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AMERICANS OPPOSE A HAWKISH FOREIGN POLICY AGAINST IRAN

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On January 3, the United States government assassinated Major General Qassim Suleimani, chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force. Suleimani was one of Iran's top military commanders and helped shape the country's foreign policy. In response to Suleimani's killing, Iran retaliated against the United States, firing twenty-two missiles at an American base inside Iraq, injuring, but not killing, several American soldiers. A few days later, Iran accidentally shot down Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, killing 176—an incident that would have been unlikely without Suleimani's assassination. In the US, fear of war spiked, causing the Selective Service System's website to briefly crash as concerns mounted that the draft may be reinstated.

Trump's decision to kill Suleimani, while the most overt act of escalation, came on the heels of years of increased antagonism between the two nations. In a lengthy and well-reported piece, the *New York Times* details this long history, though a key event in this story was President Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran nuclear deal. This agreement, the *New York Times* notes, was the "signature foreign policy achievement of Trump's predecessor Barack Obama," and marked a partial thawing of relations between Iran and the US.

As part of January 2020 survey by Data for Progress, we sought to test support for Trump's policy toward Iran, the popularity of potential escalation in the future, and other questions pertaining to US defense. We asked registered voters the following seven questions in randomized order:

1. Do you support or oppose President Trump's decision to kill Iran General Qassim Suleimani?
2. Do you support or oppose further United States airstrikes or other military action against Iran?
3. Do you support or oppose the United States invading Iran?
4. Some in Congress have argued that the killing of Iranian General Qassim Suleimani constitutes an act of war requiring congressional approval. Others argue that the president is the commander in chief of the military, and should therefore have unilateral authority to execute foreign policy under the advice of their generals. Do you believe that President Trump should have sought congressional approval before killing General Qassim Suleimani?
5. Do you support or oppose President Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal, and reimpose sanctions on Iran?
6. Some in Congress have argued that the United States should sometimes interfere in the internal affairs of other countries by supporting opposition movements aiming to overthrow leaders in order to protect the best interests of the United States. Others in Congress argue we should because it violates other country's national sovereignty and destabilizes the region. Do you think the United States should or should not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries?
7. Do you support or oppose the United States implementing a draft, which would require some young Americans to serve in the military?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ A plurality of voters oppose the United States taking further military action against Iran (40 percent support, 45 percent oppose).
- ▶ Voters strongly oppose an American invasion of Iran, opposing such a step by a margin of 34 percentage points (26 percent support, 60 percent oppose).
- ▶ A plurality of voters think that Trump should have sought congressional approval before ordering Suleimani's assassination (47 percent think he should have sought authorization, 38 percent think he should not have).
- ▶ Voters oppose attempts to restore the draft by a 30-point margin (28 percent support, 58 percent oppose). More broadly, they oppose US interference into other countries' affairs by a 28-point margin (23 percent support, 58 percent oppose).

