



America's Views of Public Policy Proposals and Goals



Overview and Key Findings

The following document is a comprehensive report of findings from a national survey for the Congressional Institute conducted August 24-25 among 1000 registered voters.

1. At present, there is little consensus as to whether the situation with the virus is improving, getting worse, or staying the same. In terms of support for reopening, about half of the electorate felt the country should be able to start reopening. Support for reopening increases when people are given the condition that social distancing would be followed and people would be encouraged to wear masks.
2. The electorate's top priorities are the economy/jobs and health care, reflecting their focus on resolving the situation with the virus. Republicans tend to be more singularly focused on the economy but independents and other groups prioritize both the economy and health care. Reflecting recent protests and violence in cities across the country, crime/safety is now on par with Social Security/retirement as a key second tier priority.
3. Even though a majority had said if they had a choice they would prefer to go back to the way things were, voters understand things have structurally changed, so they view this experience as an opportunity to make structural reforms to society.
4. However, there is a clear expectation that life will be different as a result of the virus, and while voters would like to see things go back, there is an understanding that this is not realistic especially in relation to aspects of our society like the workplace, education and health care.
5. Voters see many aspects of society and their lives as having changed permanently. Areas most changed were the workplace and how much people telecommute, small business, travel industry, education and health care, with restaurants, workforce skills needed, and the economy also seen as having changed. Only an individual's career or job was seen as going back to the way things were.
6. It is clear that people are looking for outcomes over what they perceive as rhetoric. From a list of possible goals for the country, the most important were items that were clear outcomes and things people could easily understand, with examples being *defeat the coronavirus*, *keep America healthy and defeat the virus*, *honor our veterans and get America working*.
7. In terms of a series of proposals to address immediate-term challenges and help the country recover from coronavirus, key priorities tended to coalesce around health care, reflecting their top issues, the electorate's focus on the current situation, and their prioritization of defeating the coronavirus and keeping America healthy as a goal for the country. Other priorities pertained to preserving freedoms under the Constitution and preserving safety.
8. On the topic of police reform, presented with a range of approaches about what should happen with law enforcement at a national level, the largest share called for reforming the police. On the statement that *we should reform police but not defund police*, there was overwhelming agreement among voters overall and across party.

This research indicates that people are looking for clear outcomes and positive solutions, particularly in relation to the goals of defeating the virus and getting America working.

General Environment for Issues

State of the Virus and Reopening

There was little consensus to how voters thought the situation with the virus was going, with 26% saying the situation was starting to improve, versus 34% saying it was getting worse (20% staying the same, 16% too soon to tell). Men (35-30 starting to improve-getting worse, 18% staying the same) were more optimistic than women (17-38, 22% staying the same). By party, Republicans were the most optimistic (48-14, 19% staying the same), compared to independents (20-32, 21% staying the same) and Democrats, a 53% majority of whom said the situation was getting worse (11-53, 21% staying the same).

Situation with the virus	Overall	Men	Women	GOP	Indep	Dem
Starting to improve	26	35	17	48	20	11
Staying about the same	20	18	22	19	21	21
Getting worse	34	30	38	14	32	53
Too soon to tell	16	15	17	16	21	13

Overall, about one in two voters said they supported reopening (49-38 should be able to open up-should not be allowed). By party, Republicans were the most supportive (75-18), with independents more supportive than not (45-38) and Democrats opposed (30-56). Men (57-32) are also more supportive than women (42-44).

However, when the caveat that social distancing is followed and people will be encourage to wear masks is included, overall support for reopening goes from 49-38 to 60-31, with men (66-27) and especially women (54-34) becoming more supportive. This movement among women is especially noteworthy as women have typically had more concerns about reopening. By party, Republican support does not change much (77-18 with the caveat included), but independents (58-31) and Democrats (46-43) did become more supportive.

Top Issue

The economy/jobs (26%) and health care (19%) are the top two priorities, including among independents. Republicans tend to be more singularly focused on the economy (32% economy, 10% health care) but independents and other groups prioritize both the economy and health care.

