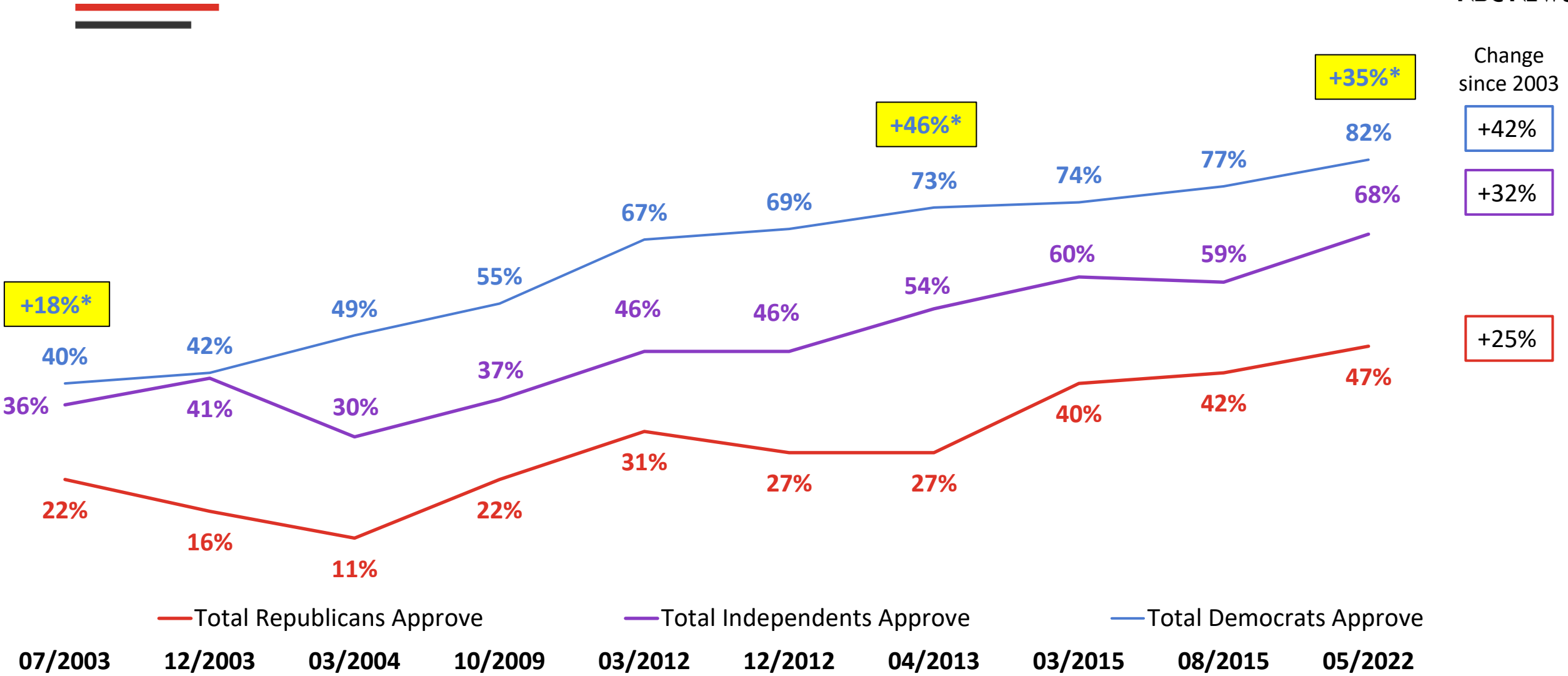
<i>Data Shown by %Who Say Affirmative Action is Still Needed</i>	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Net Difference (GOP – Dem)
<b>March 1991</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>+12%</b>
<b>January 2003</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>+40%</b>
<b>June 2013</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>+45%</b>
<b>April 2023</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>+55%</b>

Now let me read you two brief statements on affirmative action programs, and ask which one comes closer to your own point of view. **Statement A:** Affirmative action programs are still needed to counteract the effects of discrimination against minorities, and are a good idea as long as there are no rigid quotas. **Statement B:** Affirmative action programs have gone too far in favoring minorities, and should be ended because they unfairly discriminate against whites

# 9

There is an interesting counterpoint: Same sex marriage. Here Democratic support is higher than a decade ago, but the margin of their support is not as great as Republicans have moved on this issue as well.

