

**Sacred Values, Willingness to Sacrifice, and  
Accountability for the Capitol Insurrection: Exploring How  
Deeply and Why Americans Hold Their  
January 6-Related Views**

**October 2022**

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# Background

This report explores Americans' attitudes toward January 6 and related accountability efforts, specifically examining *how deeply* and *why* Americans hold their views on accountability for the Capitol attack. **In sum, Americans hold strong and divergent positions about accountability for January 6, and a striking proportion claimed they would be willing to sacrifice for their views to take effect.**

Engaging a broad segment of Americans in conversations about January 6 is critical for developing the shared narrative needed to prevent further political violence. This is a particularly urgent task as the Select Committee continues to expose the truth about the insurrection and those responsible. To explore alternative ways of communicating around the attack, we sought to identify whether January 6 and related accountability efforts have been **sacralized—or held as “sacred values”**—by Americans. Research shows that once an issue has been sacralized, we need to communicate around it differently.

**Over 60% of respondents sacralized stances related to accountability or perceived lack of responsibility for January 6.**

Our findings provide starting points for engaging segments of Americans that sacralize stances on accountability for January 6—audiences with potentially the strongest views on these issues. Not all communications efforts will seek to engage these groups. Even so, understanding whether, why, and among whom January 6 stances are sacralized will benefit stakeholders' contextual awareness and position them to better prepare for any blowback that their communications may have among Americans.

We surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1274 respondents via YouGov in January 2022. Importantly, we conducted this research prior to the Select Committee hearings and the stances discussed here may have since changed in prevalence and strength. Still, recent reporting indicates that these themes remain foundational to engaging Americans in conversations around January 6.

This is the second in a series of resources summarizing our findings. Our [first report](#) provided an overview of how Americans view and assign responsibility for the January 6 violence. It also identified a segment of conservatives — “accountability-minded conservatives”— amenable to the Select Committee and accountability efforts more broadly. This segment complicates the narrative that views toward January 6 fall neatly along ideological lines.

# Background: A Very Brief Sacred Values Explainer

This project used a sacred values lens to examine how deeply Americans hold their views on accountability for January 6, and why. Over 60% of respondents sacralized stances on accountability for January 6.

Sacred values are moral imperatives, highly intertwined with emotions and identity, that are processed in a different part of the brain than traditional values or policy tradeoffs. We can think of sacred values as strong, absolutist views, something we act upon as a duty or obligation rather than as a choice. **This means that sacred values cannot be framed or bargained over in terms of costs and benefits.** Doing so can prompt value-holders to become angry or morally outraged, and to disengage from further conversations, producing a *backfire effect*. Disrespecting a sacred value in this way can also lead sacralizers to become “devoted actors” who endorse violence in defense of the threatened value.

How do issues become sacralized? **We are more likely to sacralize an issue when we believe the value, or our group, is under threat and when we deem a particular stance as central to our group membership.** For [instance](#), believing that support for the border wall is a core piece of what it means to be Republican or that support for increasing the number of refugees is a core piece of being a Democrat.

**Understanding how beliefs become sacralized is doubly important for January 6-related issues.** Amid today’s toxic polarization, both liberals and conservatives feel under threat from one another. Further, stances on the 2020 election and January 6 feature prominently in political rhetoric across the ideological spectrum and can appear central to what it means to be either a liberal or conservative. **In sum, today’s environment is ripe for January 6-related views to become sacralized.**

# Background: Introduction to Sacralized Stances

This report explores how Americans across the ideological spectrum sacralize January 6. We particularly examine sacralized stances related to (1) perceived lack of responsibility for the violence, and (2) accountability for those deemed responsible for the violence.

Below, we provide a brief overview of these themes and our approach, elaborating in greater detail throughout the report.

**Sacralizing lack of responsibility for the violence:** Given narratives falsely characterizing January 6 as a “tourist visit” or a “false flag operation” to incriminate Donald Trump, we investigated whether Americans sacralized that Donald Trump or the protestors were not responsible for the violence.

To identify this as a sacred value, we focused on respondents who did not select either Trump or the protestors as responsible for January 6 (we earlier asked respondents to assign responsibility for the violence) and who indicated that either of these parties’ lack of responsibility mattered “a lot” or “totally” to them. We asked these respondents whether they would engage with information about these parties’ potential responsibility in exchange for money. This might involve participating in a dialogue, watching a documentary, or reading an official investigation report.

Respondents who chose that there was “no amount of money” that they would accept in exchange for engaging with this information were considered sacred value-holders. We elaborate on this approach and our findings, [here](#).

NOTE - We only asked these questions in reference to Donald Trump and the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol.

**Sacralizing accountability for the violence:** While the “lack of responsibility” questions examined whether Americans sacralized that Donald Trump or the protestors were *not* responsible for the violence, the accountability questions investigated whether Americans sacralized accountability for the parties they did deem responsible for January 6.

Here, we focused on respondents who indicated it mattered “a lot” or “totally” to them to hold accountable the parties they deemed responsible for January 6 (we earlier asked respondents to assign responsibility for the violence). Next, we asked these respondents to indicate the amount of money they would accept so that the responsible party was not held accountable.

Respondents who stated that there was “no amount of money” they would accept were considered sacred value-holders. We elaborate on this approach and our findings, [here](#).

NOTE - Respondents received these questions in reference to those they selected as most responsible for the violence, so long as they indicated that holding this party accountable mattered “a lot” or “totally.”

## Background: Sacralized January 6 Stances

Over 60% of respondents sacralized stances related to January 6. This slide summarizes these stances. We organize these stances both thematically (perceived lack of responsibility and accountability) and by individual/entity. We conducted this research prior to the Select Committee hearings and the stances discussed here may have since changed in prevalence and strength. Still, recent reporting indicates that these themes remain foundational to engaging Americans in conversations around January 6. We include a table in the [Appendix](#) summarizing these stances.

### BY THEME

**Sacralizing lack of responsibility for the violence:** NOTE - We only asked these questions in reference to Donald Trump and the protestors.

- **Donald Trump is not responsible for the violence:** 14% of respondents sacralized this stance: 33% of conservatives, 9% of moderates, and .8% of liberals.
- **The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol are not responsible for the violence:** Only 6% of respondents sacralized that the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol are not responsible for the violence: 13% of conservatives, 5% of moderates, and 2% of liberals. Put differently, **94% of respondents were open to considering the protestors' responsibility.**

**Sacralizing accountability** for parties that respondents deem responsible for the violence.

- **Donald Trump:** 31% of respondents sacralized holding Donald Trump accountable: 63% of liberals, 30% of moderates, and 4% of conservatives.
- **The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol:** 17% of respondents sacralized this view: 21% of liberals, 20% of moderates, and 11% of conservatives.
- **The far-right, including the Proud Boys and QAnon adherents:** 18% of respondents sacralized this view: 37% of liberals, 16% of moderates, and 5% of conservatives.
- **The far-left, including Antifa:** 12% of respondents—almost exclusively conservatives—sacralized this view: 31% of conservatives, 7% of moderates, and .3% of liberals (one single liberal).

