



**THE COMMON GROUND  
OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE**

**POLICY POSITIONS  
SUPPORTED BY BOTH  
DEMOCRATS & REPUBLICANS**



PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

# INTRODUCTION

The Federal government is currently failing to address numerous problems. This failure is largely due to increasing partisan polarization resulting in government gridlock. One may well have the impression that there is virtually no common ground between Republicans and Democrats in America today.

Some speculate that polarization in the American public is driving the polarization in Congress. However, there are strong reasons to believe that the polarization in Congress primarily comes from other sources. Over the last decades, concurrent with the increase of polarization in Congress there has been an extraordinary increase in the amount of money flowing from special interests into political campaigns as well as a dramatic increase in the number of lobbyists operating in Washington. As many of these special interest have competing objectives their increased efforts at influencing government decisions, and the increased access derived from campaign contributions can exert centrifugal forces on the policymaking process.

Still the question stands as to whether there is common ground between Republicans and Democrats in the public—at least more than Congress. If so, the public would have the potential to become an arbiter between the parties, offering a pathway toward convergence.

To find out if there is such common ground, a major multi-year study of the American people was conducted by the Program for Public Consultation with the support and participation of Voice of the People, and more recently Common Ground Solutions. Financial support was also provided by the Democracy Fund, the Hewlett Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the MacArthur Foundation and the Circle Foundation.

## PPC'S ONLINE POLICYMAKING SIMULATION SURVEYS

Over a five year period, 31 in-depth surveys were conducted with 85,921 survey respondents (though some individuals were respondents in more than one survey). Most of the policy positions considered were based on proposed legislation. Others were derived from proposals made by the president, or were items in budget proposals.

The surveys were not simply standard polls used by the media or in political polling. For many issues, average Americans have a lack of information and in some cases misinformation on key issues. They also have not heard key arguments on each side of the issues. Research shows that in these circumstances poll responses are not highly stable and subject to even minor variations in the wording of the questions. Thus, they are not a reliable source of direction for policymakers.

Therefore, for this project, a unique survey form that goes well beyond standard polls was used. The aim of the process—developed by the Program for Public Consultation at the University of Maryland—is to put respondents in the shoes of a policymaker; thus they are called policymaking simulations. In this process, respondents are:

- provided a briefing on the issue and the policy proposals under consideration
- presented and asked to evaluate arguments for and against the policy proposal
- finally, asked for their recommendations

In some cases, the final recommendations are simply a binary question, such as whether the respondent favors or opposes a proposed legislative action. In other cases, the respondent is not only given the option of making a change or not, but is given the ability to specify their level of preferred change on a continuum, such as raising a tax rate or a benefit level.

In some cases, respondents are also given feedback about the impact of their choices. For example, in making choices about budget items, they are immediately shown the impact of their choices on the budget deficit.

The content of the policymaking simulations are reviewed in advance by proponents and opponents of the policy options to ensure that the briefings are accurate and balanced and that the arguments presented are indeed the strongest ones being made by proponents and opponents.

The surveys were conducted online with samples of 2,000 or more provided by Nielsen Scarborough from their larger probability-based panel that was recruited by phone and mail. Visit [www.vop.org/commonground](http://www.vop.org/commonground) for more information about the process respondents went through as well as field dates, sample sizes, links to the full questionnaires and reports for each survey, status of legislation and information on related standard polls.

# CDD'S IN-PERSON DELIBERATIVE POLLS

While most of the findings are from online policymaking simulation surveys conducted by PPC, some are also derived from the “deliberative polls” conducted by the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. In a deliberative poll a representative sample of Americans goes through a process in which they are first polled on key issues using standard poll questions. They then read briefings on the key issues that have been reviewed by a bipartisan oversight committee. Next, they meet for several days in person, hear from experts on the issues, hear competing arguments and get a chance to discuss the issues. At the end, they are polled again.

CDD final poll results are included in the list of policy positions herein, noted by (CDD).

## POSITIONS WITH MAJORITY SUPPORT

In the next pages, the policy positions that received majority support overall, and in most cases, by majorities of both Democrats and Republicans.

To get a quick grasp of the level of support for each position nationally and among Democrats and Republicans, the percentage of respondents in each category who support each position is embedded in a medallion that is either gold, silver, or bronze as follows.



Support is **60% or more**



Support is **51-59%**



Support is **less than 51%**, but **53% or more find it at least “tolerable” or do not oppose the proposal** (this number is marked with a <sup>T</sup>)

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# SOCIAL SECURITY

The Social Security Board of Trustees has reported for some years now that as the Baby Boom generation has been retiring, the cost of benefits have been superseding revenues, depleting the Social Security's Trust Fund. This is known as the Social Security "shortfall". The most recent report concluded that if no changes are made to Social Security revenues and/or benefits, by 2035 the Trust Fund will be fully depleted and current benefit levels will have to be scaled back by 20%.