Voters Split on Suleimani's Assassination but Oppose Invasion of Iran

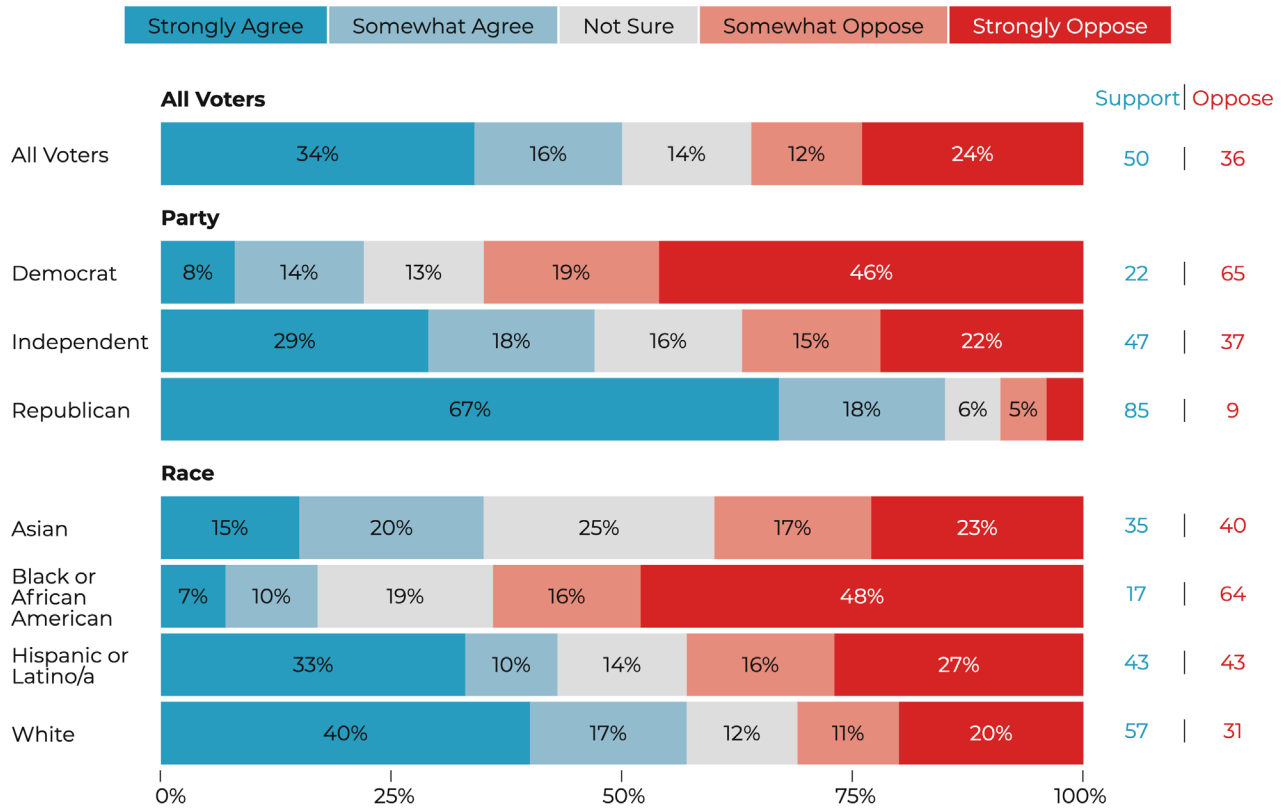
Following Suleimani's assassination, columnists at the *Washington Post* described the Iranian military leader as a "terrorist mastermind" who was "[as evil as] Osama bin Laden and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi." The *New York Times* editorial board labeled Suleimani as, "indisputably an enemy of the American people." According to an analysis from Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), columnists and editorial boards "took great pains to emphasize the disgust and contempt they held for Suleimani." While many did criticize Trump's decision

to kill Suleimani, much of this criticism was on technical grounds. For example, some highlighted Trump's failure to notify Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi before the strike.

Given the media is framing on Trump's decision to assassinate Suleimani and the alleged threat that Iran poses to the US, it is perhaps unsurprising that we found that, among all registered voters, Suleimani's killing was supported by a margin of 14 points (50 percent support, 36 percent oppose). The results were divided heavily along partisan lines, however. Democrats oppose Suleimani's assassination by 43 points (22 percent support, 65 percent oppose). Republicans, meanwhile, support the measure by 76 points (85 percent support, 9 percent oppose). Independents support the measure by 10 points (47 percent support, 37 percent oppose).

The Parties are Divided on the Assassination of General Suleimani

Do you support or oppose President Trump's decision to kill Iran General Qassim Suleimani?