### BY INDIVIDUAL/ENTITY

Note - we only asked about non-responsibility in reference to Donald Trump and the protestors

- **Donald Trump**
  - **Lack of responsibility for the violence:** 14% of respondents sacralized this stance: 33% of conservatives, 9% of moderates, and .8% of liberals.
  - **Holding Trump accountable:** 31% of respondents sacralized this view. This fractured along ideological lines: 63% of liberals, 30% of moderates, and 4% of conservatives.
- **The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol**
  - **The protestors' non-responsibility for the violence:** Only 6% of respondents sacralized that the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol are not responsible for the violence: 13% of conservatives, 5% of moderates, and 2% of liberals. Put differently, **94% of respondents would consider the protestors' responsibility.**
  - **Holding the protestors accountable:** 17% of respondents sacralized this stance. This cut across ideology—21% of liberals, 20% of moderates, and 11% of conservatives held this stance.
- **The far-right, including the Proud Boys and QAnon adherents:** 18% of respondents sacralized this stance: 37% of liberals, 16% of moderates, and 5% of conservatives.
- **The far-left, including Antifa:** 12% of respondents—almost exclusively conservatives—sacralized holding the far-left, including Antifa accountable: 31% of conservatives, 7% of moderates, and .3% of liberals (one single liberal).

# Part I: Communicating Around Sacred Values— General Insights

**Sacred values have been identified in conflict contexts around the world.** In Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Israel, Ireland, Kurdistan, and Palestine, efforts to trump a sacred value with material offerings triggered negative responses and bolstered respondents' adherence to their sacred values. In some cases, it led to an increase in the endorsement of violence.

We cannot address sacralized stances in the way we would typical values or policy positions—doing so is likely to backfire. For this reason, when sacred values are not central to an issue or conversation, they should be avoided.

That said, they are not untouchable. When they are central to an issue (as they often are), **respectful, values-based communications might avoid the backfire effect**, especially if they signal an understanding of the threatened value.

In the next slides, we suggest principles for communicating to those who sacralize January 6 accountability. **Note: We have not tested these approaches.** They are based on the nascent literature dealing with how to communicate around sacred values, making them excellent starting points for future message testing.

# Principles for Communicating Around Sacred Values

The below themes or values appeared frequently in narratives from January 6 sacralizers. Appealing to these values may be starting points for engaging sacralizers. They may also be excellent starting points for messaging testing initiatives.

- **Personal responsibility/accountability**: Individuals must take responsibility and ultimately be held accountable for their actions.
- **Equality before the law**: All people—regardless of their personal power, wealth, or political leanings—must be equal before the law.
- **Confidence in the integrity of our institutions and elections**: U.S. elections and government institutions must operate with integrity.
- **Non-recurrence/deterrence**: Americans must prevent further threats to our democracy, violations of our constitution, and acts of violence.

We also **found** that “respecting America’s institutions and laws” and “working hard to support oneself and one’s family” may offer productive paths for engagement, particularly with conservatives.

**Step 1: Try to understand the worldviews and values underlying the sacralized stance**—ask individuals *why* the concerned issue matters so much to them. (For instance: “*I can tell this matters a lot to you. Can you share more about why?*”) A sacred value may not be about the issue itself but rather the beliefs, group identities, and worldviews connected to it that feel threatened. Further, people with opposing sacralized stances might still have things in common. Speaking to these common values could lay a foundation for engaging individuals with divergent value positions in a shared conversation. **We include a list of potential underlying values or themes to the left and throughout this report.**

**Step 2: Affirm the underlying values.** Throwing carrots or sticks at a sacred value, or attempting to persuade the sacralizer that their position is wrong, will likely backfire and cause the value-holder to disengage from conversation. **Alternatively, acknowledging the underlying value may build trust and lead to further dialogue.**

**Steps 1-2 will allow you to see whether you can side-step a sacred value. When this isn’t possible, try to defuse the sacred value itself.**

**Step 3: Consider whether it’s possible to trade off on sacred values.** When a sacred value cannot be sidestepped, it can sometimes be traded for another sacralized stance—such that the other sacred value is prioritized first. For instance, imagine asking a mother to sell their child for \$5000. They would be outraged and disengage from further conversation. But then imagine that selling their child would be the only way to save its life—many would consider it. This is an example of trading one sacred value (e.g., keeping one’s child) for another (e.g., the child’s life).

**Step 4: Appeal to social identities and group norms that cast doubt upon the sacralization.** When people see that their ingroup members are not sacralizing an issue, they are less likely to sacralize it themselves. For that reason, trusted messengers and others that provide behavioral cues (such as religious or political leaders, veterans, businesspeople, and so on) can help by casting doubt on the sacralized stance or by NOT speaking about issues in absolutist terms.



## PART II

# Sacred Values & Lack of Responsibility for the Violence

### Themes for message testing to these value-holders:

- **Personal responsibility**: Individuals must take responsibility and ultimately be held accountable for their actions.
- **Confidence in the integrity of our elections and institutions**: U.S. elections and government institutions must operate with integrity (this specifically addresses belief in false flag conspiracy theories).

- Respondents – particularly conservatives – sacralized the belief that Donald Trump is not responsible for the January 6 violence.
- Most who sacralized that Donald Trump was not responsible believed that the January 6 violence was a false flag operation, that the protestors are responsible for their own actions, and/or that Donald Trump is a good person who would never have instigated the violence.
- Few respondents (6%) sacralized the protestors' lack of responsibility for the January 6 violence. Put differently, 94% of respondents were open to blaming the protestors for the violence.

# Methodology: Identifying lack of responsibility as a sacred value

**Background on sacred values questions:** Previous studies have shown that sacred values are processed differently in the brain than traditional values or issue positions. While cost-benefit decision-making is processed in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, sacred values are processed in the left temporoparietal junction and the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, areas associated with rule-based behavior and the inhibition of negative emotions and inappropriate behaviors.

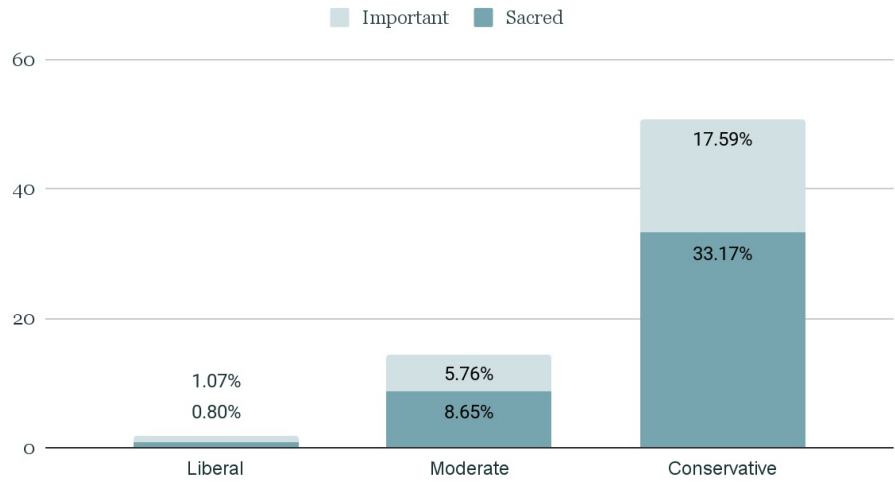
We conducted a nationally-representative survey with questions that prompted respondents to make material tradeoffs on potentially sacred stances, seeking to activate participants' absolutist, rule-based thinking. Respondents who refused to even consider alternative stances in exchange for large sums of money were considered sacred value-holders.

- Amid narratives falsely characterizing January 6 as a “tourist visit” or a “false flag operation” to incriminate Donald Trump, we sought to investigate whether individuals sacralized that either Donald Trump or the protestors were *not* responsible for the violence.
- We asked respondents to select the parties they believed were responsible for the January 6 violence. Those who did not select Donald Trump or the protestors were asked how important this stance was to them on a 1-5 scale (1=not at all, 5=totally). Those who selected “4” or “5” were asked to explain why this mattered so much to them. We coded these open-ended responses to better understand the worldviews and values driving individuals to sacralize this stance.
- They were then asked, *“Now imagine that someone would offer you varying amounts of money to learn more about [their] potential responsibility...This might involve engaging in a dialogue, watching a documentary or news segment, or reading an official investigation report or several articles, all about their potential responsibility. What amount of money would it take to convince you to engage in these actions?”* Those who chose “no amount of money” were considered sacred value-holders.
- This question directly implicates the non-negotiable aspect of sacred values: Sacred value holders would turn down a million dollars to avoid even engaging in a dialogue or reading a few news articles about Trump’s or the protestors’ responsibility for the violence—actions that wouldn’t even contribute to a change in either’s accountability prospects.