Nonetheless, there have been no reforms to Social Security since 1983. Social Security is often characterized as being a "third rail," meaning that policymakers are afraid that any change to the Social Security system will elicit a severe public backlash. In addition to the problem of the Social Security shortfall, there are also voices calling for an increase in the minimum Social Security benefits for workers who have worked for 30 years. The current minimum benefit level is below the poverty line.

In this policymaking simulation, when respondents were making their final recommendations they were shown the scoring of the option as determined by the Social Security Administration, i.e. how much each option reduced or increased the Social Security shortfall. As they selected their proposed options, they received instant feedback about the cumulative impact of their choices on the shortfall.



US

GOP

DEM

## ADDRESSING THE SHORTFALL

76

72

81

Reduce benefits for the top 25% of lifetime earners\* (reduces shortfall by 7%)

79

81

78

Raise the retirement age to at least 68 years old over a 10-year period\* (reduces shortfall by 15%)

76

72

80

Raise the payroll tax rate from 6.2% to at least 6.6%\* (reduces shortfall by 17%)

88

84

92

Raise the cap on income subject to the Social Security payroll tax cap from \$117,000 to \$215,000\* (reduces shortfall by 27%)

59

54

64

Eliminate the cap on the Social Security payroll tax (reduces shortfall by 66%)

## INCREASING MINIMUM BENEFIT

58

62<sup>T</sup>

67

Raise the minimum benefit for those who have worked at least 30 years from \$800 to \$1,216/month (which would be above the poverty line)

# MEDICARE



The Medicare Board of Trustees has reported for some years that, as the Baby Boom generation tires, the Medicare Trust Fund is being depleted as benefits have been superseding revenues. This is known as the Medicare “shortfall.” The most recent report concluded that if no changes are made to Medicare revenues and/or benefits and other costs, the Trust Fund will be depleted by 2026 and benefit levels will have to be scaled back. However, there have been no reforms made to Medicare that address this shortfall.

In this policymaking simulation, when respondents were making their final recommendations, they were shown the scoring of the option, i.e. how much each option reduced or increased the Medicare shortfall. As they selected their proposed options, they received instant feedback about the cumulative impact of their choices on the shortfall.

**US**   **GOP**   **DEM**

## REDUCING PAYMENTS FOR BENEFITS

**69**   **71**   **70**   Encourage use of generic drugs by lowering costs for generic drugs and raising them for name brand drugs (reduces shortfall by 2%)

## REDUCING PAYMENTS TO PROVIDERS

**69**   **68**   **70**   Require drug companies to accept 17% less money for drugs that go to people with modest incomes\* (reduces shortfall by 3%)

**56**   **56**   **56**   Reduce payments to hospitals to equalize them with payments made for the same services when conducted in doctors’ offices (reduces shortfall by 2%)

## INCREASING REVENUES

**67**   **69**   **68**   Raise the Medicare payroll tax on current earners by 0.1% from 1.45% to 1.55%\* (reduces shortfall by 11.3%)

**59**   **58**   **63**   Increase Medicare premiums that cover outpatient services for those with incomes over \$85,000 (\$170,000 for married couples) by 15%\* (reduces shortfall by 3.5%)

## CONTROLLING COSTS IN OTHER WAYS

**74**   **74**   **73**   Do NOT limit how much Medigap can cover

**54**   **65**   **68<sup>T</sup>**   Limit payments from malpractice lawsuits to \$250,000 for pain and suffering, and \$500,000 for punitive damages (reduces shortfall by 4%)

\* Included in this percentage are respondents who chose higher levels of change on a scale of options presented.

# THE FEDERAL BUDGET

Every year, Executive Branch and Congress develop a budget for spending areas that Congress controls on an annual basis. This does not include mandatory spending, such as for entitlement programs like Social Security. At any time, Congress can make changes to general revenues, and some such changes are often incorporated into the annual budget proposal.

A central consideration in the development of the budget is the deficit and the growing national debt which now stands at \$22 trillion. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that on its current trajectory over the next decade the debt will grow to 93% of GDP, a level not seen since World War II.

Voices from both sides of the aisle have called for reductions in deficit spending and there have been various efforts to control the deficit through legislative action, most recently the Budget Control Act. However, these efforts have limited effects, as Congress has simply raised the spending limits.

Most of the positions below were derived from a unique survey. They were presented the current discretionary budget broken out into 34 line items with a short description of each item and shown spending levels for the past two years and the projected level for the current year. They were asked to specify their proposed level for each line item. They were also shown the amount of the current projected deficit. This amount would then change if they increased or decreased spending relative to projected spending. They were then presented options for changing existing taxes and adopting new taxes. Once again, they received immediate feedback about the cumulative effect of their choices on the deficit.



