CENTER FORWARD

2026 Voter Research Journals

SEPTEMBER 2026



GS STRATEGY GROUP

breakthrough campaigns

Methodology

Breakthrough Campaigns and GS Strategy Group conducted qualitative journals between September 21 – 28, 2026.

Interviews were conducted among 35 voters who:

- Had not voted in primaries but voted in the 2024 election.

This study is the sixth iteration in a larger qualitative longitudinal research project which has tracked the political views of the same voters, starting in the lead up to the 2024 presidential election with several follow-up interactions in 2025 and 2026.

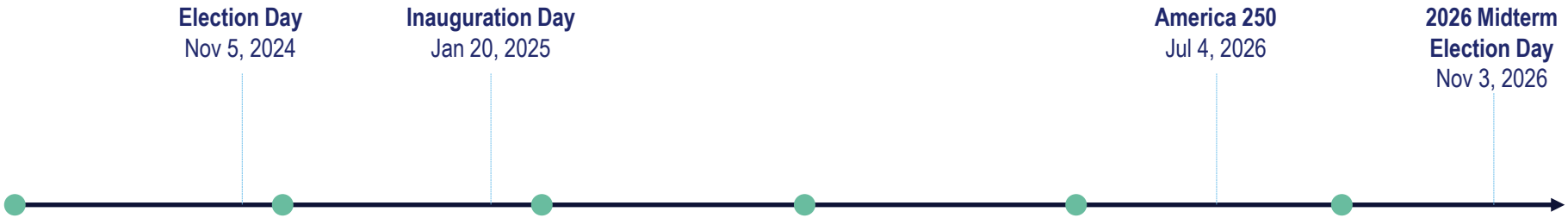
- All 35 of these voters have participated in prior iterations of the project.

Voters that indicated that they were undecided about their vote choice leading up to the 2024 elections are labeled as “unknown” in this report, otherwise their 2024 vote choice of Kamala Harris or Donald Trump is indicated.

As with all qualitative research, results are directional.

35 Journals			
17 Harris voters	**12** Trump voters	**6** Undecided/ Third Party voters	
9 Northeast	**8** Midwest	**10** South	**8** West
15 Men		**20** Women	
16 18-44	**11** 45-64	**8** 65+	
24 White voters		**11** POC voters	

Participants completed waves of diary entries over the past two years



Phase One

Oct 31 – Nov 4, 2024
38 voters

Experiences with voting, impact of politics on life and media consumption, and views on the current political landscape

Phase Two

Nov 13–15, 2024
38 voters

Most important factors that influenced vote choice, impact of politics on life, media consumption, and outlook going forward

Phase Three

Feb 17–19, 2025
35 voters

Finding common ground as Americans, impact of politics on life and media consumption, views of the second Trump administration, and outlook moving forward

Phase Four

Sep 3–7, 2025
38 voters

Views on compromise, the two-party system, the second Trump administration, and views toward the upcoming midterms

Phase Five

Apr 16–21, 2026
36 voters

Evaluating federal vs. state government, checks and balances, and America 250

Phase Six

Sep 21–28, 2026
35 voters

Voter mood, the economy and affordability, and views toward the November 2026 midterm elections