# 14% of respondents sacralized the belief that Donald Trump is not responsible for the January 6 violence.

- When examined along ideological lines, 33% of conservatives, 9% of moderates, and .8% of liberals held this sacralized stance.
- Put differently, 33% of conservatives and 9% of moderates would not engage in a dialogue, watch a news segment, or read an official investigation report about Donald Trump’s potential responsibility for the January 6 violence.
- **An additional 18% of conservatives and 6% of moderates would do so, but only for \$1 million** (this is the “important” category to the right).

Donald Trump is NOT responsible for the Jan. 6 violence

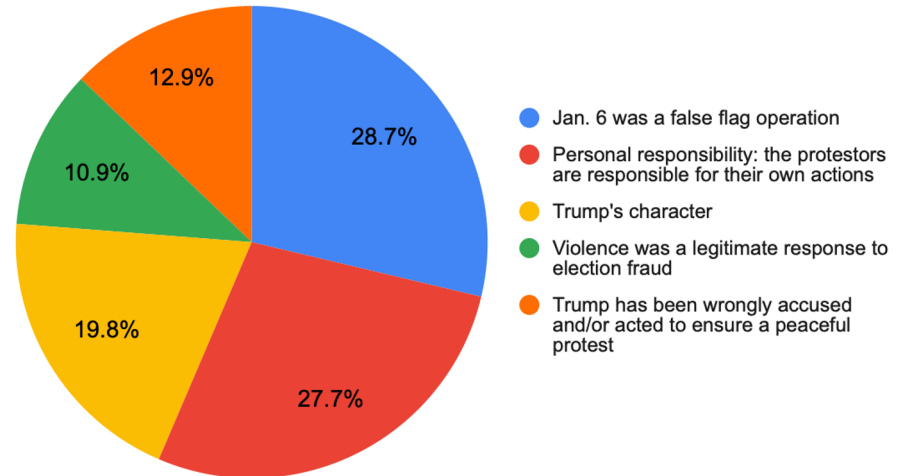


Percentage of respondents, by ideology, that holds Donald Trump’s lack of responsibility for the January 6 violence as a “sacred” or “important” value.

Many who sacralized that Trump is not responsible for the January 6 violence believed that the insurrection was a false flag operation or that the protestors are responsible for their own actions.

- We coded open-ended responses to better understand *why* the 14% who sacralize that Trump is not responsible for the violence held this view. The responses are represented in the pie chart to the right.
- The most frequent explanations were that January 6 was a **false flag operation**, that the protestors are responsible for their own actions (“**personal responsibility**”), and that Donald Trump is a good person who wouldn’t instigate violence (“**character**”).

Sacred Themes: Trump is NOT Responsible



Below, we sample **unedited (verbatim)**, prototypical responses for the three most frequent explanations among value-holders for why Donald Trump was NOT responsible for the January 6 violence. **While many of these responses repeat debunked conspiracy theories, engaging these underlying values may be starting points for reaching these audiences without affirming or repeating the false claims themselves.** (Note: responses can fit within multiple categories.)

## FALSE FLAG OPERATION (29%)

- *“...The FBI and Antifa planned a false flag to entrap patriots. The Capitol police waved the protestors in. It was all fake and these people are nothing but political prisoners.”*
- *“the Democrats want to GET Trump any way any how so that he cant [sic] run again and continue to clean out the swamp. Jan 6 was A set up Pelosi refused to call out the National guard which Trump authorized and theory has it Govt agitators were in the crowd to incite some theroies [sic] say ANTIFA was involved .the Jan 6 committee is a sham to get Trump maybe when the Republicans [sic] take over in 2022 they will have A committee to investigate BLM and ANTIFA riots and the democratic party involvement”*

## PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (28%)

- *“I don't believe in blaming anyone except the people who participated! There is nothing to show that Trump sent people there, encouraged them.”*
- *“He has no more responsible than I am plain and simple. People are independent actors they can make choices which is both good and bad. We have historically assign blame to individuals for their individual acts not trying to link it to another party. It is inappropriate to link ask of one to another that is not related.”*
- *“Donald Trump isn't responsible for the actions of his loyalists. People overreacted and misinterpreted his statements.”*
- *“People are responsible for their own actions. What Donald Trump said is not an excuse for anyone's actions.”*

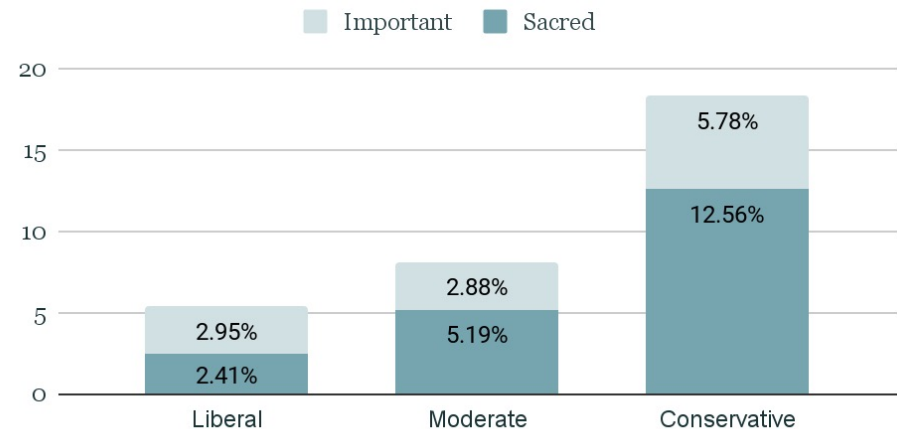
## CHARACTER (20%)

- *“Donald Trump is not a violent man. He would not have told his supporters to do this.”*
- *“Because Trump was one of the best presidents we ever had.”*
- *“Because he was a former president and we look up to him.”*
- *“He tried to stop the violence, not incite it. He was such a great President and deserves respect.”*
- *“He is a good honest and Christian”*
- *“Donald Trump was by far the best President in my almost 80 years of life. The 2020 election was a total con job by the democratic party.”*

## The vast majority of respondents across ideology would consider the protestors as responsible for the violence.

- Amid revisionist narratives falsely characterizing the arrested protestors as “political prisoners,” we investigated whether respondents sacralized that “the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol” were not responsible for the violence.
- Only 6% of respondents sacralized this view: 13% of conservatives, 5% of moderates, and 2% of liberals would not engage with information about the protestors’ potential responsibility. An additional 6% of conservatives, 3% of moderates, and 3% of liberals would do so, but only for \$1 million.
- **Put differently, 94% of respondents were open to considering the protestors’ responsibility for the violence.** This is consistent with our [earlier-reported](#) findings that respondents across ideology view the protestors as among the two groups most responsible for the violence.
- These figures may have shifted in either direction since the polling was conducted in January 2022, amid the Select Committee hearings, the new information that has been revealed, and an uptick in narratives among the MAGA wing of the Republican party valorizing those arrested for January 6 involvement (consider the [CPAC prisoner exhibit](#)).