## US    GOP    DEM    DISCRETIONARY SPENDING

- |    |    |    |   |
|----|----|----|---|
| 64 | 53 | 74 | Reduce defense budget for general operations by \$7 billion*                      |
| 56 | 55 | 58 | Reduce subsidies to agricultural corporations by \$7 billion*                     |
| 62 | 59 | 65 | Reduce spending on military operations like Afghanistan and Syria by \$4 billion* |
| 65 | 56 | 73 | Reduce spending on nuclear weapons programs by \$2 billion*                       |
| 56 | 51 | 60 | Reduce spending on agencies that enforce federal law by \$2 billion*              |

\* Included in this percentage are respondents who chose higher levels of change on a scale of options presented.

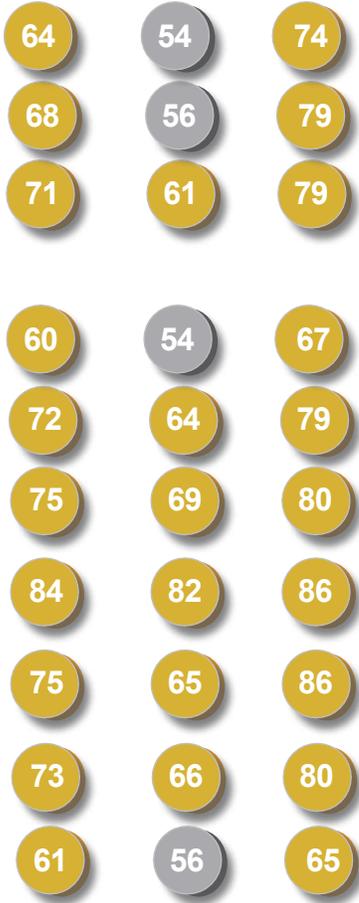
# GENERAL REVENUES

US

GOP

DEM

## CHANGE EXISTING TAXES



Raise average effective tax rates back to 2017 rates for individual incomes:

- \$200k-500k\* (generates \$55 billion)
- \$500k-\$1 million\* (generates \$17 billion)
- Above \$1 million\* (generates \$39 billion)

Raise taxes on capital gains and dividends by treating them as ordinary income for individual incomes:

- \$200k-500k\* (generates \$19 billion)
- \$500k-\$1 million\* (generates \$13 billion)
- Above \$1 million\* (generates \$90 billion)

Eliminate the provision known as the 'hedge fund managers tax' because it can lower the tax these managers would otherwise pay (generates \$2.2 billion)

Do NOT eliminate the estate tax

Raise taxes on various tobacco products (generates \$5 billion)

Raise alcohol taxes to 25 cents per ounce of alcohol\* (generates \$5 billion)

## ADOPT NEW TAXES



Adopt a 4% surtax on individual income above \$5 million\* (generates \$13 billion)

Adopt a 1% surtax on corporate income above \$100 million\* (generates \$12 billion)

Adopt a 0.15% fee on uninsured debt of financial institutions (generates \$11 billion)

Adopt a 0.1% tax on financial transactions: trades of stocks, bonds & derivatives (generates \$70 billion)

## ADDITIONAL TAX REFORMS FROM OTHER SURVEYS



Do NOT lower the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15% (CDD)

# HEALTHCARE

There is substantial agreement that the US healthcare system has serious problems. A remarkably high 18% of GDP is devoted to healthcare—far higher than other developed countries, but without producing better health outcomes. Twenty-eight million Americans do not have health insurance—also a much higher rate than other developed countries.

In 2009, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was passed to improve access and lower the costs of healthcare. Since its passage there has been much debate over whether it should be modified. In 2017, the American Health Care Act (AHCA) was put forward calling for the repeal of many of the provisions of the ACA, but it failed to pass.



## US    GOP    DEM

### EXPANDING HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

71	59	84
79	70	88
60	68	54

- Offer a government-run public option open to all individuals (CDD)
- Allow people aged 55 years or older to purchase a Medicare plan (CDD)
- Change the ACA to allow insurance companies to offer low-premium, high-deductible “copper plans” to people age 30 and over

## US    GOP    DEM

### PRESERVING ACA RULES ON HEALTH INSURANCE COSTS

81	66	94
78	60	93

- Do NOT repeal the ACA requirement that insurance companies cannot set premiums for older people more than three times what they charge younger people
- Do NOT repeal the ACA requirement that insurance companies cannot consider pre-existing conditions when setting premiums

### REDUCING HEALTH CARE COSTS

92	92	92
88	81	92

- Allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices (CDD)
- Make changes to the patent system to allow generic drugs to get on to the market more quickly (CDD)

# IMMIGRATION



Numerous voices from both sides of the aisle have called for immigration reform in light of:

- an extraordinary number of immigrants living without legal status in the country (now 10.5 million)
- unresolved issues about how to deal with adults who were illegally brought into the US as children
- a continuous flow of immigrants seeking to cross the border illegally
- a flood of asylum seekers primarily from Central American that have created a major backlog of pending cases
- a huge demand for immigrant workers in various industries.