Top Issue (Issues at or above 5%)	Overall	GOP	Indep	Dem
Economy/jobs	26	32	25	19
Health care/RX	19	10	16	28
Social Security/retirement	10	10	9	12
Crime and Safety	9	11	8	7
Environment/Climate Change	6	2	7	8
Immigration	6	9	7	2
National defense/terrorism	4	7	4	3

Crime/Safety Issues

The issue of crime/safety has increased up to 9% on par with Social Security/retirement, and this is not just among Republicans. Independents also prioritize crime/safety (8) on par with Social Security/retirement (9%), and for Democrats, crime/safety (7%) is on par with their priority issue of environment/climate change (8%).

On a specific question about Antifa, voters saw this group as having *incited violence in cities throughout the country* (49%) rather than that *their activities have been exaggerated and sensationalized, and there is not a real threat* (24%). Republicans are overwhelmingly of the view that Antifa has incited violence (71-17 violence-exaggerated), with independents also leaning toward this view (45-21, 35% don't know). Democrats were split on this question (34-33, 33% don't know). However among suburban women, they leaned toward the belief that this group has incited violence (44-21).

Perceptions of the Scale of Changes

If You Had a Choice

In terms of what people would ideally prefer if they had a choice, the majority said they would prefer to go back (54%) rather than believing that in the long run things will be better and changes will be positive (34%). This is the case across party and gender, with men and Republicans slightly more inclined to prefer to go back to the way things were.

Which statement do you agree with more?	Overall	Men	Women	GOP	Ind	Dem
If you had a choice, you would prefer to go back to the way of life you had before the virus.	54	60	48	58	54	50
In the long run, your way of life will be better in the future, and the changes that come as a result of the country's experience from the virus will be positive.	34	31	37	34	28	39

Reality of Changes

While voters would like to see things go back to the way things were before the pandemic, there is an understanding that is not realistic especially in relation to aspects of our society like the workplace, education and health care.

Once the coronavirus crisis is over, which comes closer to what you think will happen?	Overall	Men	Women	GOP	Ind	Dem
Things will generally go back to the way they were	27	33	20	39	22	20
Things will be very different from before, and we will have to go to a "new normal."	63	59	67	54	62	72

There is clearly an expectation that things will be different, with two thirds of the electorate (63%) saying things will be very different and we will have to go to a new normal, rather than things going

back to the way they were (27%). Among men (33-59 go back-new normal) and Republicans (39-54), there is a higher expectation that things will return to the way they were compared to other groups, but still the majority of both these groups expect things to be different.

As to whether those differences will result in a country and world that is better than, about the same as, or worse than before, some 36% of voters overall say this outcome will depend on how well we manage it, with 24% saying things will be worse than before, 18% saying it will be about the same, and 17% saying things will be better.

Once the coronavirus crisis is over, will the country and world we face be...	Overall
Better than before	17
About the same as before	18
Worse than before	24
Depends on how well we manage it	36

Opportunity for Reform

Even though a majority had said if they had a choice they would prefer to go back to the way things were, voters understand things have structurally changed so they view this experience as an opportunity to make structural reforms to society (39-52).

Which statement do you agree with more?	Overall	Men	Women	GOP	Ind	Dem
I wish life would go back to the way it was before the pandemic.	39	40	38	48	36	34
I hope we use this pandemic as an opportunity to make structural reforms to our society.	52	51	54	47	49	60

Republicans are split on this (48-47) as they may be thinking social engineering, but the rest of the country including independents (36-49) and women (38-54) think we should make the best of the situation and use this as an opportunity for reform. However, having an opportunity for reform doesn't necessarily have to be a bad thing for Republicans, especially as this introduces the openings on education and health care.

Areas of Change

Voters see many aspects of society and their lives as having changed permanently. Areas most changed were the workplace and how much people telecommute (27-56 will go back to the way things were-permanently changed), small business (31-55), travel industry (32-54), education (35-52) and health care (34-51).