Key Findings

Changes In Voters' Views: October 2024 – September 2026

	PHASES 1–3 October-November 2024, February 2025	PHASES 4-5 September 2025, April 2026	PHASE 6 September 2026
TRUMP	• Harris voters were incredibly anxious about Trump's candidacy and early months in office. • Trump voters were generally happy and excited about his reelection and enthusiastic about his agenda.	• In September 2025, many voters were already frustrated with Trump's performance, while some Republicans remained hopeful that he would improve the country's direction. • By April 2026, frustration had deepened, with some Trump voters describing themselves as "disappointed" and questioning how things were going.	• Voters across the political spectrum described feeling "frustrated" or "disappointed" with Trump, even those who have supported him previously. • While Democratic voters largely blamed Trump for economic challenges and foreign policy decisions, most Republican voters shared similar sentiments.
ECONOMY	• Trump voters believed he would fix the economy — and some Harris voters acknowledged Trump's economic stewardship was the "only bright spot" of a Trump administration.	• Affordability was a major concern in September and became an even bigger source of frustration by April. • Concerns shifted from uncertainty about inflation and rising costs to widespread anger that everyday expenses were still getting worse.	• Economic concerns dominate voters' outlook on the country today. • Across party lines, voters cited rising costs of expenses (i.e., groceries, gas, housing, insurance, and healthcare) as evidence that the economy has worsened over the past year.
IMMIGRATION	• The Southern border and immigration policy were a key priority and focus of voters across the aisle. • Non-Harris voters saw the "chaos" at the southern border and Democrats "amnesty" policies as disqualifying Democrats • Many Harris voters conceded that the Democrats' immigration approach had been a failure.	• In September 2025, concerns centered on the administration's immigration approach and enforcement tactics. • By April 2026, most Trump voters still supported tougher border enforcement, but immigration had become less prominent as economic concerns dominated voters' attention	• Immigration remains a key issue, but voters are divided on both the problem and the solution • Republicans emphasized border security and illegal immigration, while Democrats focused on ICE enforcement practices, treatment of immigrants, and concerns about family and community impacts.

Key Findings

1 Frustration remains dominant, but disappointment is growing

No voter describes themselves as happy or proud, and disappointment rose notably since April as voters across parties express growing dissatisfaction with the country's direction and institutions.

2 Affordability is the lens, not one issue among many

Voters judge the economy through gas, groceries, housing and insurance costs, and increasingly see affordability as connected to broader concerns about government competence and priorities. They fault both parties, but place trust on neither to fix it.

3 The midterms are a referendum on the country's direction, not individual candidates

Stakes feel existential even when voters expect their own household to be fine, and many frame the election as a choice about the country's trajectory rather than specific candidates.

4 Checks and balances matter more than partisan control

Across preferred congressional outcomes, voters consistently favor a Congress that serves as an independent check rather than one that fully aligns with the President.

5 The problem is influence rather than election integrity

Most believe their vote will be counted accurately, but fewer believe their voice changes outcomes or that elected leaders respond to people like them.

6 Voters want Congress focused on costs, but expect politics and investigations

Affordability and health care dominate what voters want Congress to address, while fighting, investigations and partisan conflict dominate what they expect.

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Mood & 2026 Election

Frustration still dominates, but disappointment is the mover – up 4 since April – as voters across parties cite costs, executive overreach, and relentless partisan conflict

CURRENT VOTER MOOD

21 voters
+1 from April 2026

FRUSTRATION continues to be felt across party lines as voters express growing dissatisfaction with the country's systems

15 voters
+4 from April 2026

Party division leads to a perceived gap in values, beliefs, and solutions driving **DISAPPOINTMENT**

14 voters
-3 from April 2026

ANXIETY remains widespread as voters worry about rising costs, economic uncertainty, and the country's future direction

7 voters
No change from April 2026

HOPE is largely concentrated among Republican and Independent voters looking toward a new direction of leadership

Q1. Which TWO of the following best describe your feelings about how things are going in the US right now? Why did you choose those two words to describe how you are feeling? If none of those words describe how you feel, which words would you choose?

FRUSTRATED

"I feel frustrated and disappointed. **There are many reasons.** In no particular order: **the contentious war with Iran, the fact that we do not have term limits** (see how Mitch McConnell is doing), **and the overall political division**."

– Male, 18-44, White, Northeast, College+, Republican

"I am frustrated and worried because there **should be a way for other elected officials or courts to exercise their power to check the executive branch**."

– Female, 45-64, White, Midwest, <College, Democrat

ANXIOUS / WORRIED

"I feel overwhelmed because gas is too high and it makes everything else expensive…I **am concerned about the midterm elections**…because if the democrats win either the House or the Senate it will **be nonending investigations and stop the Trump agenda**. And I am also worried because **the democrats have become outright socialists**. I am concerned about **having an open border again**. We have all seen the destruction that has brought on our country."

– Female, 65+, White, South, College+, Republican

"We are currently in a very divisive time in our country. **We are focused on all the differences in each other but not appreciating the similarities we all have**."