## US    GOP    DEM    DEALING WITH IMMIGRANTS WITHOUT LEGAL STATUS

US	GOP	DEM	Policy
74	55	92	Create a new long-term visa for certain undocumented immigrants, which gives them a path to citizenship
80	69	92	Provide undocumented immigrants eligible for DACA status with full legal status and a path to citizenship
69	68	75	First-time violators of immigration laws should only be expelled, not subject to criminal punishment (CDD)

## DETERRING ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

US	GOP	DEM	Policy
73	80	68	Require that employers use the E-Verify system to establish the legal status of current employees and all new applicants

## INREASING THE NUMBER OF WORK VISAS

US	GOP	DEM	Policy
69	73	67	Increase the number of available temporary non-farm work visas (H2B) from 66,000 to around 200,000 a year
77	66	87	Increase the number of visas for low-skilled workers to move to the US for industries that need them, like agriculture and services (CDD)
80	72	86	Increase the number of visas for skilled workers to move to the US (CDD)
54	53 <sup>T</sup>	63	Increase the number of employment-based visas for immigrants who have skills needed in the US labor market

## DEALING WITH REFUGEES

US	GOP	DEM	Policy
93	90	96	Increase personnel to process asylum seekers' claims faster (CDD)
57	65 <sup>T</sup>	70	Provide aid to reduce poverty and violence in Central America (CDD)

\* Included in this percentage are respondents who chose higher levels of change on a scale of options presented.

# FEDERAL POVERTY PROGRAMS

Since the War on Poverty in the 1960s, one of the most polarizing issues in the American political discourse has been the question of how much the federal government should invest in efforts to mitigate poverty.

While the American economy has grown 384% over the last 50 years, the percentage of the population living under the poverty line has barely budged and is currently 11.8% with 38 million individuals living under the poverty line, including about 13 million children. Various pieces of Congressional legislation and other proposals have called for both expanding and for cutting back Federal poverty programs.



US

GOP

DEM

## FOOD ASSISTANCE

81

66

93

78

62

91

88

81

93

73

82

67

76

85

68

Increase SNAP benefits for:

- individuals living alone by at least 25%
- single mothers by at least 13%

Provide discounts on fruit and vegetables purchased using SNAP benefits

Disallow using SNAP benefits for:

- sweetened sodas
- candy

## CHILD POVERTY

72

52

90

75

59

89

Make pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds in low-income families and expand the availability of Early Head Start programs

Set up a Congressional commission to develop a plan to reduce child poverty by half in 10 years and as close to possible to zero in 20 years

US

GOP

DEM

## HELPING THE WORKING POOR

74

58

89

Raise the federal minimum wage to \$9

82

71

89

Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit, which provides a benefit to more middle-class workers (CDD)

59

51

67

Increase the maximum earnings that a worker without children can make and be eligible for EITC from \$14,820 to \$18,000

90

88

92

If a company is found guilty of not fully paying its workers (wage theft), take away its right to bid on government contracts

82

73

89

Create federal jobs programs to be deployed if economic conditions get worse and unemployment increases, including:

- a conservation program in which US Forest Service would employ 100,000 young people and cost \$250 million a year\*
- a childcare and early education program that would employ 100,000 childcare workers and early education teachers and cost \$3 billion a year\*
- a school renovation program that would employ 650,000 construction and maintenance workers and cost \$50 billion a year\*
- a community projects program that would employ 750,000 people and cost \$30 billion a year\*

75

58

91

81

69

93

80

69

92



## OTHER POSITIONS

60

67

54

Give states the option to receive federal poverty program funds in the form of a block grant

73

88

59

Do NOT have the federal government fund a bond for each child born that will accumulate in value until the child turns 18 to then become usable for higher education or other essentials for a start in life (CDD)

82

98

72

Do NOT have the federal government give cash grants of \$1,000/month to all adults at least eighteen-years-old (CDD)

# ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY



The United States has had a longstanding tension between its needs for protection of the environment and its needs for reasonably-priced energy. The challenge of finding the right balance between these priorities has been a perennial of policymaking.

While there is a consensus in the scientific community that the climate is changing as a result of human production of greenhouse gases related to energy production, there is a substantial debate within the Federal government about whether these conclusions are solid enough to warrant taking action to reduce emissions, especially when doing so could have economic consequences, with some populations, such as coal workers, being especially hard hit.