The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol are NOT responsible for the Jan. 6 violence

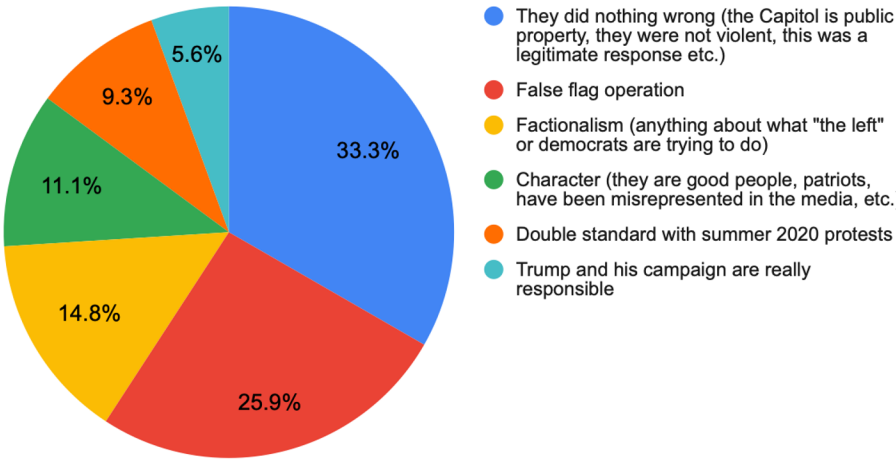


Percentage of respondents that holds the protestors’ lack of responsibility for the January 6 violence as a “sacred” or “important” value, by ideology.

Of the 76 respondents (6% of the total) who sacralized that the protestors are not responsible for the violence, 33% cited that the protestors did nothing wrong and 26% cited that January 6 was a false flag operation.

- Additional explanations focused on "the left" ("factionalism") and the protestors' character – how they are good people, even patriots who have been misrepresented in the media.
- An additional 9% focused on the perceived double standard with how the summer 2020 protests were handled. For instance, *"Antifa and BLM protesters rioted, looted and burned several of our major cities and they were cheered on by the Democrats, as soon as conservatives protested they were arrested. This is patently unfair."*

Sacred themes: The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol are NOT responsible



Below we sample **unedited (verbatim)**, prototypical responses for the three most frequent explanations among value-holders for why the protestors were NOT responsible for the January 6 violence. Again, this only comprises 6% of respondents. **While many of these responses repeat debunked conspiracy theories, engaging these underlying values may be starting points for reaching these audiences without affirming or repeating the false claims themselves.** (Note: responses can fit within multiple categories.)

## THEY DID NOTHING WRONG (33%)

- *“There was no trespass. Those buildings belong to the citizens of this country and no one should be kept out under the circumstances of Jan 6.”*
- *“The only violence that took place that day was officer Byrd shooting and killing unarmed Ashli Babbitt, a veteran. And he got promoted. I hope he watches his back very carefully.”*
- *“The “violence” was limited to forcing their way in, but none were armed with weapons. Most were simply caught up in the moment.”*

## FALSE FLAG OPERATION (26%)

- *“The event was staged by congressional democrats [sic] and federal law enforcement. They must be held accountable”*
- *“Its just wrong. Its lies. Those who entered and caused damage should be prosecuted. I just dont believe they were part of the peaceful protest group. I believe the violence was left wing groups pretending to be part of the peaceful protest”*
- *“Flrst of all, I believe that most of these “forceful” entrants were encouraged by the undercover stooges from the FBI, or members of Antifa, Communists, etc. Not one of the real Trump supporters would have done this...only outliers. And fuck the Dems and Liz Cheney who are trying to sell this bullshit.”*

## FACTIONALISM (15%)

- *“The Left wants communism.Communism.. they want to CONTROL everyone... this time was predicted by a Russian leader in the 50's we will get you through your children & grandchildren”*
- *“I believe we are going to go through a rebellion. All of this we care about everyone else except for the white population.”*
- *“Because they are being excoriated for actions that would be applauded by the media and democrats if they were done in the name of Antifa, BLM, or communism”*



# PART III

## Sacred Values & Accountability for the Violence

Themes for message testing targeting these value-holders:

- **Personal responsibility**: Individuals must take responsibility and ultimately be held accountable for their actions.
- **Equality before the law**: All, regardless of their personal power, wealth, or ideology, must be equal before the law.
- **Confidence in the integrity of our institutions and elections**: The importance of upholding the integrity of our elections and government institutions.
- **Non-recurrence**: Americans must prevent further threats to our democracy, violations of our constitution, and acts of violence.

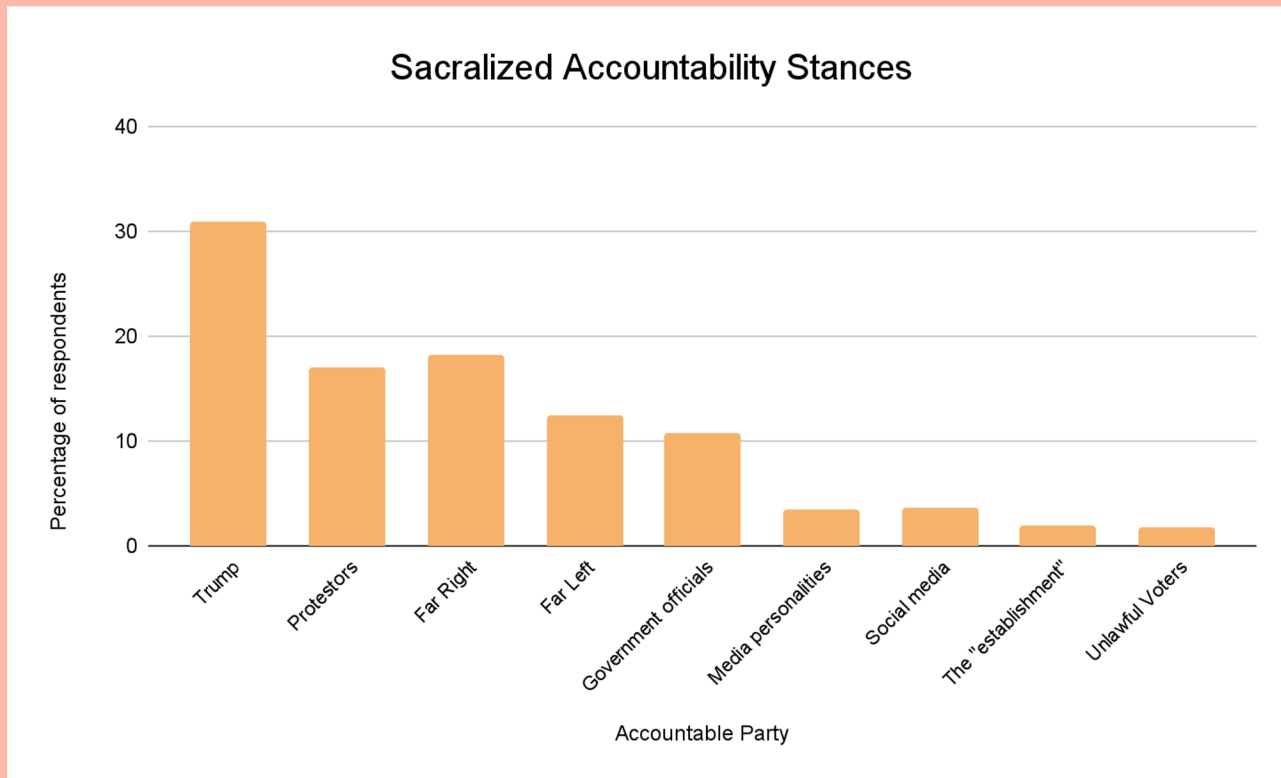
- **Over 60% of respondents sacralized holding accountable those they deemed responsible for the January 6 violence.**
- **As with assignments of responsibility, sacralized accountability stances largely splintered along ideological lines.**
- **Over 45% of respondents also claimed that they would be willing to sacrifice their relationships, their jobs, or even their lives for their views on accountability to take effect.**

# Methodology: Identifying Accountability as a Sacred Value

- To determine whether respondents sacralized their stances on accountability for January 6, we asked them to select up to two individuals or entities that they believed were most responsible for the violence (the same responsibility question referenced [earlier](#)).
- Next, we asked respondents whether they would support holding their selected individuals/entities accountable, and then how much this mattered to them on a 1-5 scale (1=not at all, 5=totally). For those who selected 4 (“a lot”) or 5 (“totally”), we asked them to describe why this issue mattered so much to them. We coded these open-ended responses to better understand the worldviews and values driving individuals to sacralize their accountability stance.
- To understand whether holding the entity accountable was a sacred value, we asked respondents to indicate the amount of money they would accept so that the relevant party was not held accountable, offering the same monetary options referenced earlier. Those that chose “No amount of money” were considered to sacralize accountability for this person/entity.