– Male, 45-64, Black, Northeast, College+, Democrat

DISAPPOINTED

"I would expect our country at some point to be able to **overcome our differences, and it seems [like] the gap just keeps getting wider**."

– Female, 18-44, White, Midwest, College+, Independent

"**It just feels like there's so much arguing and division all the time. It seems like both sides are more focused on fighting with each other than actually getting things done.** I'm disappointed with how things are going and frustrated because it feels like the same problems keep getting talked about without much changing.**"**

– Male, 18-44, Latino, South, <College, Republican

HOPEFUL

always paired with a negative emotion (i.e. "frustration")

"I am both hopeful and frustrated with the current political climate. I am frustrated because I despise everything that our current administration is doing, I think that they are doing a horrible job. **But yet I am now hopeful that people are finally wanting a change and the tide seems to be shifting."**

– Female, 18-44, White, Midwest, College, Democrat

"Frustrated because there is a lot of good legislation like voter id that needs to get approved and it is not**. Hopeful that it will get approved and the politicians will finally look at the people and not money and lobbyists."**

– Female, 65+, White, West, College+, Independent

For the second consecutive phase, no voter selected "happy" or "proud"

Voters of every party judge the economy by what they pay, not by the indicators – and almost none of them expect relief in the next year

CURRENT AND PREDICTED ECONOMIC SITUATION



31 out of 35 define the economy by prices: groceries, gas, housing, insurance



Gas is the multiplier: 19 of 35 directly tie gas costs to the price of everything else



Most expect next year to be the same or worse – and five go further, predicting an outright recession, depression, or market crash

Q2. What are your thoughts on America's current economic situation? And where do you think it will be one year from now?

CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION

"**Inflation, lack of good paying jobs, the price of gas, to name a few…**The Republicans keep cutting welfare for low-income citizens, which is making it hard to survive. I always say if you're prolife, then be prolife their WHOLE life!"

– Female, 18-44, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

"I am very disappointed in current fuel prices. We all need to drive, most of us need to provide for our family and it is getting harder to do so. **I am hopeful that it will be better in one year, although I won't be surprised if its not.**"

– Male, 45-64, White, Midwest, <College, Independent

"I think the current economic situation is a bit harsh. **Most people I know are struggling. Gas, food, vehicles are so expensive. I know my spouse and I are trying to spend less and we are considered financially secure.** I think one year from now will be the same."

– Female, 45-64, White, South, <College, Republican

"It is very bad. I'm on a fixed income… **My gas and electric, car insurance, have gone up. Food is outrageous**, we have given up on buying beef…We've cut down on outings because of the price of gas."

– Female, 65+, Latina, Northeast, Democrat

PREDICTED ECONOMIC SITUATION

"**I am not too optimistic about America's current economic situation.** Growing oil price leads to inflation and we may end up in recession…**I won't be surprised if America will be in the deep recession due to the mindless federal government's actions**."

– Female, 65+, White, Northeast, College+, Independent

"The current economic situation is troubling, the very basic things people claimed they were voting for such as affordable groceries and gas have skyrocketed**. A year from now things will only continue to worsen when POTUS is making deals to fatten his pockets rather than feed the people of his nation**."

– Female, 18-44, Black, Northeast, <College, Democrat

"The upper class is fine. **But the middle and lower class continue to struggle. I don't think much will change in the next year**…The price of everything is going up and staying there while wage increases aren't matching these new cost of living expenses."

– Female, 18-44, White, Midwest, College+, Independent

"I do believe if Trump is allowed to continue with his agenda gas will go back down again and prices will even out. **However, once prices become inflated they never go back down again."**

– Female, 65+, White, South, College+, Strong Republican

More voters blame Trump and Republicans than Biden for today's economy, but the largest cross-partisan instinct is to fault both parties – and few trust either to fix it

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ECONOMY – AND WHO CAN FIX IT

15 voters — **place the blame primarily on Trump and his party**
Tariffs and the Iran war dominate; Biden-era blame is stale. Who can fix it: Democrats, or no one soon

18 voters — **spread the blame across both parties or the system itself**
Deficits and donor money outweigh any one leader. Who can fix it: neither party alone

2 voters — **trace today's prices back to Biden-era decisions**
Biden-era inflation, energy, and border policy is the root cause. Who can fix it: Republicans

Q3. Thinking specifically about the negative side of the current economic situation, who or what do you hold responsible? Republicans often blame Biden-era policies, while Democrats blame President Trump and Republicans. To what extent do you agree with either view? Why? Looking forward, who is best equipped to fix it?