Over and above the effect on climate, emissions related to energy production, especially from fossil fuels, also have substantial negative effects on health, especially for certain vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly and those with asthma. In addition, there is consideration of whether the US should invest in new clean energy technologies that could prove to be a promising market.

Under the Obama administration, the US made significant international commitments, through the Paris Climate Agreement, to reduce its production of greenhouse gases by approximately 2%, which were then applied through the Clean Power Plan. The Trump administration reversed both of these steps. However, 25 states have persisted in seeking to live up to the obligations of the Paris Agreement and their commitments under the Clean Power Plan.

Various pieces of legislation have been proposed to promote clean energy, including new tax incentives and regulations, thereby reducing greenhouse gases and the negative health effects of fossil fuels.

US	GOP	DEM	COMMITMENTS TO REDUCING GREENHOUSE GASES
71	52	89	Adopt the goal of reducing US greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 2% a year
70	60 <sup>T</sup>	91	Commit to the 2014 Paris Agreement to combat climate change (CDD)
68	60 <sup>T</sup>	85	Go beyond the Paris Agreement and aim for more significant cutbacks on greenhouse gas emissions (CDD)
62	59	78	Provide adjustment assistance to coal workers who lose their job as a result of the transition to cleaner forms of energy
77	59	93	Adopt Clean Power Plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from power plants by 2-3% a year, provided that coal workers receive adjustment assistance*

TAX INCENTIVES FOR CLEAN ENERGY			
Provide tax credits:			
78	69	87	• for building new energy-efficient homes
75	66	84	• for installing fuel-efficient lighting, doors, windows and insulation on homes and businesses
73	62	85	• for installing small residential wind and fuel cell micro-turbines to generate energy for homes
77	66	88	• to farmers who build biogas facilities on their farms

\* Included in this percentage are respondents who chose higher levels of change on a scale of options presented.

73

57

86

Require higher fuel efficiency standards for:

- light cars and trucks
- heavy-duty vehicles

71

56

84

Require electric companies to have a minimum portion of their electricity come from renewable sources

74

56

89

77

65

90

Adopt stricter regulations on hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) and require businesses to gradually replace them with alternatives

## OFFSHORE DRILLING

Oil spills are a major contributor to environmental degradation and have led to calls for greater oversight and regulation. However, these have been met with opposition by voices who do not want to hinder America's energy production. The 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, which was the largest offshore oil spill in US history, led to a ban on new offshore oil drilling in US coastal waters, increased regulations on all offshore oil drilling and the creation of a special fund to cover future cleanups of oil spills. The current administration has rolled back some of these measures, including lifting the ban on offshore drilling. Most coastal states have requested a waiver that would keep the ban in place for their state.

71

56

86

Grant waivers to the 15 out of 17 coastal states who have requested that the ban on new offshore drilling be kept in place for their states

74

68

83

Do NOT lift the regulation requiring that oil drilling equipment be inspected by independent auditors certified by the federal government

85

78

92

Renew for 5 years the tax that oil companies pay to a special fund which covers the cost of oil spills, and raise the tax from 9 cents to 10 cents per barrel

## EXPANSION OF OIL & GAS PRODUCTION IN ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

In the current administration's move to achieve 'energy dominance', millions of acres of federal lands, such as the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, have been opened up for oil and gas drilling. Opponents say this is destabilizing to the environment, and endangers important ecosystems which benefit local communities.

76

54

88

Do NOT allow expansion of oil and gas production on federal lands previously dedicated to wildlife preservation (CDD)



# GOVERNMENT REFORM

Numerous government reforms have been proposed that seek to counter potential distortions to the democratic process by:

- constraining the role of money in the campaigns and making it more transparent
- limiting lobbying by recently retired government officials
- making the process of House redistricting more representative of the partisan balance of a state
- having Congressional term limits
- making it more possible for independent and third-party candidates to compete in elections.



## US    GOP    DEM    CONSTRAINING THE ROLE OF MONEY IN CAMPAIGNS

75

66

85

Pass a new Constitutional amendment that would allow governments greater freedom to regulate campaign financing and to restrict corporations more than individuals, thus overturning the Citizens United decision

## COUNTERING LARGE CAMPAIGN DONORS

60

53

67

Make half of a campaign donation up to \$50 refundable in the form of a tax credit, and limit this to people who have donated no more than \$300 to that candidate

66

58

73

Provide support to Senate candidates who only take donations up to \$150 with a 6-to-1 match and other support using funds from a new fee on government contractors

66

79

53

End the existing but inactive program for public financing of Presidential campaigns funded from checkoffs on tax returns

## INCREASE REQUIREMENTS TO DISCLOSE CAMPAIGN FINANCING

82

77

88

Require all individuals or organizations that donate or receive at least \$10,000 in campaign-related donations to register with the FEC and be publicly listed