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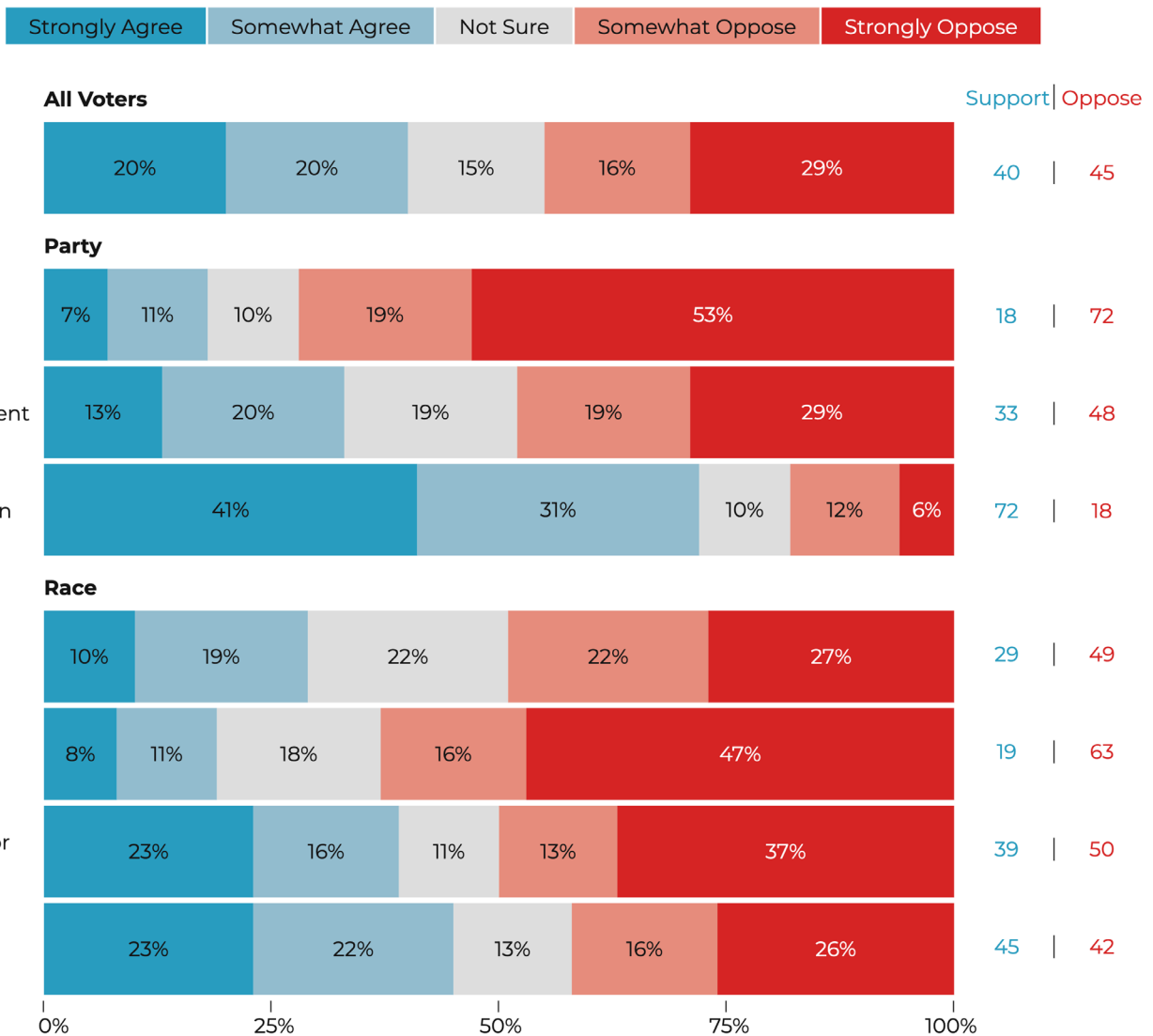
Despite their net support for Suleimani's assassination, voters narrowly oppose further military action against Iran (40 percent support, 45 percent opposed).

Democrats and Republicans had exactly inverse opinions on this question, with Democrats opposing it by 52 points

(18 percent support, 72 percent oppose) and Republicans supporting it by 52 points (72 percent support, 18 percent opposed). Independents, on the other hand, oppose further military actions by 15 points (33 percent support, 48 percent oppose).

A Plurality of Voters Oppose Further Military Action Against Iran

Do you support or oppose further United States airstrikes or other military action against Iran?



