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ONE IN THREE AMERICANS BELIEVE IN ASPECTS OF IMMIGRANT ‘REPLACEMENT THEORY,’ NEW AP-NORC SURVEY FINDS

Chicago, IL, May 9, 2022 — Thirty-two percent of Americans think that a group of people are trying to replace native-born Americans with immigrants for electoral gains, according to a recent survey conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Slightly fewer (29%) express concern that increased immigration will result in native-born Americans losing economic, political, and cultural influence. These two key measures tap into the core arguments of Replacement Theory, a decades old idea, which posits that there is a group of powerful people in this country who are trying to permanently alter the culture and voting strength of native-born Americans by bringing in large groups of immigrants. The survey indicates about one in five (17%) adults agree with both of these central tenets.

These new data from [AP-NORC’s Immigration Attitudes and Conspiratorial Thinkers](#) survey come after years of heated rhetoric around immigration and its effects.

“The study shows it is not just a small number of people who see conspiracies when it comes to immigration policies and trends,” said Trevor Tompson, director of The AP-NORC Center. “While most Americans see value in a diverse population, there is a sizeable segment of the public that believes immigrants are coming to the U.S. to disrupt our way of life. And these data reveal that thinking leads to support for harsher immigration policies.”

Most Americans say the lack of economic opportunity (93%), poverty (92%), and violent crime (91%) motivate immigrants to leave their country. About two-thirds cite the impacts of climate change. In terms of what draws immigrants to the U.S., 44% say securing government assistance is a major factor and nearly a quarter of adults think changing the American way of life (24%) and influencing the outcome of elections (22%) are major reasons immigrants come to the U.S.

Across the survey, Republicans have deep concerns about the potential impacts of immigration. However, those who express the strongest anxiety about immigration are people who believe in conspiracies. These Americans are defined as those most likely to agree with a series of statements including that “much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places” and that “big events like wars, recessions, and the outcomes of elections are controlled by small groups of people who are working in secret against the rest of us.”

These conspiratorial thinkers closely resemble the general population in terms of their race, income, and education. However, this group consistently reports feeling discriminated against, is less trusting of new people, and is more likely to be evangelical and interpret the Bible literally. And people who believe in conspiracy theories are more than twice as likely as the general public to agree with both the core arguments behind Replacement Theory (42% vs. 17%).

“The people who hold conspiratorial beliefs don’t fit into any particular demographic,” said Jennifer Benz, deputy director of The AP-NORC Center. “In today’s media environment, when

misinformation is so widespread, these results show that people from all kinds of political, demographic, and socioeconomic backgrounds can be susceptible to these narratives.”

About a third (32%) of all Republicans register as high conspiratorial thinkers, compared to about a quarter of Democrats (24%) and independents (25%). White conspiratorial thinkers are also far more likely than other white Americans to believe they face discrimination in their daily lives because of their race.

About the Study

The nationwide study was conducted by The AP-NORC Center from December 1–23, 2021, using TrueNorth®, which combines a sample from AmeriSpeak®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago, with a non-probability panel sample. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 4,173 people ages 18 and older living in the United States. The margin of sampling error is +/- 1.96 percentage points. Complete questions and results are available at: www.apnorc.org/projects/immigration-attitudes-and-conspiratorial-thinkers.

About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

- The Associated Press (AP) is an independent global news organization dedicated to factual reporting. Founded in 1846, AP today remains the most trusted source of fast, accurate, unbiased news in all formats and the essential provider of the technology and services vital to the news business. More than half the world’s population sees AP journalism every day. www.ap.org
- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and nonpartisan research institutions in the world. www.norc.org

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more. Learn more at www.apnorc.org.

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