85

83

88

Require corporations, unions, and other groups, when spending money on campaign-related activities to immediately report this to their shareholders and members, the public and the FEC

81

74

89

Require the FEC to publicly disclose the names of significant donors paying for TV or radio ads in support of candidates or related to controversial public issues

85

84

89

Have the President require federal contractors to disclose their donations to campaign-related activities

79

85

77

To ensure that those making campaign donations from abroad are registered US voters, require all campaigns to get the address and CVV code of all credit card donors



**US** **GOP** **DEM**

**LIMITING DIRECT FUNDRAISING**

55 51 58 Prohibit direct person-to-person fundraising by Members of Congress

**LIMITING POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY NON-PROFITS**

79 71 88 Maintain the prohibition against political activity, including campaign financing, by non-profits that receive tax-deductible donations

**LIMITING LOBBYING BY FORMER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

77 80 73 Extend the period government officials must wait after leaving office before they can work as lobbyists:

- for former Members of Congress to five years\*
- for former Congressional staffers to two years
- for former senior Executive Branch officials to five years

77 79 74

75 77 71

75 81 70

Prohibit former senior Executive Branch officials from lobbying for foreign governments for the rest of their life

**MAKING HOUSE REDISTRICTING LESS PARTISAN**

66 53 80 Rather than state legislatures, have Congressional redistricting done by a citizen commission that is representative of the state's demographics and partisan affiliations

55 64<sup>T</sup> 66 Create multi-member districts to better reflect the partisan distribution of the state

**IMPOSING CONGRESSIONAL TERM LIMITS**

80 88 73 Pass a constitutional amendment to limit how many terms Members of Congress can stay in office

71 76 66 Limit House Members to three 2-year terms and Senators to two 6-year terms

**ENABLING INDEPENDENT & THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES**

74 71 75 Make it more possible for independent and third-party candidates to compete in Congressional elections

77 75 77 Make it more possible for independent and third-party candidates to compete in Presidential debates

55 62<sup>T</sup> 64 Adopt ranked choice voting in federal elections to counter the potential spoiler-effect of independent or third-party candidates

\* Included in this percentage are respondents who chose higher levels of change on a scale of options presented.

# SENTENCING REFORM

Currently, there is substantial debate about the fact that the number of Americans in prison has quadrupled since the 1980s and is greater than any other country in absolute terms and on a per capita basis. Much of this increase was due to mandatory sentencing laws that were established in the later part of the 20th century.

Various pieces of legislation have called for reforming federal sentencing by reducing the role of mandatory minimum sentencing.



US

GOP

DEM

## REDUCING MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCING

83

76

90

Reduce the mandatory minimum sentence for 'one strike' drug offenses from 10 years to 5 years

78

68

87

Give judges the discretion to release early, prisoners who were convicted as juveniles and who have completed at least 20 years of their sentence

74

64

83

Create a new sentencing category for those convicted of transporting or storing drugs or drug money that does not carry a mandatory minimum sentence

# U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

The US Postal Service has been under continuous financial pressure since 2008. Funded exclusively by selling its products and services, it has suffered from a decline in its first-class mail business - from the Great Recession as well as from the rise of email, especially for billing. The unique requirement that the Postal Service pre-fund its retirement program by 100% is also a major source of pressure. The Postmaster General has proposed numerous services to make the US Postal Service economically viable that have been included in Congressional legislation.



US

GOP

DEM

## MAKING THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE VIABLE

83

86

86

Reduce the retirement pre-funding level from its current requirement of covering 100% of future costs down to covering 80%\*

89

86

91

Allow USPS to offer a wider range of products and services

66

73

63

Allow USPS to close up to 5% of its unprofitable post offices each year\*

67

75

60

Eliminate Saturday letter delivery

79

82

72

Promote the voluntary conversion of door-delivery mailboxes to curbside or cluster boxes\*

62

73

63<sup>T</sup>

Require that, in the event of labor disputes, arbitrators always take into account the Postal Service's long-term financial stability



For decades now, there have been periodic efforts to reform police practices and laws regarding the use of force, especially deadly force, by law enforcement officers. The recent deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and other incidents of law enforcement officers using deadly force have stimulated protest and demands for policing reforms.

Congress introduced two comprehensive police reform bills to address these issues: The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act (H.R. 7120, S. 3912), sponsored by Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA) and Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ); and the JUSTICE Act (S. 3985), sponsored by Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC).

The provisions in these two bills continue to be the basis for ongoing debates over police reform, including:

- when police officers should use deadly force;
- what types of force police officers should be able to use, such as chokeholds;
- the use of no-knock warrants;
- the standards by which officers are held accountable for their use of excessive force;
- whether racial bias among police is a problem to be addressed; and
- how much regulation there should be of military equipment transferred to the police.