TRUMP & REPUBLICANS

"I feel the blame is **100% Trump and the Republicans**. Tariffs, the war, military spending, oil prices are all happening now… I don't see any short-term fix."

– Male, 65+, White, Northeast, <College, Democrat

"I blame **Trump and the Republicans that blindly follow him**! This term it has been even worse. We need to get him out of office and try to reverse things."

– Female, 65+, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

"I **solely blame President Trump and Republicans**… if they would have done absolutely nothing, we would have been in a better economic situation."

– Male, 18-44, Latino, Northeast, College+, Independent

BOTH PARTIES

"I think they are **both to blame** given they both do not control public spending properly. Democrats spend too much on social programs, Republicans on defense."

– Male, 18-44, White, Northeast, College+, Republican

"I blame **both parties**. They both have refused to address the deficit crisis. The only way out of debt and inflation is to raise taxes."

– Male, 45-64, Black, Northeast, College+, Democrat

"It's a mix of both… **neither side can do it alone** – the Democrats and Republicans need to work together."

– Female, 18-44, White, Midwest, College+, Independent

BIDEN-ERA POLICIES

"I still blame Biden. **His "Inflation Reduction Act" brought back inflation**… Trump is trying to reign it in, but the Iran War has not helped. I still believe Trump is best equipped to fix it."

– Female, 65+, White, South, College+, Republican

"I think **the Republicans are the ones to fix this**. The problem was from democrats taxing the Americans to death at every turn."

– Female, 45-64, White, South, <College, Republican

"I blame **both Biden-era policies and Trump's latest actions**, but the Biden era is over, and Trump's actions continue**… it can be fixed only by the Republican party**."

– Female, 65+, White, Northeast, College+, Independent

When pressed beyond prices, voters describe a crisis of security and trust, not a list of policy priorities

TOP CONCERNS OUTSIDE OF THE ECONOMY

When thinking about the **issues that concern you right now**, aside from the economy and rising prices, what else are you thinking about?

▲ MOST MENTIONS

ICE Raids / Immigration Enforcement (11)

Iran War / Foreign Policy (10)

Healthcare Access and Costs (7)

Food Safety / FDA Recalls (5)

AI Surveillance (5)

Social Security / Retirement Security (4)

Misc. – Individual Rights, Civic Protections

▼ FEWER MENTIONS

Q4. When thinking about the issues that concern you right now, aside from the economy and rising prices, what else are you thinking about?

IMMIGRATION enforcement and foreign conflict continue to be top concerns from previous phases

"Immigration is out of control. **We have too many foreigners here with different values than America and they are trying to change our way of life to more resemble theirs**. Even though they came from despicable countries."

– Male, 45-64+, White, Midwest, College+, Republican

"The War**, Ice agents being so forceful and not treating people like people** but treating them like rabid animals. **The morality and lack of empathy of the leadership trickling down and the feeling this is ok**."

– Female, 65+, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

FOREIGN POLICY: Raised across parties but concentrated among Republicans (7 Reps, 2 Dems, 1 Ind), who split between fearing escalation and backing military action

"I am worried about the fact that **Trump is always doing something to make other countries mad.** I wonder how long it will be until he starts or **provokes some unjust war** that involves innocent American people who want nothing to do with it."

– Female, 35–49, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

"I am thinking about the war with Iran**. I personally support the effort to bring down the Iranian regime…** Iran has been the single largest supporter of terrorism… It's time to neutralize them."