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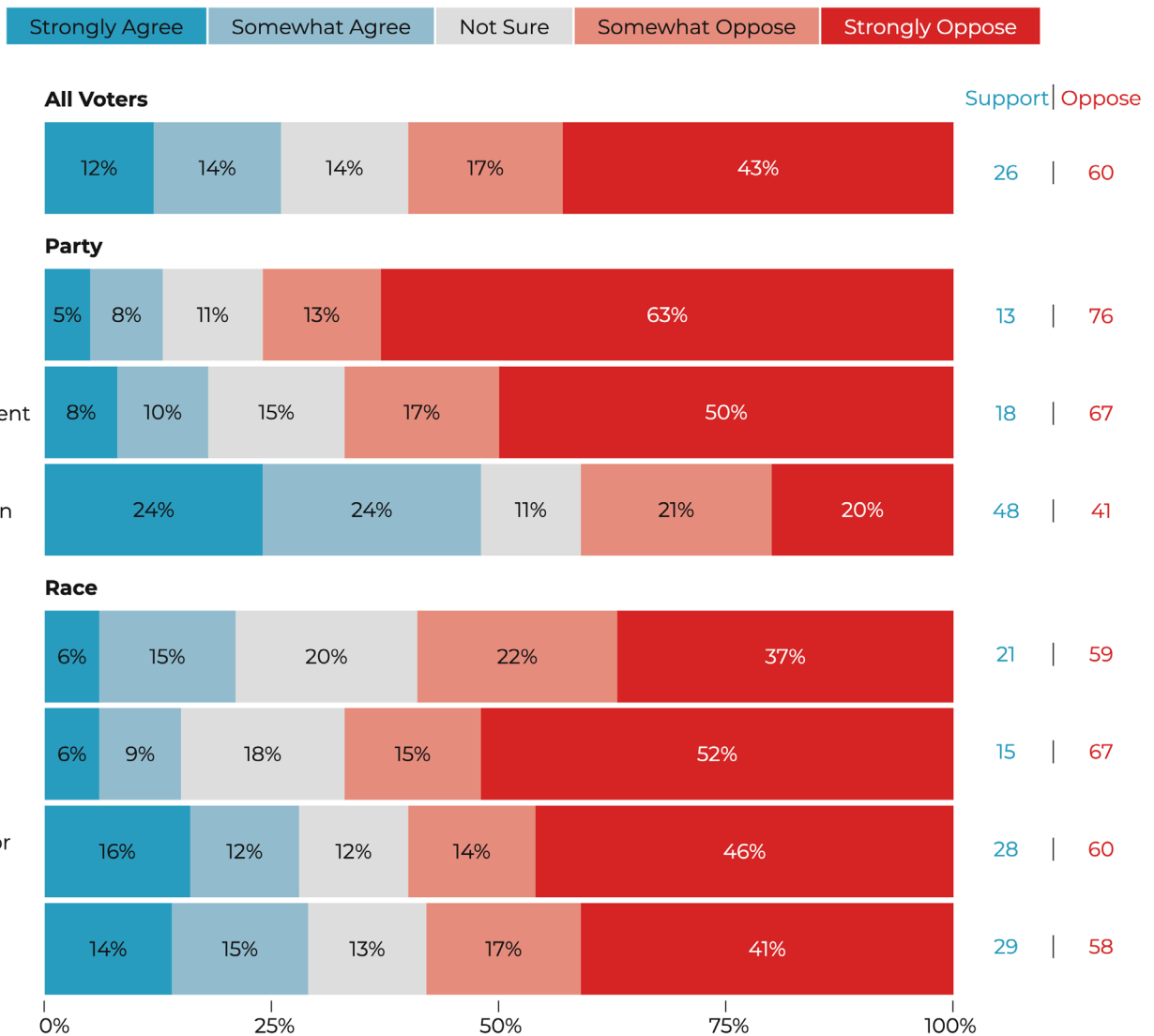
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Although voters were more split on the question of further military action against Iran, they are united against a US invasion of the country, opposing the idea by 34 points (26 percent support, 60 percent oppose).

Democrats and independents are firmly opposed (each by at least 49 points), while Republicans narrowly support an invasion (48 percent support, 41 percent oppose).

Voters Oppose Invading Iran

Do you support or oppose the United States invading Iran?