Industries and aspects of the country (Will go back-permanently changed)	Overall
The workplace and how much people telecommute	27-56
Small business	31-55
Travel industry	32-54
Education	35-52

Industries and aspects of the country (Will go back-permanently changed)	Overall
Health care system	34-51
Restaurants	40-49
Workforce skills needed for jobs of the future	35-48
Economy	37-47
Your career or job	45-33

There was somewhat less consensus on restaurants (40-49), workforce skills needed (35-48), and the economy (37-47) but those were seen as having permanently changed. Part-time employees were particularly likely to see the workforce skills needed as changed (30-56) compared to full time employees (44-43). The only one of the list seen as going back to the way things were was your career or job (45-33) which is specific to individual situations, but with a significant difference between full time (57-32) and part time employees (39-44).

Outcomes and Goals for the Country

From the survey, it is clear that people are looking for outcomes over what they perceive as rhetoric. From a list of possible goals for the country, the most important were items that were clear outcomes and things people could easily understand, an example being *defeat the coronavirus*.

Goals for the country (1-9 scale, where 1 is not important at all, 5 important, and 9 extremely important)	Overall	GOP	Indep	Dem
Defeat the coronavirus	7.71	7.92	7.45	7.73
Keep America healthy and defeat the virus	7.57	7.81	7.22	7.64
Honor our veterans	7.40	7.86	7.28	7.10
Get America working	7.37	7.92	7.11	7.10
Preserve our freedoms and uphold the law	7.36	7.89	7.13	7.08
Make our country safer at home and abroad	7.35	7.70	7.06	7.26
Give every child a high quality education	7.31	7.43	7.15	7.34
Create jobs and reopen our economy	7.29	7.83	7.01	7.03
Ensure the safety and security of communities and neighborhoods	7.26	7.64	7.09	7.06
Put America first and end reliance on China	7.01	7.78	6.90	6.42
Deliver more pathways to success	7.00	7.21	6.64	7.09
Empower every American to achieve financial freedom	6.94	7.08	6.65	7.06
Get back on the road to greatness	6.89	7.73	6.36	6.56
Win the future	6.80	7.44	6.20	6.69
Fighting for you	6.79	7.25	6.30	6.78
Having a promise to America	6.72	7.45	6.15	6.53

All of the proposed themes and goals were seen as important, with observations below:

- Reflecting top issue and the electorate's focus on the current situation, the most important theme as a goal for the country across the board was *defeat the coronavirus* (7.71) which was

the number one priority across party. This was followed closely by the related theme of *keep America healthy and defeat the virus* (7.57).

- *Get America working* was a high priority and on par with defeating the virus as the top two goals for Republicans.
- Republicans prioritize ending reliance on China (7.78) much more than independents (6.90) and Democrats (6.42) who see this as important but not at the scale Republicans do.
- Independents did not respond as positively to phrases that sounded like political rhetoric or what is not clear to them, examples being *win the future* (6.20), *fighting for you* (6.30) and *having a promise to America* (6.15) with no description as to what those mean.
- *Honor our veterans* is a given and is important across party, although a higher priority to Republicans compared to independents and Democrats.

Proposals - Immediate Challenges

Presented with a series of priorities to address immediate challenges that people are facing now and to help the country recover from the coronavirus, voters rated each priority above a 5, meaning they saw each as important. Voters used a 1-9 scale, where 1 was not important at all, 5 important, and 9 extremely important. To identify the key priorities for each group, the mean and standard deviation of all the potential priorities were calculated for each group. Priorities in red represent those that were more than one standard deviation higher than the mean for that group, indicating they are of particular priority. Some observations:

- Reflecting top issue, the electorate's focus on the current situation, and their prioritization defeating the coronavirus and keeping America healthy as a goal for the country, key priorities among the overall electorate for addressing immediate challenges tended to coalesce around health care. Specifically, these included *lower drug prices* (mean 7.28, #2), *develop new cures and treatments* (7.13, #4), and *increase health care price transparency* (7.07, #5).
- Other particular priorities for voters overall pertained to preserving freedoms (*preserve our freedoms under the Constitution*: 7.35, #1) and preserving safety (*ensure the safety and security of communities and neighborhoods*: 7.26, #3).
- Similar to voters overall, independents prioritized *preserve our freedoms under the Constitution* (7.32, #1), *lower drug prices* (7.23, #2), *increase health care price transparency* (7.05, #3) and *ensure the safety and security of communities and neighborhoods* (6.98, #4).
- Republicans were particularly focused on proposals related to preserving freedom, including *protect religious liberty* (7.76, #1), *preserve our freedoms under the Constitution* (7.75, #2), and *protect the Second Amendment right to own firearms* (7.59, #3). They were also focused on preserving and ensuring safety: *fully fund our police and first responders* (7.56, #4) and *ensure the safety and security of communities and neighborhoods* (7.49, #5).
- Suburban women were also focused on safety (*ensure the safety and security of communities and neighborhoods*: 7.27, tied for #1), health care and defeating the virus (*lower drug prices*: 7.27, tied for #1; *develop new cures and treatments*: 7.03, #4; *increase health care price transparency*, 6.97, tied for #5), and preserving freedom (*preserve our freedoms under the Constitution*, 7.15, #3). *Make sure children are not trapped in failing schools* was also a priority (6.97, tied for #5).

Priorities addressing challenges people are facing and to help the country recover from the coronavirus (1-9 scale, where 1 is not important at all, 5 important, and 9 extremely important)	Overall	GOP	Indep	Suburban Women
Preserve our freedoms under the Constitution	7.35	7.75	7.32	7.15
Lower drug prices	7.28	7.25	7.23	7.27
Ensure the safety and security of communities and neighborhoods	7.26	7.49	6.98	7.27
Develop new cures and treatments	7.13	7.36	6.75	7.03
Increase health care price transparency	7.07	7.12	7.05	6.97
Make sure children are not trapped in failing schools	7.00	7.19	6.78	6.97
Fix our roads and bridges/infrastructure	7.00	7.11	6.82	6.86
Modernize our medical stockpile	6.95	7.14	6.68	6.85
Modernize the health care system to focus on protecting your choice of doctor, and move toward personalized medicine so that your health care is unique to your health and situation.	6.95	7.19	6.66	6.84
Reform the nation's supply chain and bring back critical industries	6.92	7.35	6.74	6.75
Improve quality of personal health through addressing mental health services and opioid treatment	6.88	6.88	6.64	6.92
Fully fund our police and first responders	6.79	7.56	6.44	6.56
Protect religious liberty	6.79	7.76	6.43	6.49
Address surprise medical billing	6.77	6.75	6.67	6.57
Promote career and technical education	6.76	6.97	6.43	6.65
Expedite a vaccine or treatment for the coronavirus through significant investment and cutting red tape and government bureaucracy	6.73	6.98	6.40	6.46
Invest in education with a focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education to match the future of work	6.71	6.90	6.41	6.60
Increase access to health care through telehealth and telemedicine	6.70	6.76	6.33	6.77
Allow Americans the choice of getting health care through a public option	6.67	6.36	6.46	6.68
Invest in workforce training and help one million individuals per year upgrade their skills so they can earn a promotion or enter a new career	6.65	6.73	6.25	6.53
Reduce all unnecessary costs and regulations on small businesses and entrepreneurs	6.64	7.27	6.27	6.48
Help Americans to keep more of what they earn by making tax cuts permanent	6.59	7.23	6.20	6.41
Address racial equality through police reform and police funding	6.58	6.46	6.29	6.61
Help cost of living through increasing affordable housing	6.57	6.26	6.21	6.66
Ensure no tax increases on taxpayers or businesses	6.49	7.10	6.15	6.25
Give every child in America the ability to attend the school of their choice	6.48	6.80	6.05	6.27
Support startup formation and access to capital to support small businesses and entrepreneurs	6.42	6.72	6.11	6.13
Require any college receiving federal funds to have "skin in the game" with accountability on student outcomes and cost	6.36	6.79	6.00	6.10