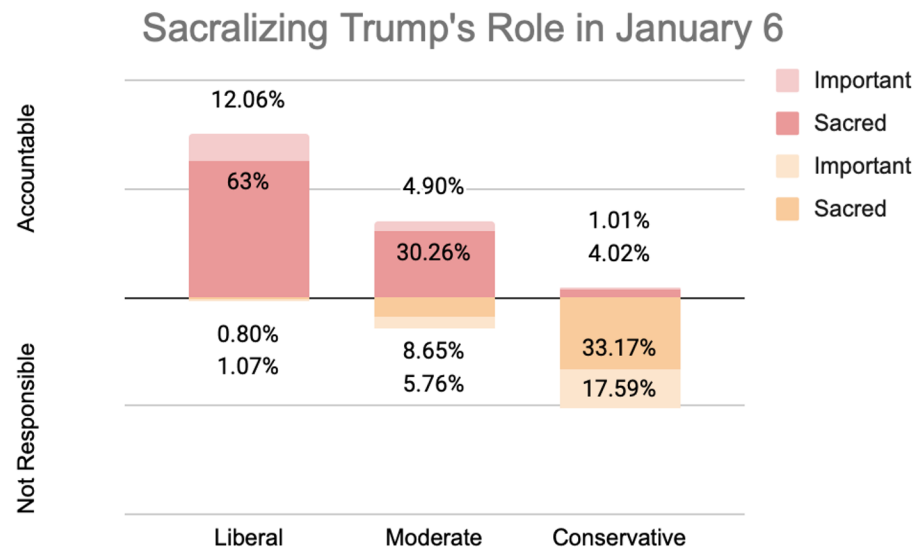
## Respondents sacralized holding a range of figures accountable for the January 6 violence.

- As with assignments of responsibility, sacralized accountability stances largely broke down along ideological lines. While liberals predominantly sacralized holding Trump and the far-right accountable, conservatives sacralized holding the far-left (and, to a lesser extent, public officials, accountable (see [slide 6](#)).
- Respondents across the political spectrum sacralized holding accountable the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol.
- **Across the board, there was a small positive correlation between sacralized accountability stances and professed willingness to sacrifice a close friendship, a job or source of income, and even one's life for one's stance to take effect.**



## 31% of respondents sacralized holding Donald Trump accountable.

- This broke down along ideological lines: 63% of liberals, 30% of moderates, and 4% of conservatives held this view.
- This is the near-opposite ideological breakdown of those who sacralized that Trump was not [responsible for the violence](#): While the majority of liberals sacralized that Trump should be held accountable for January 6, one-third of conservatives sacralized that he was not responsible for the violence.

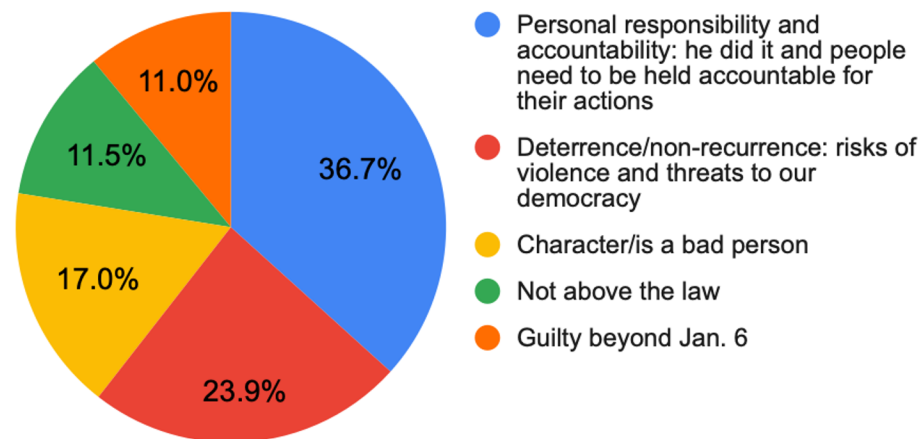


Comparison of respondents that sacralize Trump's lack of responsibility for the violence and accountability for his role, by ideology.

Over one-third (37%) of those who sacralized holding Trump accountable cited his responsibility and the importance of holding people accountable for their actions (“personal responsibility”).

- An additional 24% cited that an absence of accountability would pose risks to our democracy and of further violence (“deterrence/ non-recurrence”).
- Some respondents (17%) also cited Trump’s character, arguing that he is a bad or immoral person.

Sacred themes: Holding Donald Trump accountable



Below, we sample **unedited (verbatim)**, prototypical responses for the three most frequent explanations among sacred value-holders for why Donald Trump should be held accountable for the January 6 violence. Engaging these values may be starting points for reaching these audiences. (Note: responses can fit within multiple categories.)

## PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (37%)

- *“Because if it was not for him this wouldn't have happened”*
- *“Because the people who got arrested did this in his name, he needs to be accountable for rallying.”*
- *“They lied to people to encourage them to overthrow a legitimate election.”*
- *“Because they're never held accountable. They spew lies and their listeners and viewers assume they're all in it together, but they're not.”*

## DETERRENCE/ NON-RECURRENT (24%)

- *“So that 1/6 never happens again.”*
- *“If he is not held accountable, it is a show to his followers that he did nothing wrong and anyone can get away with anything”*
- *“To ensure the stability of our democracy thus sending the world a clear message as to how democracy works, even with its imperfections.”*
- *“I never imagined such a think [sic] could happen yet it did. Everything possible and necessary to ensure such never happens again MUST be done.”*
- *“He is a moron, but the next want to be tyrant might not be. The precedent needs to be set now that tyrants are held accountable to discourage the next one.”*

## CHARACTER (17%)

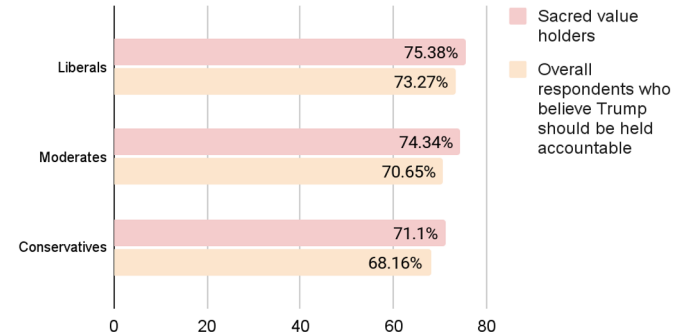
- *“I fell that this man is sick and evil. He tells lies everyday”*
- *“He's a grifter, or as a onetime radio host used to say (about other people) he's a fake, phony, and a fraud.”*
- *“He is part of the problem. A rich man who never has consequences for his wrong doings.”*
- *“Because of his total ineptitude in his time as President, he was behaving like an overgrown child, in my humble opinion”*
- *“Donald Trump BETRAYED the trust of America. He was nothing but full of LIES AND DISHONESTY.”*