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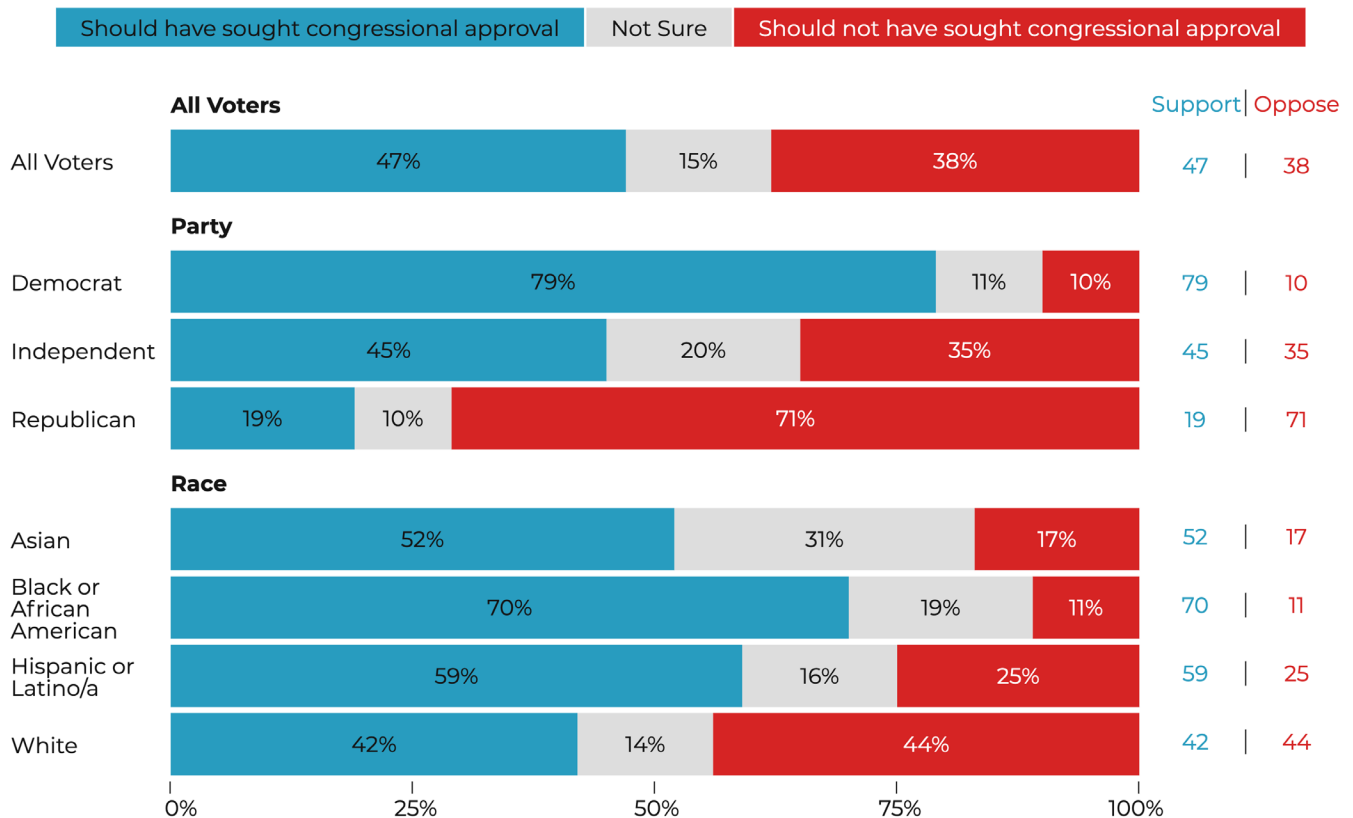
Voters Split on Congressional Approval for Assassination and on Iran Nuclear Deal

Trump did not seek congressional approval for Suleimani's assassination, and process was a central concern in how many Democrats framed their opposition to the assassination. Overall, voters think that Trump

should have sought congressional approval by 9 points (47 percent support, 38 percent oppose). Breaking down results by party, we found that Democrats overwhelmingly think Trump should have sought congressional approval (79 percent support, 10 percent oppose). Independents also think Trump should have sought congressional approval (45 percent support, 35 percent oppose). In contrast, Republicans strongly think Trump should *not* have sought congressional approval (19 percent support, 71 percent oppose).

The Parties are Split on whether Trump Needed Congressional Approval

Some in Congress have argued that the killing of Iranian General Qassim Suleimani constitutes an act of war requiring congressional approval. Others argue that the president is the commander in chief of the military, and should therefore have unilateral authority to execute foreign policy under the advice of their generals. Do you believe that President Trump should have sought congressional approval before killing General Qassim Suleimani?