# Approve of Same-Sex Marriages by Party – Trend



Change since 2003

+42%

+32%

+25%

— Total Republicans Approve

— Total Independents Approve

— Total Democrats Approve

07/2003    12/2003    03/2004    10/2009    03/2012    12/2012    04/2013    03/2015    08/2015    05/2022

\*Net Difference Republicans – Democrats

# 10

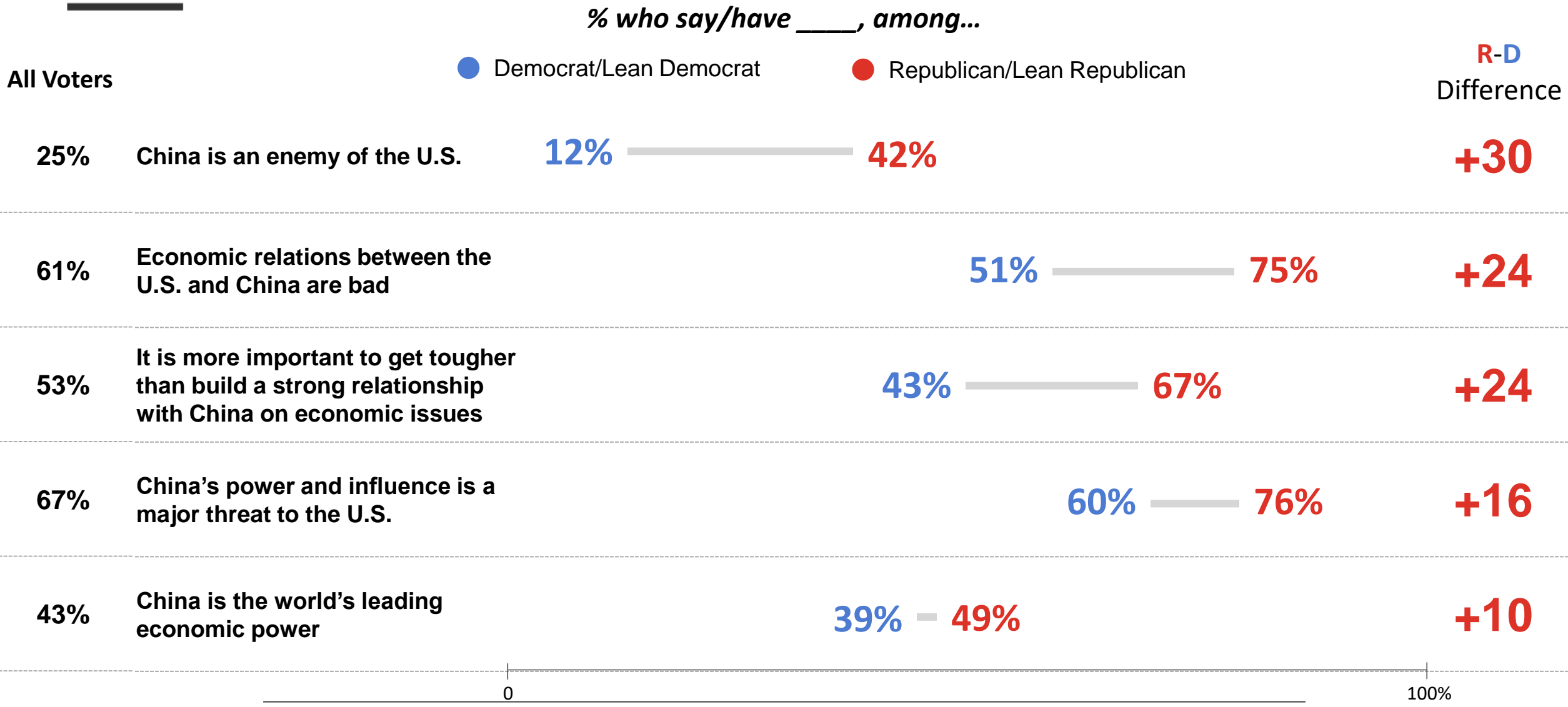
There are some interesting differences where the contrast between Republicans and Democrats bends in the other direction. Republicans are more likely to believe Martin Luther King's statement about America being a country judged by the content of your character. Republicans are more concerned about China and the FBI has become a Republican flashpoint.

# Martin Luther King's Dream in Decline Among Democrats

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement— “America is a nation where people are not judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

<i>Shown by %Agree</i>	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Net Difference (GOP – Dem)
January 2008	55%	47%	40%	+15%
January 2013	65%	54%	46%	+19%
April 2023	70%	47%	28%	+42%

# Overall negative numbers about China – with large, partisan differences on many ratings.



*Note: All differences shown are statistically significant. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 21-27, 2022. "China's Partnership with Russia Seen as Serious Problem for the U.S." Pew Research Center.*



# Feelings Towards the FBI

## Data Shown by %Positive

	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Net Difference (GOP – Dem)
July 1995	52%	49%	50%	+2%
June 2013	41%	41%	57%	+16%
September 2022	18%	37%	70%	+52%

Now I'm going to read you the names of several public figures, groups and organizations and I'd like you to rate your feelings toward each one as very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative, or very negative. If you don't know the name, please just say so.



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