– Male, 65+, White, South, <College, Independent

HEALTHCARE ACCESS & COSTS

"The first thing that comes to my mind is healthcare. **The prices are growing and Medicare does not cover all the costs.** I have a friend who suffered a stroke, and Medicare does not cover the expenses. The family is close to be totally broke and they are devastated**.** Also, **the situation with vaccinating children became unreasonably dangerous due to Robert Kennedy's actions**"

– Female, 65+, White, Northeast, College+, Independent

Most voters call November existential for the country even when they expect their own family to be fine – the rest doubt the outcome, not the stakes

IMPORTANCE OF THE NOVEMBER ELECTION

What is at stake for families is affordability: gas, groceries, property taxes and jobs dominate the personal answers.

The Implication: Urgency is real but uneven – some are urging everyone they know to vote, while others see no link between voting and relief.

Q5. Looking ahead to the upcoming elections this November, how important does this election feel to you personally? What is at stake for you and your family? What is at stake for the future of the country?

WHY NOVEMBER FEELS EXISTENTIAL – ROUGHLY 2 IN 3

National stakes outrun personal ones (14)

Many say their own household will be fine either way but still call the country's direction existential. Feeling insulated doesn't lower the stakes.

Different threats drive the same urgency (20)

Democrats often focus on democracy, rights, and institutions. Republicans more often focus on immigration, culture, and national decline. The concerns differ, but both are described as high-stakes.

It is a referendum, not a race (10)

Almost no one names a candidate. The question voters describe is whether Congress will enable or restrain the president. Beyond that, voters want competent professionals focused on affordability.

"This could be our last election. **The future of our democracy is at stake**."
– Female, 45-64, White, Midwest, Democrat

"It is critical. **Our future hangs in the balance**."
– Female, 65+, White, South, Strong Republican

"If the Democrats win they will open the borders again and we will **lose this country forever**."
– Male, 45-64, White, West, Republican

WHY SOME DISCOUNT IT – ROUGHLY 1 IN 3

"Nothing in Washington will change" (4)

They expect gridlock no matter who wins and doubt a new majority would accomplish much once seated.

"My vote may not matter" (4)

They doubt the vote itself, worn down by being told every election is do-or-die, they question whether their ballot changes anything.

"This one just isn't my fight" (4)

A few are simply disengaged and not following the race or able to name an issue of their own on the ballot.

"This is the first one where I really don't know if my vote matters. The amount of fraud that seems to be rampant in the voting systems, coupled with living in California, makes me question if my vote really makes any difference at all. "
– Male, 18-44, White, West, Independent

"I am skeptical that any real change will take place."
– Female, 18-44, White, West, Republican

CENTER FORWARD

Engagement, Efficacy, and the Pull from the Center

Apathy here is about influence, not integrity – and it splits these voters into four distinct types