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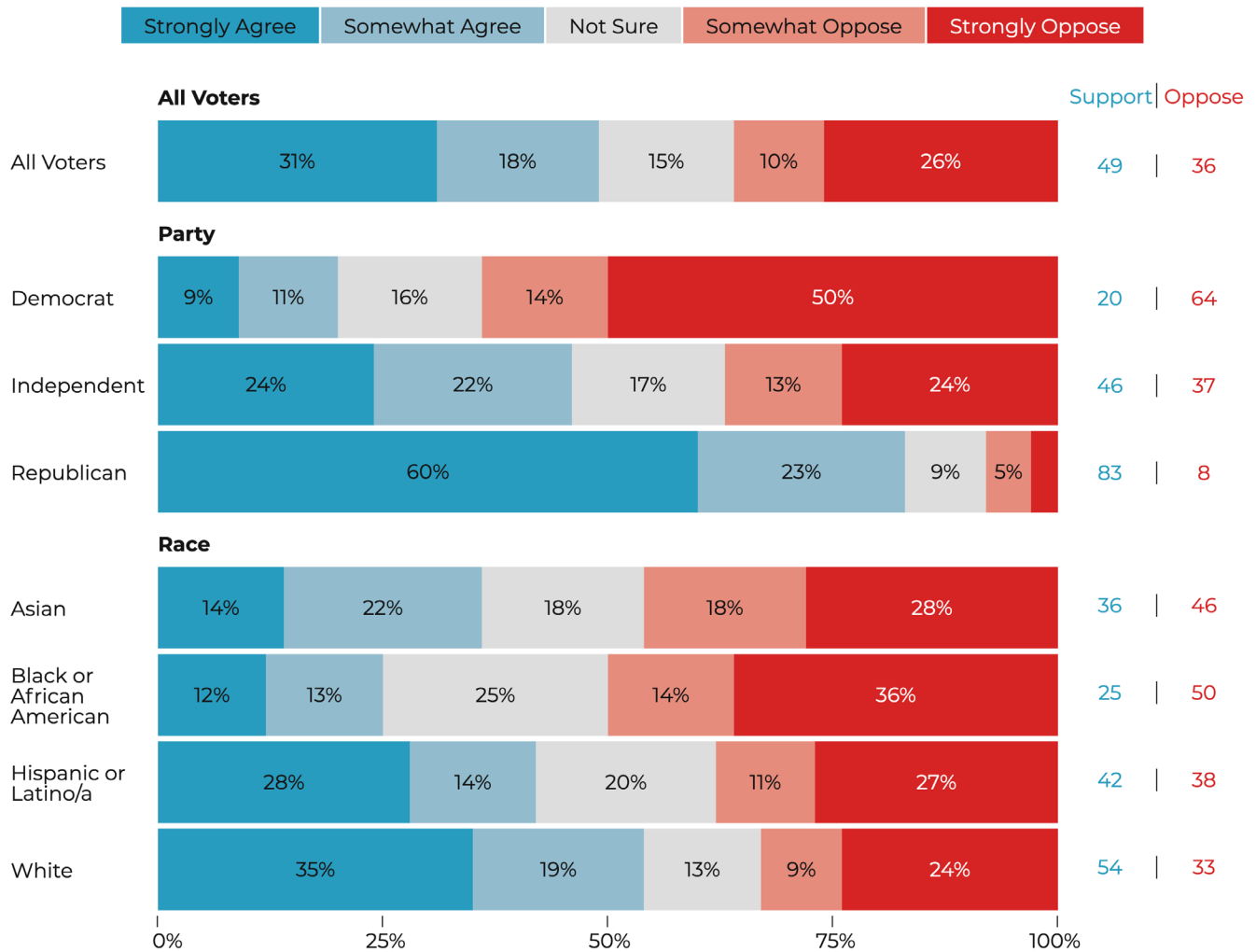
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Turning to a question of US diplomacy, we found that a plurality of voters agree with President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, backing the president by 13 points (49 percent support, 36 percent oppose).

While 91 percent of Republicans held an opinion on this issue, only 84 percent of Democrats and 83 percent of Independents held one. Republicans appear to be activated on the issue, likely reflecting Trump's habit of routinely denouncing the agreement.

The Parties Are Split on the Iran Nuclear Deal

Do you support or oppose President Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal, and reimpose sanctions on Iran?



