

Views on Democratic Principles and Leadership: Divides Between Trump and Non-Trump Voters

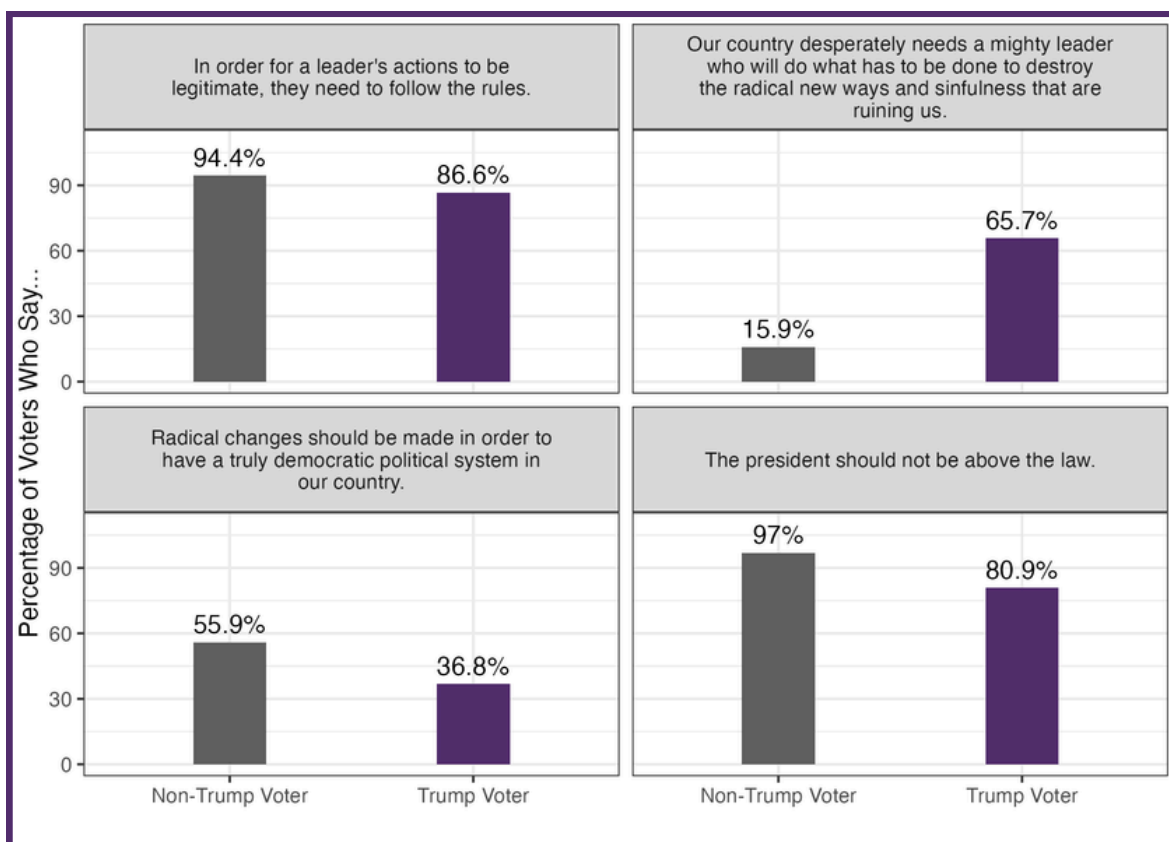
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Americans hold sharply different views on democratic norms, leadership, and the rule of law, according to new data from the Notre Dame Health of Democracy Survey. The findings highlight significant divides between Trump voters and those who did not support the former president, particularly on questions about the legitimacy of leaders, the role of the president, and support for systemic reform.

Legitimacy Rooted in Rule Following

Most voters agree on one core democratic principle: Leaders' actions are only legitimate if they follow the rules. This sentiment is nearly unanimous among non-Trump voters, with **94%** affirming the need for leaders to adhere to established rules. Though at a somewhat lower rate, Trump voters also largely agree; **87%** say that following the rules is necessary for a leader to be considered legitimate.



Sharp Divides on Leadership Styles

However, the survey reveals a stark divide in attitudes toward leadership styles. Two-thirds of Trump voters (**66%**) believe the country “desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.” Just **16%** of non-Trump voters share this view, suggesting profound differences in perceptions of the country’s direction and the leadership needed to address its challenges.

Differing Views on Democratic Reform

There is also a significant gap in views on democratic reform. A majority of non-Trump voters (**56%**) say that radical changes are necessary to establish a truly democratic political system in the U.S. Trump voters are less likely to support this kind of systemic reform, with just **37%** expressing agreement.

Presidential Accountability and the Rule of Law

Despite their differing perspectives on leadership and reform, large majorities across both groups agree that the president should not be above the law. Still, the gap here is notable—and concerning. While nearly all non-Trump voters (**97%**) say the president must be held accountable under the law, only **81%** of Trump voters agree. This 16-point difference suggests that Trump voters are significantly more open to the idea of a president who operates above traditional legal constraints. In other words, they are more likely to view presidential accountability as negotiable, a finding that raises important questions about the durability of democratic norms in an era of heightened political polarization.

These results paint a complex picture of American democracy at a crossroads. On one hand, there remains broad agreement on some foundational democratic principles. On the other, sharply divergent views on leadership, reform, and executive accountability reveal deep fractures in the electorate. Stay tuned for the Notre Dame Health of Democracy Survey Winter 2025, where we will explore how Trump voters respond to his actions in practice.