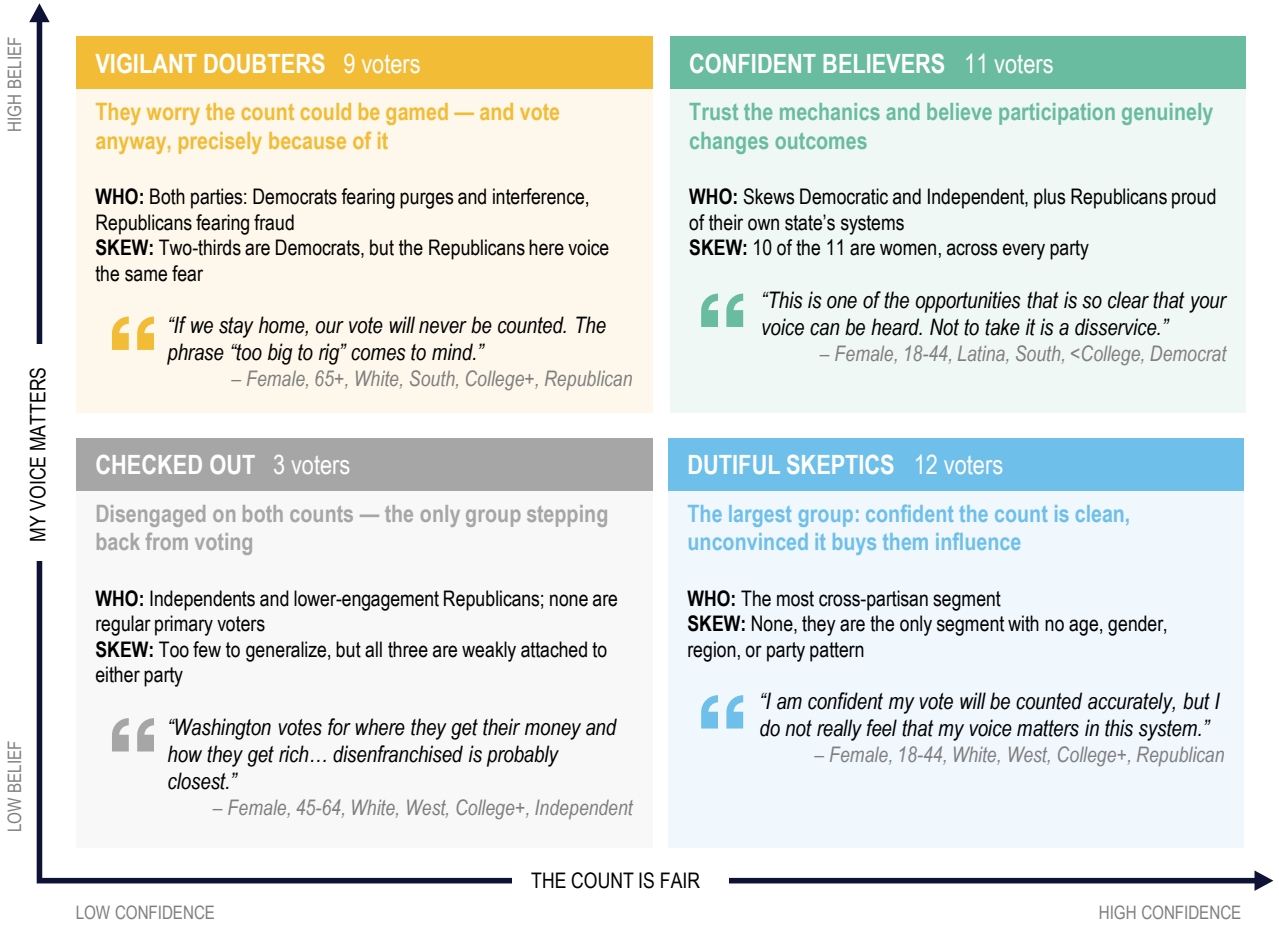
VOTE CONFIDENCE VS. BELIEF THAT MY VOICE MATTERS

Most (23 of 35 voters) **trust the count.**

Only 20 believe their voice changes anything.

The gap is efficacy, not integrity.

Q9. Some voters tell us they feel apathetic or disenfranchised because they aren't sure if the system works or if their vote really matters. Do you personally feel apathetic toward voting this year? How confident are you that your vote in this upcoming election will be counted accurately and fairly? Do you feel like your voice matters in this current system?



VIGILANT DOUBTERS 9 voters

They worry the count could be gamed — and vote anyway, precisely because of it

WHO: Both parties: Democrats fearing purges and interference, Republicans fearing fraud
SKEW: Two-thirds are Democrats, but the Republicans here voice the same fear

> *"If we stay home, our vote will never be counted. The phrase "too big to rig" comes to mind."*
> *– Female, 65+, White, South, College+, Republican*

CONFIDENT BELIEVERS 11 voters

Trust the mechanics and believe participation genuinely changes outcomes

WHO: Skews Democratic and Independent, plus Republicans proud of their own state's systems
SKEW: 10 of the 11 are women, across every party

> *"This is one of the opportunities that is so clear that your voice can be heard. Not to take it is a disservice."*
> *– Female, 18-44, Latina, South, <College, Democrat*

CHECKED OUT 3 voters

Disengaged on both counts — the only group stepping back from voting

WHO: Independents and lower-engagement Republicans; none are regular primary voters
SKEW: Too few to generalize, but all three are weakly attached to either party

> *"Washington votes for where they get their money and how they get rich… disenfranchised is probably closest."*
> *– Female, 45-64, White, West, College+, Independent*

DUTIFUL SKEPTICS 12 voters

The largest group: confident the count is clean, unconvinced it buys them influence