## US    GOP    DEM    POLICIES REGARDING USE OF FORCE

82	71	94	Make it a duty for officers to intervene in cases where another officer is using excessive force
73	55	91	Prohibit chokeholds and other neck restraints
69	64 <sup>T</sup>	90	Require officers to be trained in de-escalation and other alternative techniques, require such techniques be exhausted before using deadly force, and make officers criminally liable if they fail to do so.
65	58 <sup>T</sup>	82	Ban no-knock warrants, in which officers can enter a suspect's house without warning

## INCREASING ACCOUNTABILITY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

89	85	94	Require all officers to wear body cameras, and to turn them on when they are on a call or interacting with a suspect
81	70	92	Create a national registry of police misconduct available to all police departments and the public
70	52	86	Incentivize states to hire an independent prosecutor in cases against an officer who used deadly force
63	56 <sup>T</sup>	84	Amend qualified immunity so that it is more possible to hold officers liable in civil cases for their use of excessive force

## OTHER PROVISIONS

72	53	89	Require officers to receive training to address implicit racial bias
64	54 <sup>T</sup>	84	Require police departments to get local government approval for requests for surplus military equipment, and prohibit requests for certain high-powered military equipment

# INTERNATIONAL TRADE

International trade has been controversial for some decades. Each international trade agreement was preceded by a major debate about whether the benefits of trade outweigh the costs, particularly to American workers.

During the 2016 election, Donald Trump posed strong challenges to America's existing trade agreements. The Trump administration subsequently pulled the US out of the recently negotiated Trans-Pacific Partnership, imposed new tariffs on trading partners, and pressed for the renegotiation of various trade deals, renewing the debates about whether trade serves US interests and whether the negative effects of trade can be better mitigated.



## US    GOP    DEM

### HAVING INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

87	84	93
72	54	89
72	55	88
74	62	88

- As a general principle, continue to promote international trade through a set of internationally agreed-on rules
- Continue to be part of the World Trade Organization
- Have a free trade agreement with Mexico and Canada
- Rejoin the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the trading agreement between 12 countries excluding China (CDD)

### MITIGATING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF TRADE

#### - INCLUDING LABOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS IN TRADE AGREEMENTS -

89	86	93
86	79	94
78	70	85
69	60	75

- Include enforceable labor standards in new trade agreements
  - Include enforceable environmental standards in new trade agreements
- #### - INCREASING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS -
- Increase the amount of unemployment benefits a person receives as a percent of their prior earnings—currently an average of 39%
  - Increase the maximum amount of unemployment benefits a person can receive above the current average of \$472 per week

#### - MAKING AMERICAN WORKERS MORE COMPETITIVE IN THE GLOBAL MARKET -

83	81	87
81	74	90
82	72	93

- Provide employers with a tax credit up to \$5,000 for providing more apprenticeship programs
- Increase the amount spent on training programs for cybersecurity jobs
- Increase the amount spent on training programs for jobs in the energy industry

# INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND MILITARY ALLIANCES

A central pillar of the world order the US established in the period after World War II was the principle of collective security which says that nations will contribute to collective military operations and/or using economic sanctions in response to international aggression. This principle was also the basis for the US establishing military alliances and mutual defense treaties with other countries or groups of countries. This principle has become more controversial recently as some have questioned whether the US should sustain such commitments.

As NATO celebrated its 70th anniversary, there was a debate about whether NATO is obsolete. Also, the fact that NATO members are not meeting the agreed-upon requirement of spending 2% of GDP for defense has prompted calls for the US to threaten to pull out of NATO if members do not increase their defense spending.

Also subject to debate are US treaties with Asian countries. Since 1953 the US has had a mutual defense treaty with South Korea and has 24,000 US troops based in South Korea in support of its commitment. Since 1960, the US has had a treaty with Japan that says that the two countries pledge to join forces and act together if there is an armed attack against Japan or against the 39,000 US forces based there.

US

GOP

DEM

## UPHOLDING THE PRINCIPLE OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

82

77

89

The US should make it a high priority to continue to uphold the principle of collective security by committing to contribute to the collective defense in the event of aggression

## MUTUAL DEFENSE TREATIES

### - NATO -

83

77

90

The US should continue to be part of the NATO military alliance (with it specified that this entails a commitment to collective defense)

83

77

90

The US should reaffirm its commitment to defend any NATO ally attacked by a hostile force (CDD)

85

76

91

The US should not threaten to withdraw from NATO if European members do not increase their defense spending

### - SOUTH KOREA -

87

86

89

The US should continue to have a mutual defense treaty with South Korea

76

80

74

The US should continue to have 24,000 US troops based in South Korea

### - JAPAN -

87

88

87

The US should continue to have mutual security treaty with Japan

76

80

76

The US should continue to have 39,000 US troops based in Japan

# NUCLEAR WEAPONS

For decades, the United States has tried to reduce nuclear risks by maintaining an effective nuclear deterrent while negotiating arms control with other countries that limit US capabilities.