**Over 43% of respondents stated they would sacrifice their close friendships, sources of income, or even their lives in order for Trump to face accountability. Stated willingness to sacrifice is a strong indication of how important accountability is to these respondents.**

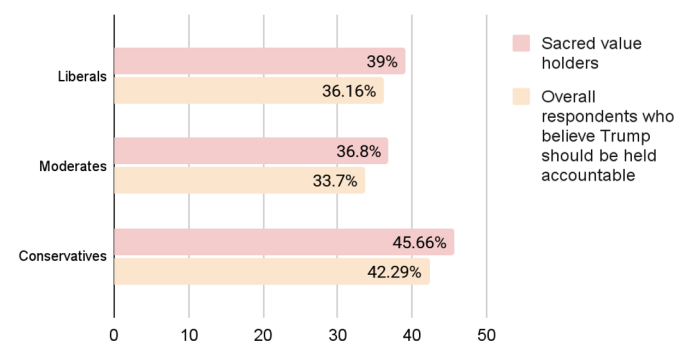
- Over two-thirds of liberals, moderates, and conservatives who believed that Trump should be held accountable stated they would sacrifice a close friendship for this to happen.
- Over a third of those who believed that Trump should be held accountable stated they would sacrifice their job or source of income for Trump to be held accountable.
- Across ideology, there was a small positive correlation between sacralizing that Trump should be held accountable for January 6 and stated willingness to sacrifice for this view to materialize.

## Stated willingness to sacrifice among those who believe that Trump should be held accountable

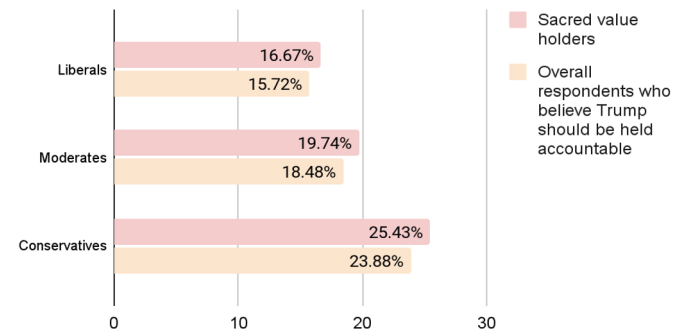
### Willingness to sacrifice a close friendship



### Willingness to sacrifice job or source of income



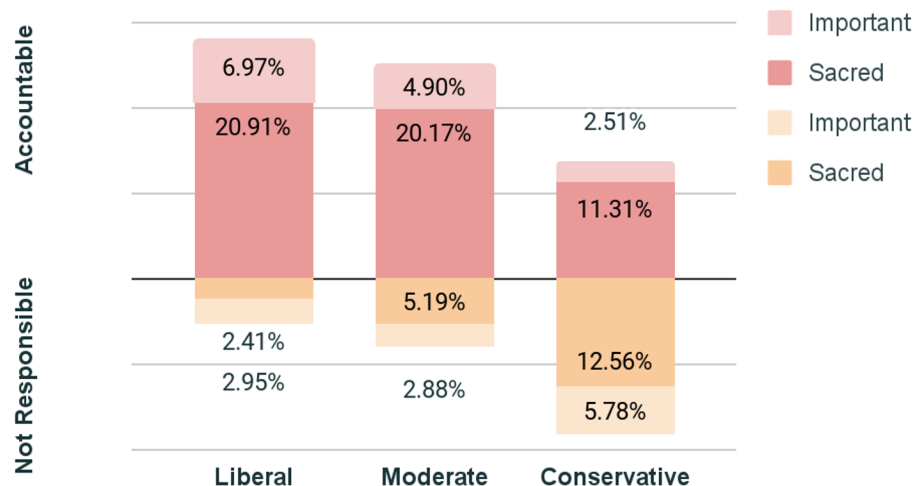
### Willingness to sacrifice one's life



## 17% of respondents sacralized holding the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol accountable.

- Respondents across ideology sacralized this stance: 21% of liberals, 20% of moderates, and 11% of conservatives.
- An additional 7% of liberals, 5% of moderates, and 3% of conservatives would give up this stance, but only for \$1 million (the “important” figure to the right).
- Nearly equal numbers of conservatives sacralized holding the protestors accountable for the violence as sacralized the protestors’ perceived non-responsibility for the violence.

### Sacralizing protestors' role in Jan. 6



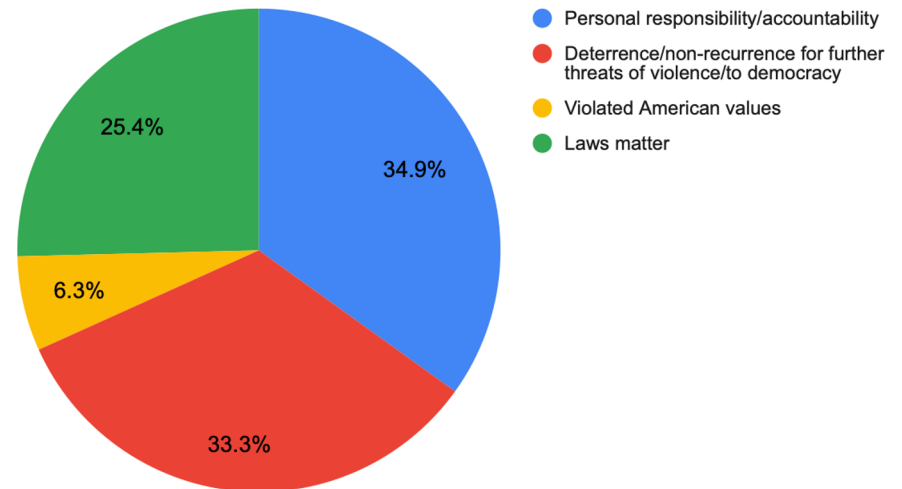
Comparison of respondents that sacralize the protestors’ lack of responsibility for the violence and accountability for this group, by ideology.



## Explanations for holding the protestors accountable mirror those for holding Trump accountable.

- 35% of those who sacralized holding the protestors accountable cited personal responsibility/accountability – that the protestors were responsible for the violence and must be held accountable for their actions.
- Another 33% cited the risks for democracy and of further violence if the protestors are not held accountable. **These were also the two most frequent themes among those who sacralized holding Trump accountable.**
- An additional 25% noted that laws matter and must be followed.

Sacred themes: Holding the protestors accountable



Below we sample **unedited (verbatim)**, prototypical responses for the three most frequent explanations among value-holders for why the protestors should be held accountable for the January 6 violence. Engaging these values may be starting points for reaching these audiences. (Note: responses can fit in multiple categories.)

## PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (35%)

- *“They committed a crime and should be held accountable.”*
- *“If you do something wrong you have to be held accountable”*
- *“All must be held accountable regardless of political affiliations”*
- *“They broke the law & need to be accountable for their actions”*
- *“Because of the violence that it caused and breaking the law.”*
- *“while Trump did push them towards that direction and waited so long to tell them to stop, it's ultimately the protestors who entered and injured and killed people.”*

## DETERRENCE/ NON-RECURRENT (33%)

- *“If these people are not held to account it will almost certainly lead to erosion of our democracy and by extension to a loss of legitimacy by our political system.”*
- *“The people involved committed arguably the greatest crime against American democracy and need to be held accountable, otherwise I think they'll try to do it again.”*
- *“If we don't hold domestic terrorists accountable for their actions, America is a joke.”*
- *“If there are no consequences, the next time they will succeed.”*

## LAWS MATTER (25%)

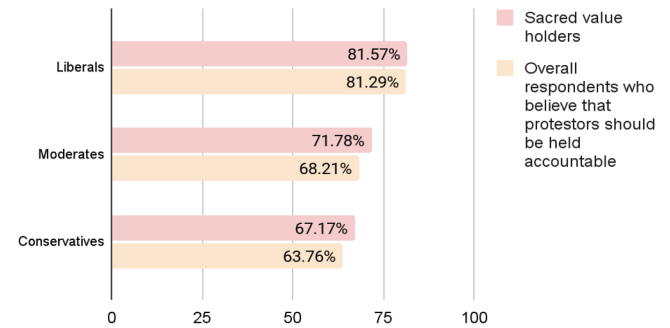
- *“The rule of law & respect for constitutional government is essential for the stability and well-being of the nation & her citizens.”*
- *“Because they need to be shown that you cannot throw a fit and cause mayhem just because you didn't get what you want. There are laws and rules in place in society and we all must abide by them. Physical and emotional violence against others is not acceptable, in at circumstances.”*
- *“You do the crime, you do the time. Laws matter.”*

Over 45% of respondents stated they would sacrifice their close relationships, sources of income, and even their lives for the protestors to be held accountable. Stated willingness to sacrifice is a strong indication of how important accountability is to these respondents.

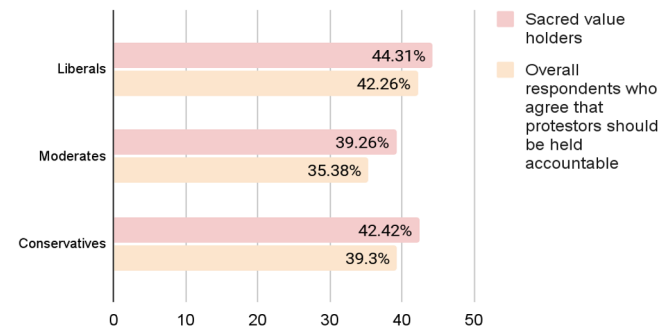
- The majority of liberals, moderates, and conservatives who believed that the protestors should be held accountable stated they would sacrifice a close friendship for this to happen. Over 35% of these segments stated they would sacrifice their job or source of income for this to happen.
- Respondents also stated they would be willing to sacrifice their lives to ensure accountability for the protestors.

Stated willingness to sacrifice among those who agree that “the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol” should be held accountable

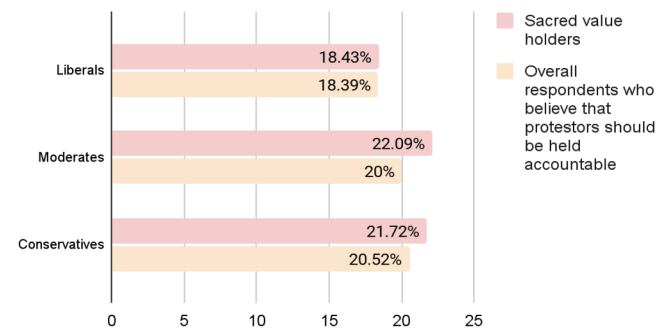
Willingness to sacrifice a close friendship



Willingness to sacrifice job or source of income



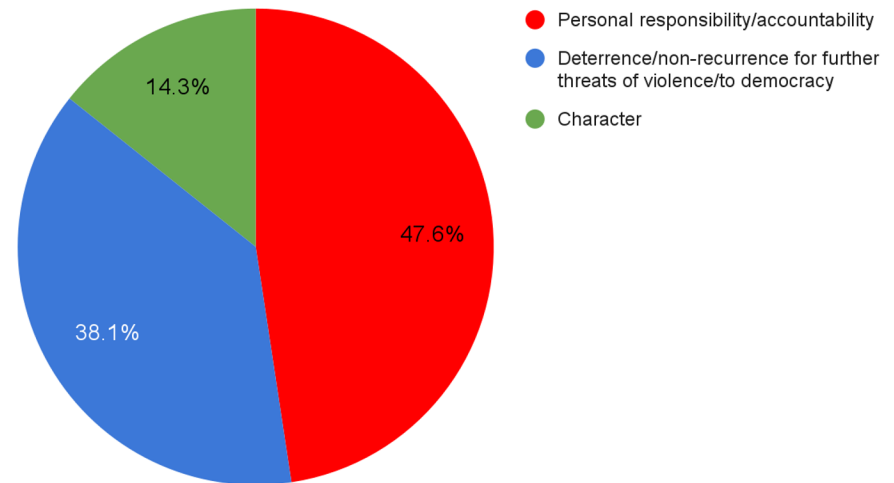
Willingness to sacrifice one's life



## 18% of respondents sacralized holding the far-right, including the Proud Boys and QAnon adherents accountable for the January 6 violence.

- Rationales here echoed those used to justify different sacralized accountability stances: personal responsibility (48%), deterring future violence and threats to democracy (38%), and character (14%).
- Those who sacralized holding the far-right accountable and those who sacralized holding the [far-left accountable](#)—virtually opposite stances—cited similar values underpinning these stances.

Sacred themes: Holding the far-right accountable



Below we sample **unedited (verbatim)**, prototypical responses for the three most frequent explanations among value-holders for why the far-right, including the Proud Boys and QAnon adherents should be held accountable for January 6. Engaging these values may be starting points for reaching these audiences. (Note: responses can fit within multiple categories.)

### Personal Responsibility (48%)

- *"They instigated the riot"*
- *"Because they were most likely responsible"*
- *"Because they tore up the property of the country and personal belongings of public officials."*
- *"They need to pay for there [sic] actions."*

### Non-recurrence (38%)

- *"They attacked our democracy. If we value it, those who seek to destroy it must be held accountable"*
- *"They genuinely were trying to overthrow the government in an attempt to prop up a dictatorship."*
- *"[They] proved time and time again that they will commit violence against others. Racism and white-supremacy cannot be allowed to continue without massive legal challenges."*

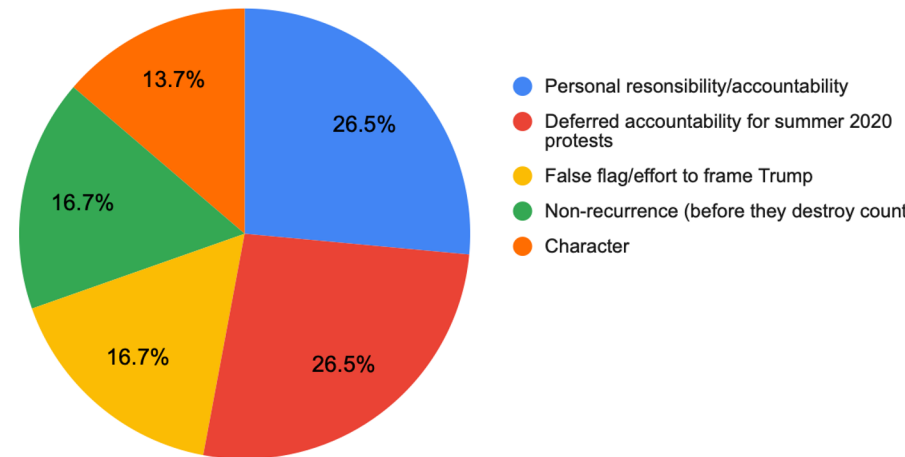
### Character (14%)

- *"These groups are destroying our country and getting away with spreading lies to gullible people. They think violence is okay."*
- *"These are radical groups"*
- *"They are criminals"*

## 12% of respondents—almost exclusively conservatives—sacralized holding the far-left, including Antifa accountable for the violence.