WHO: The most cross-partisan segment
SKEW: None, they are the only segment with no age, gender, region, or party pattern

> *"I am confident my vote will be counted accurately, but I do not really feel that my voice matters in this system."*
> *– Female, 18-44, White, West, College+, Republican*

Two-thirds of voters say they see candidates moving more and more toward political extremes and the skeptics doubt the framing, not the polarization

A PUSH AWAY FROM MODERATE POLITICIANS – NOTICING THE TREND

24 voters

say candidates are clearly moving toward the extremes

Cross-partisan and consistent – voters describe both parties pulling outward and the middle emptying out

4 voters

say the shift is real but far narrower than coverage suggests

They see it in a small number of races and credit media sensationalism for the rest

7 voters

have not seen the trend or reject the premise outright

Many have not personally observed the trend and attribute concern to political polarization rather than a real shift

Q8. Some people say political candidates today are moving farther from the political center than in the past, with more outside-the-mainstream candidates defeating traditional, moderate politicians. Have you noticed this trend? Do you agree or disagree with this observation? Why do you think voters might be choosing candidates who are further from the center right now? Do you think this trend is good or bad for the country? How do you think this affects how our government functions?

NOTICED IT

"I think that it is becoming **more far left and more far right than it has been in the center since Trump was elected**…the people who vote along those lines are more passionate and will show up to the polls opposed to more of the moderate folks like myself that just get tired of all the hate and separation."

– Male, 18-44, White, Midwest, College+, Independent

"We are becoming very polarized. **I find it sad and not healthy at all for the country**…We used to be able to openly and kindly discuss political topics. Now those discussions descend into name calling and worse."

– Female, 65+, White, South, College+, Republican

SAY IT'S OVERSTATED

"I think this movement has happened. **But I also believe it is on a much smaller scale than the media sensationalizes it to be**."

– Male, 65+, White, South, <College, Independent

"I feel like it is applicable to some candidates… I think each party fear mongers their base into thinking that the other side is just too far to the right, too far to the left…**I think people are voting for people that have more of an identity**. I think **when somebody is too moderate**, it's just a bit frustrating because **what do you stand for?"**

– Female, 18-44, Latina, South, <College, Democrat

HAVE NOT NOTICED

"I have not noticed this trend nor do I agree with it. **I think it's too much media hype and trying to influence a person towards one side or another**…It seems like picking the lesser of all the evils."

– Female, 45-64, White, South, <College, Republican

"I personally haven't noticed this much**, but I wouldn't be surprised.** Both sides have been insane the last several elections…they just want someone different all together.

– Female, 18-44, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

Voters describe extremism less as something they want and more as the only real choice on offer

WHAT IS DRIVING THE MOVE AWAY FROM THE CENTER

1. Moderates promised change and delivered none, so **voters will take a chance on an outsider**

2. **Each party's move outward is framed as retaliation** – voters want a fighter, not someone who concedes

3. Social feeds, targeted ads, and dark money **reward the loudest candidates**

⚠ Almost no voter defends the extremes on the merits – the move away from the center is described as **a verdict on the center's performance, not an embrace of ideology.**

Q8. Some people say political candidates today are moving farther from the political center than in the past, with more outside-the-mainstream candidates defeating traditional, moderate politicians. Have you noticed this trend? Do you agree or disagree with this observation? Why do you think voters might be choosing candidates who are further from the center right now? Do you think this trend is good or bad for the country? How do you think this affects how our government functions?

EXHAUSTION WITH THE STATUS QUO

"I think the American people are tired of true politicians and are willing to elect those that are not. **Career politicians are in it for the career and not necessarily for the good of the people.** Outsiders come in and want to make change."

– Female, 45-64, White, West, College+, Democrat

"I think people have been unhappy with the choices available to them…**I want to vote for someone I believe in and can stand behind.** I think that is why more outside the mainstream candidates are entering the picture, to give us choices."

– Female, 65+, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

REACTION TO THE OTHER SIDE

"Voters are choosing candidates further from the center because **political division is now operating in the extremes.** When we elect a conservative extremist to office, the left respond by electing an equally extreme democratic leader."