Priorities addressing challenges people are facing and to help the country recover from the coronavirus (1-9 scale, where 1 is not important at all, 5 important, and 9 extremely important)	Overall	GOP	Indep	Suburban Women
Protect the Second Amendment right to own firearms	6.26	7.59	5.96	5.81
Implement liability protections for schools and businesses	6.20	6.65	5.78	6.05
End federal funding to universities that stifle free speech or host Chinese government-funded Confucius Institutes	6.09	6.94	5.54	5.70
Hold China accountable for their role in the coronavirus	6.06	6.99	5.52	5.73
Offer pre-K education for all 3 and 4 year olds	6.03	5.98	5.48	6.21
Make Opportunity Zones permanent to secure \$10 billion a year in investments in areas that need it most	6.00	6.36	5.59	5.73
Expand broadband connectivity and deploy nationwide 5G	5.90	6.11	5.29	5.68
Expand the charter school program and increase the number of available openings at charter schools for one million students	5.80	6.39	5.28	5.57

Longer-Term Proposals

Voters were then presented with another set of proposals and asked to rate each using the same 1-9 scale. As with the previous set of proposals, to identify the key priorities for each group, the mean and standard deviation of all the potential priorities were calculated for each group. Priorities in red represent those that were more than one standard deviation higher than the mean for that group. Some observations:

- Reflecting the importance of honoring our veterans as a theme and goal for the country, *Allow veterans and survivors to use their GI Bill benefits in a way that suits their individual needs, including short terms, online and apprenticeship programs* was a high priority for voters overall (mean 7.12, #1), independents (6.88, #1) and suburban women (7.01, #1).
- Similarly, *increase veterans choice and accountability at the VA* was a high priority among voters overall (7.11, #2), independents (6.76, #3), and suburban women (6.96, #3).
- Reflecting the goal of making our country safer at home and abroad, another key priority was *increase cybersecurity to stop foreign nations from stealing our intellectual property* (7.09, #3 among voters overall; 6.82, #2 among independents; 6.97, #2 among suburban women).
- Reflecting the importance of goals and proposals related to health care, and the importance of increasing price transparency expressed in the previous section, *require health care providers to disclose prices prior to appointments* was also a priority for voters overall (6.95, #4) and suburban women (6.95, #4).
- For independents, *reform the federal bureaucracy and implement term limits for government employees* was also a priority (6.75, #4).
- While Republicans also thought the proposals already mentioned were important, their priorities included *enforce our immigration laws* (7.72, #1), *secure our borders* (7.71, #2), and *ban “born alive” abortions that are performed after a child is born* (7.70, #3).

Priorities addressing challenges people are facing and to help the country recover from the coronavirus (1-9 scale, where 1 is not important at all, 5 important, and 9	Overall	GOP	Indep	Suburban Women
Allow veterans and survivors to use their GI Bill benefits in a way that suits their individual needs, including short term, online and apprenticeship programs.	7.12	7.47	6.88	7.01
Increase veterans choice and accountability at the VA	7.11	7.51	6.76	6.96
Increase cybersecurity to stop foreign nations from stealing our intellectual property	7.09	7.55	6.82	6.97
Require health care providers to disclose prices prior to appointments	6.95	7.15	6.68	6.95
Reform the federal bureaucracy and implement term limits for government employees	6.89	7.32	6.75	6.60
Increase flexibility for individuals to save their own money in tax-preferred accounts for important expenses like retirement, education, health and dependent care	6.82	7.20	6.52	6.63
Reach bipartisan consensus on tackling our national debt	6.80	7.13	6.56	6.47
Make necessary reforms at the United Nations, World Health Organization and World Trade Organization to help prevent another pandemic	6.76	7.15	6.43	6.73
Ban “born alive” abortions that are performed after a child is born	6.70	7.70	6.55	6.48
Promote clean energy and environmental stewardship	6.65	6.38	6.38	6.76
Enforce our immigration laws	6.51	7.72	6.16	6.04
Reach more fair trade deals	6.50	7.16	6.18	6.27
Secure our borders	6.50	7.71	6.08	6.10
Increase investments in our military to ensure technological superiority	6.44	7.36	5.82	6.20
Fully implement and leverage the trade agreement between the US, Mexico and Canada that was recently signed into law	6.33	7.09	5.99	5.92
Expand access to online and mobile banking, and for innovative financial services firms to offer banking and investment services across the country	6.16	6.59	5.55	6.00
Reinstate protections for the Dreamer immigration program	6.12	5.80	5.87	5.97
Expand the research and development tax credit by doubling it for every kind of research and development, and further enhancing it for targeted areas like medical countermeasures	6.05	6.46	5.40	5.87
End sanctuary cities	5.98	7.47	5.43	5.41
Win the race for artificial intelligence and other industries of the future	5.94	6.57	5.38	5.63
Ensure there is no taxpayer funding for abortions	5.76	7.32	5.16	5.36
Build up the Space Force to protect US interests and counter adversaries in space	5.69	6.64	4.96	5.34