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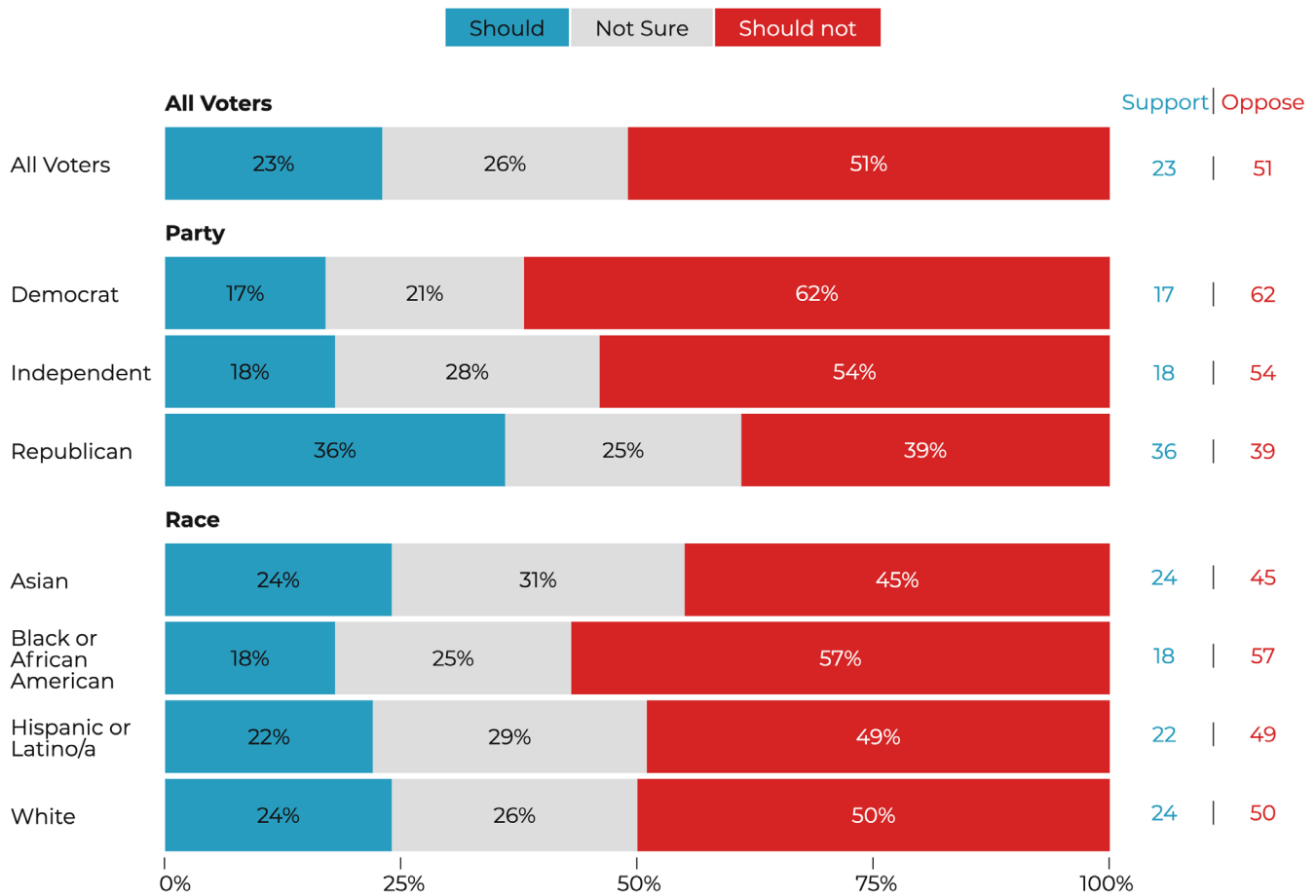
Voters Oppose Draft and US Interference in Other Countries' Affairs

Voters' concerns over US intervention do not apply only to Iran; they extend to other countries as well. After hearing both positive and negative frames, voters strongly oppose US interference in the internal affairs of other countries (23 percent support, 51 percent oppose).

This is a critical finding. A historic cause of tensions between the US and Iran was the 1953 CIA-backed coup of former Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, a left-wing elected leader who was attempting to nationalize the Iranian oil industry. The coup replaced Mossadegh with the dictator Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who ruled until he was overthrown in the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Voters Do Not Want the US to Interfere in other Countries' Politics

Some in Congress have argued that the United States should sometimes interfere in the internal affairs of other countries by supporting opposition movements aiming to overthrow leaders in order to protect the best interests of the United States. Others in Congress argue we should because it violates other country's national sovereignty and destabilizes the region. Do you think the United States should or should not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries?



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This intervention has served as the backdrop for much of the US–Iran tension that exists today. Globally, US coups have empowered dictators and devastated human rights in dozens of countries. Therefore, our finding in this survey indicates that Americans are concerned with the pitfalls of intervening in other countries’ affairs, and would be wary of further interventions in Iran that could escalate the conflict.