The Trump administration's Nuclear Posture Review put forward numerous controversial positions that have stimulated debate on such issues as whether the US should continue to maintain and extend nuclear arms control treaties, whether the US needs to have its current nuclear capabilities and whether new capabilities need to be developed. There are also debates about whether the US should maintain its current policies on using nuclear weapons first and current legislation that would restrict the President's ability to use nuclear weapons first.



**US**

**GOP**

**DEM**

## HAVING ARMS CONTROL TREATIES

83

84

83

Continue to have arms control treaties with Russia

82

77

89

Extend the New START Treaty

87

85

90

Continue to abide by the moratorium on nuclear weapons testing

## NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPACITIES

85

94

79

Have at a minimum enough nuclear weapons to fulfill a minimum retaliatory capability

65

77

56

Develop low-yield nuclear warheads to put on submarines

61

53

69

Phase out land-based missiles (ICBMs) instead of replacing them\*

## FIRST USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

68

59

74

Require that before using nuclear weapons first, the President must get a declaration of war from Congress

57

64

51

Continue to be ambiguous about whether the US would consider using nuclear weapons first and under what circumstances

## IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

67

59<sup>T</sup>

83

The US recommitting to the Iran Nuclear Agreement (CDD)



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

After the moderate success of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, countries around the world committed to achieving the even more ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). US commitment to provide foreign aid to solve world problems has remained steady over the last few decades, and continues to be the highest among donor nations in absolute terms, though relatively low in terms of a percentage of GDP.

**US** **GOP** **DEM**

Provided that the other donor nations contribute their proportionate share of the costs of meeting the various SDGs, the US should do its share by:



- increasing spending \$11 billion a year to achieve the goal of universal access to vaccinations by 2030, which would require a 0.5% increase in taxes
- increasing spending \$18 billion a year to get halfway to the goal of eliminating chronic hunger by 2030, which would require a 0.85% increase in taxes\*
- increasing spending \$21 billion a year to get halfway to the goal of universal access to clean drinking water and sanitation by 2030, which would require a 0.95% increase in taxes\*

The US should use diplomacy and financial support to promote democracy and human rights throughout the world (another SDG) (CDD)



# NET NEUTRALITY

Policies regarding the internet have faced the same tension as other areas of the market, namely the balance between freedom and regulation. This tension can be witnessed most visibly in the debate over the "net neutrality" rules, which were passed by the FCC in 2015 and then repealed by the FCC in 2017. The net neutrality rules put in place in 2015 forbid Internet Service Providers from blocking access to certain websites; charging customers a fee to access certain websites; or providing websites the option to give their visitors the ability to download material at a higher speed, for a fee, while providing a slower download speed for other websites.

Democratic Members of Congress and consumer advocacy groups feel that ISPs have become too powerful and that regulations are necessary to keep the market from being dominated by a few actors. Republican Members of Congress and free market advocates oppose the rules which they believe would stifle innovation within the digital economy.

**US** **GOP** **DEM**



Do NOT repeal the net neutrality regulation put in place in 2015

\* Included in this percentage are respondents who chose higher levels of change on a scale of options presented.



## VARIATIONS BY RED/BLUE DISTRICTS, PRIMARY VOTERS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

### **Very Red and Very Blue Districts**

Naturally the question arises as to whether the common ground positions in the country as a whole are also found in very red or very blue districts. To find out the samples were divided six ways according to the partisan index (from Cook's ratings) for the Congressional districts where the respondent lived. In every case the direction of majority opinion was the same as for the national sample and in nearly all cases the views in very partisan districts differed from overall national sample less than the national sample of partisans, and in the few cases where they did it was by no more than the margin of error.

This leaves open the possibility that some specific districts might differ from the national sample more than the national partisan sample, but that is likely to be quite rare and it is extremely unlikely that the direction of majority opinion would differ from the national sample of partisans. It is also possible that the partisan sample within a very partisan district might differ from that national partisan sample, but based on analysis of numerous cases we have generally found that partisans in very partisan districts are no more deviant from the overall national sample than is the national partisan sample.

### **Primary Voters**

While in some cases primary voters of one party were slightly more deviant from the overall national sample than the national partisan sample, in no case did primary voters of either party diverge from the majority position national partisan sample.

### **Demographics**

Examining the views of the demographic subgroups—including race, age, gender and education—in a very small number of cases a demographic sample was divided while the overall sample had a majority position. In only one case did the majority of a demographic group diverge from the national majority position and, surprisingly, this was a case in which African-Americans were not supportive of a tax increase on the wealthy.



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