- Many of the explanations for this stance repeat debunked conspiracy theories, though they cite overarching themes or values that cut across divergent accountability stances.
- The top themes for sacralizing the far-left, including Antifa’s accountability were personal responsibility/accountability (27%), deferred accountability for the summer 2020 protests (27%), and that January 6 was a false flag operation to frame Donald Trump (17%)
- While nearly half of conservatives (inaccurately) cite “the far-left, including Antifa” as responsible for the violence, they most often characterize the protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol as [“good people who got swept up in the moment.”](#)

Sacred themes: Holding the far-left, including Antifa accountable



Below we sample **unedited (verbatim)**, prototypical responses for the three most frequent explanations among sacralizers for why the “far-left, including Antifa” should be held accountable for January 6. While many of these responses repeat debunked conspiracy theories, engaging these underlying values may be starting points for reaching these audiences without affirming or repeating the false claims themselves. (Note: responses can fit within multiple categories.)

## PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (27%)

- *“Because we are all equal under the law. Anyone breaking the law that day should be held accountable, regardless of party or affiliation. Antifa has been protected in congress and in the media. Protecting people the media agrees with motivates politicians to ignore criminal activity.”*
- *“They walked away from this. Scot free”*
- *“They instigated the incident”*
- *“They caused a lot of trouble and should be held accountable.”*
- *“They need to be responsible for their actions”*

## DEFERRED ACCOUNTABILITY(27%)

- *“They destroyed the country for the duration of the Spring and Summer of 2020 without any sort of justice. Past time for them to pay the price.”*
- *“They have been involved in many or most of the very bad riots nationally, setting fires, damage to private businesses, and injured many people. They are terrorists.”*
- *“They rioted and destroyed cities then posed as Trump supporters to draw unsuspecting people into the capital creating an incident to stop congress from looking at the election fraud.”*
- *“These guys or gals have been criminals for years and they need to be stopped. Burning, killing, rioting, looting, destroying public or personal property is wrong.”*

## FALSE FLAG OPERATION (17%)

- *“It was to frame Donald Trump. He was not responsible. The far left and Antifa were and should be punished for trying to cause harm to the Republicans.”*
- *“They have not been held responsible for working in conjunction with FBI/DOJ.”*
- *“There is evidence that the event was pre-planned by left-leaning people. Additionally, Nancy Pelosi, in my opinion based on certain facts, made it easy for the breach at the Capitol.”*
- *“They tried to make Trump look bad”*
- *“The protest was suppose to be outside they were leftist there to barge in and everyone followed it was a ploy from the democrats”*

## Sacred Values & January 6 Cheat Sheet

**Background on sacred values:** Sacred values are strong views that we act upon as a duty or obligation rather than as a choice. They cannot be negotiated over in terms of costs and benefits. Doing so disrespects the sacred value and produces a *backfire effect*, often prompting sacred value-holders to become angry or morally outraged, to disengage from further conversations, or even to endorse violence in defense of the threatened value.

*Americans across the ideological spectrum sacralize divergent stances on responsibility and accountability for January 6.*

**Implications for Communicating Around Sacralized Stances:** Talking about sacralized stances in terms of costs and benefits, the way one would typical values or policy positions, can lead to a backfire effect. That said, sacred values are not untouchable. When they are central to an issue (as they often are), **respectful, values-based communications might avoid the backfire effect.**

### Principles for communicating around sacred values:

- Avoid unnecessarily engaging sacralized stances (this may not be possible in the accountability context).
- Avoid disrespecting a sacred value by directly challenging the sacralized stance or by throwing incentives at the sacralizer in an effort to persuade them to abandon their position.
- Identify and affirm the values or worldviews underlying the sacralized stance (e.g., that all must be held accountable for their actions). This may be an entrypoint to dialogue.
- Consider whether the sacred value can be traded for another sacralized stance, such that the other is prioritized first.
- Appeal to group norms and identities that cast doubt on sacralized positions or that speak to the underlying values. Engage trusted messengers for your audience along the way.

## Sacralized January 6 Stances

Note - this research was conducted in January 2022 and these stances may have since shifted amid the Select Committee hearings and changes in January 6 narratives.

### Donald Trump

- **Lack of responsibility for the violence** 14% of respondents sacralized this stance: 33% of conservatives, 9% of moderates, and .8% of liberals.
- **Holding Trump accountable:** 31% of respondents sacralized holding Donald Trump accountable. This fractured along ideological lines: 63% of liberal, 30% of moderates, and 4% of conservatives.

### The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol

- **Lack of responsibility for the violence** Only 6% of respondents sacralized this stance: 13% of conservatives, 5% of moderates, and 2% of liberals. Put differently, 94% of respondents would consider the protestors' responsibility.
- **Holding the protestors accountable:** 17% of respondents sacralized this stance. This cut across ideology—21% of liberals, 20% of moderates, and 11% of conservatives.

### The far-right, including the Proud Boys and QAnon adherents:

18% of respondents sacralized accountability for this group: 37% of liberals, 16% of moderates, and 5% of conservatives.

### The far-left, including Antifa:

12% of respondents—almost exclusively conservatives—sacralized accountability for this group: 31% of conservatives, 7% of moderates, and .3% of liberals (one liberal).

### Themes or values that emerged across January 6 sacralizers.

These are excellent starting points for message testing initiatives.

- **Personal responsibility:** Individuals must take responsibility and ultimately be held accountable for their actions.
- **Equality before the law:** All, regardless of personal power, wealth, or political leanings, must be equal before the law.
- **Confidence in the integrity of our institutions and elections:** The importance of upholding the integrity of our elections and government institutions.
- **Non-recurrence:** We must prevent further threats to our democracy, violations of our constitution, and acts of violence.



# Appendix: Sacralized January 6 stances

This slide summarizes the January 6-related stances that respondents sacralize. We organize these stances both thematically (perceived non-responsibility and accountability) and by party.

| <b>BY THEME</b>  |                |                      |                  |                 |
|--|----------------|----------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Non-responsibility</b>                                      |                |                      |                  |                 |
|  | <b>Overall</b> | <b>Conservatives</b> | <b>Moderates</b> | <b>Liberals</b> |
| Donald Trump   | 14%            | 33%                  | 9%               | 0.80%           |
| Protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol                  | 6%             | 13%                  | 5%               | 2%              |
| <b>Accountability</b>  |                |                      |                  |                 |
| Donald Trump   | 31%            | 4%                   | 30%              | 63%             |
| The protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol              | 17%            | 11%                  | 20%              | 21%             |
| Far-right, including the Proud Boys and QAnon adherents        | 18%            | 5%                   | 16%              | 37%             |
| Far-left, including Antifa                                     | 12%            | 31%                  | 7%               | 0.30%           |
| <b>BY INDIVIDUAL</b>   |                |                      |                  |                 |
| <b>Donald Trump</b>  |                |                      |                  |                 |
|  | <b>Overall</b> | <b>Conservatives</b> | <b>Moderates</b> | <b>Liberals</b> |
| Non-Responsibility   | 14%            | 33%                  | 9%               | 0.80%           |
| Accountability   | 31%            | 4%                   | 30%              | 63%             |
| <b>Protestors who forcefully entered the Capitol</b>           |                |                      |                  |                 |
| Non-responsibility   | 6%             | 13%                  | 5%               | 2%              |
| Accountability   | 17%            | 11%                  | 20%              | 21%             |
| <b>Far-right, including the Proud Boys and QAnon adherents</b> |                |                      |                  |                 |
| Accountability   | 18%            | 5%                   | 16%              | 37%             |
| <b>Far-left, including Antifa</b>                              |                |                      |                  |                 |
| Accountability   | 12%            | 31%                  | 7%               | 0.30%           |

# Resources on Sacred Values

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