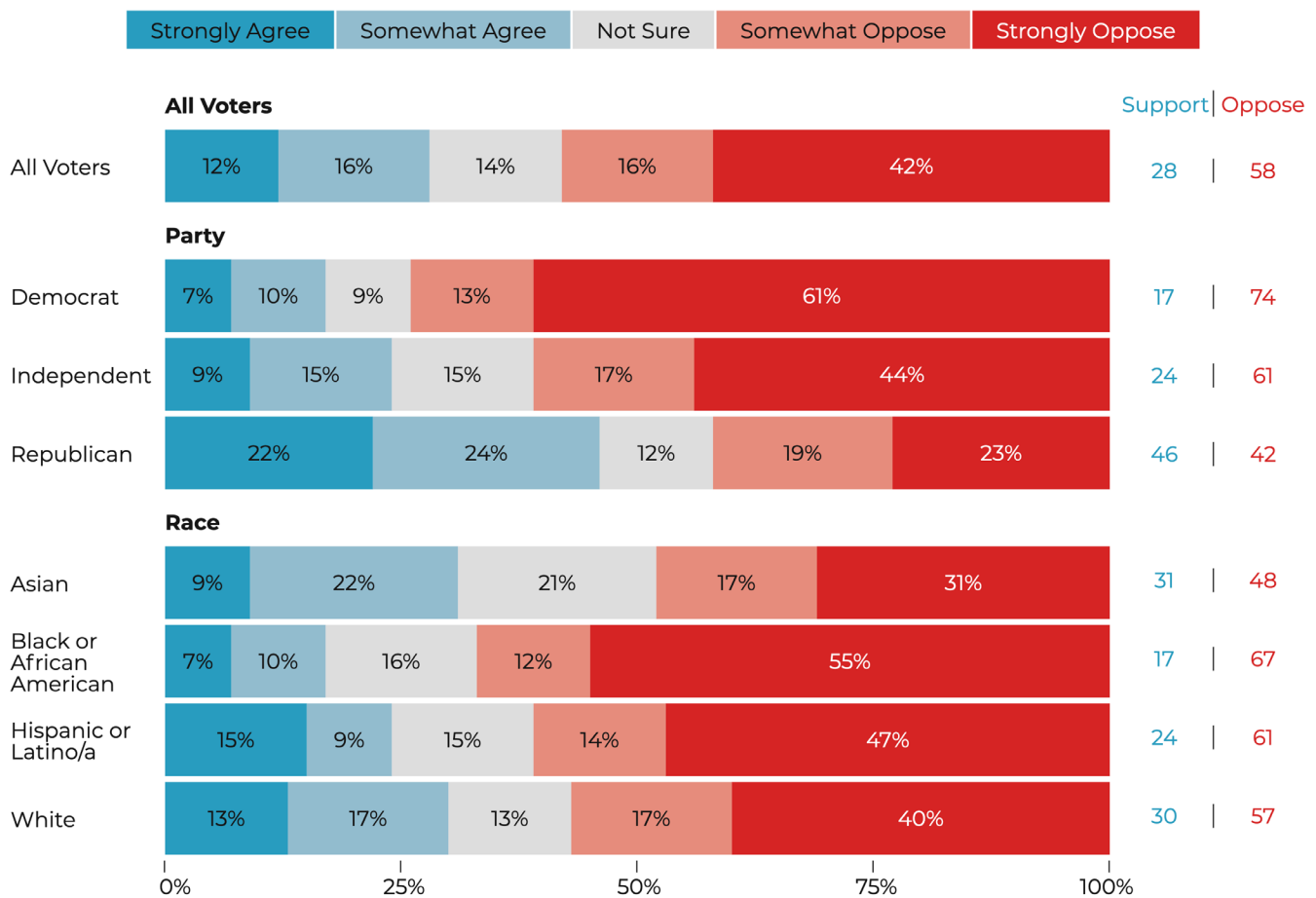
Interestingly, more than one-quarter of voters didn’t know their stance on this issue—a figure that was especially

high among Independents. This suggests that if the Democratic presidential nominee boldly and effectively criticizes US intervention abroad, it could sway public sentiment on this issue.

Overall, voters are strongly against reinstating the draft, opposing reinstatement by 30 points (28 percent support, 58 percent oppose). A slim plurality of Republicans, however, do support reinstatement (46 percent support, 42 percent oppose).

Voters Oppose Bringing Back the Draft

Do you support or oppose the United States implementing a draft, which would require some young Americans to serve in the military?



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CONCLUSION

There is a high degree of partisan sorting on questions around US–Iran relations. Nonetheless, there is clearly room for Democrats to push back against Trump’s agenda. On questions of whether Trump ought to have received congressional approval and whether the US should escalate military conflict against Iran and meddle in the internal affairs of other countries, we see public opinion is on the Democratic Party’s side.

METHODOLOGY

Between January 9th and January 12th, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 5171 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, urbanicity, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is \pm 1.4 percent.

For rounding purposes, all results conveyed in the charts sum to 100 percentage points and thus may deviate slightly from crosstab data.