Police Reform

Of a range of approaches about what should happen with police and law enforcement at a national level, the largest share (41%) said reform the police, with 1 in 4 (mostly Republicans) favoring increasing funding (25%). Republicans clearly preferred increased funding (47%) followed by reform (24%), while independents (48%) and Democrats (52%) favored reform by far over other options. Among African-Americans, there was not a consensus about a single approach; the largest group (44%) preferred reforming the police over defunding (20%).

In thinking about the current discussion about police and racial injustice, which comes closer to how you feel about what should happen with police and law enforcement at a national level?	Overall	GOP	Indep	Dem	African-American
Abolish police departments	5	6	3	6	10
Defund the police	10	5	8	15	20
Reform the police	41	24	48	52	44
No changes are needed	12	14	13	9	8
Increase funding for police	25	47	17	13	9
Don't Know	7	5	11	6	9

In terms of a statement that *we should reform police but not defund police*, there was overwhelming agreement among voters overall (74-15 agree-disagree) and across party (Republicans, 80-12; Independent, 71-13, Democrats 71-19). A majority of African-Americans tended to agree (53-33) but to a lesser extent than other groups.

There was no consensus as to which particular reform related to law enforcement would be most important, with 31% saying improving and increasing training, 16% greater resources for community policing, 15% increasing use of body cameras, 15% banning chokeholds, and 11% improving data reporting and transparency. Results were generally similar across party and among African-Americans.

Which of these reforms related to law enforcement would be most important to you?	Overall	GOP	Indep	Dem	African-American
Improving and increasing training for law enforcement officers	31	28	34	30	28
Providing greater resources for law enforcement agencies to engage in community policing	16	21	14	14	14
Increasing the use of body cameras	15	16	15	14	11
Banning the use of chokeholds, except in instances where the officer's life is in danger	15	14	12	19	16
Improving law enforcement data reporting and transparency	11	11	7	13	19
None of these	3	5	3	2	2
Don't Know	8	4	15	7	11

Conclusion

At the end of August, there was some improvement in voters' assessment of how the virus was going, as well as an increase in support for reopening. In terms of how things may change as a result of the virus, while voters would prefer to see things go back to normal, there was an understanding that this would not be realistic, especially with regard to aspects of our society like the workplace, education and health care, which are already seen as having permanently changed. Given this understanding that there have been many structural changes, voters do see this experience as an opportunity to make structural reforms to society.

In thinking through priorities for goals for the country to pursue, it was clear that people were looking for outcomes over what they perceived as rhetoric. Therefore, from the list of potential themes and goals for the country, the most important were items that were clear outcomes and things people could easily understand, *defeat the coronavirus, keep America healthy and defeat the virus, honor our veterans and get America working.*

In terms of a series of proposals to address immediate term challenges and help the country recover from coronavirus, key priorities tended to coalesce around health care, reflecting the electorate's focus on the issue, the current situation, and their prioritization of defeating the coronavirus and keeping America healthy as a goal for the country. Other priorities pertained to preserving freedoms under the Constitution and preserving safety.

Based on the proposals and goals for the country that were prioritized, people are clearly looking for positive solutions, centering upon a way forward to defeat the virus and get America working. Voters, particularly independents, are wary of anything they perceive as rhetoric. Rather, they are looking for concrete steps and actionable solutions that will help the country beat the virus and get the economy moving.