– Female, 18-44, White, West, College, Republican

"**Voters are choosing candidates who are further from the center because people are angry with the other party's decisions and actions.** They want someone who would fight more fiercely for their values."

– Female, 65+, White, Northeast, College+, Independent

AMPLIFIED BY MONEY AND MEDIA

"I think gerrymandering and political ads have a lot to do with this…**Our information is coming in skewed and it's hard to change someone's mind when they have it made up already."**

– Female, 45-64, White, Midwest, <College, Independent

"Allowing dark money PACs and corporate donations is what is driving the polarization…**Too many politicians are there solely to enrich themselves and get re-elected so they are pandering to their donors rather than representing the people in their districts.**"

– Female, 45-64, White, Midwest, <College, Democrat

Voters overwhelmingly judge the trend bad for the country, and name the same consequence: a government that can no longer compromise

EFFECTS OF A MOVE AWAY FROM CENTER

BOTTOM LINE: Even voters who welcome the disruption expect it to slow government down – the disagreement is only over whether that cost is worth paying.

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THE VERDICT	WHAT VOTERS DESCRIBE		IN THEIR WORDS
BAD FOR THE COUNTRY The dominant view, shared across parties	**18** Compromise becomes impossible, nothing passes	**9** Division hardens between ordinary voters	**"The further apart both sides get, the harder it becomes to compromise or get anything done.** It just leads to more fighting and gridlock in government." *– Male, 18-44, Latino, South, <College, Republican*
GOOD, OR NECESSARY A minority who welcome the disruption	**5** Fresh ideas replace a failed status quo	**3** Real choices instead of the lesser evil	"Voters are finally realizing that what we have had in place for many years has not been working…**Our government greatly benefits from this action**." *– Female, 45-64, White, South, <College, Republican*
HOW GOVERNING CHANGES Named across both camps	**6** Policy whiplash as each party undoes the last	**4** Experience traded for loyalty and celebrity	"We have one party get into power, try to undo everything the other party did in 4 years and then another party gets elected and do the opposite. **That is no way to run the country!**" *– Female, 65+, White, South, College+, Republican*

Congressional Focus and “Revenge Politics"

Voters want Congress to focus on costs and health care, but expect fighting and investigations – and blame the incentives, not the people

CONGRESSIONAL FOCUS – WANT VS. WILL

Why voters say the gap exists

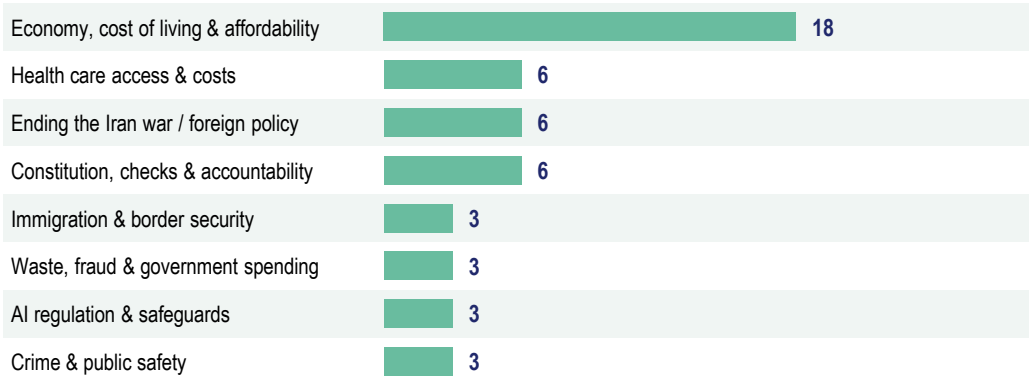
No accountability from the voter base; re-election and donor incentives; members too wealthy to share the same problems; and winning for the party valued over governing.

The gap is not universal

4 expect Congress to take up what they named – affordability, health care, the war, and AI regulation.

Q10. Thinking about the newly elected Congress that will take office next year: What are the top TWO issues you WANT the federal government to spend their time and energy on? Now, realistically, what do you think they WILL ACTUALLY spend their time on? Why is there a difference, if any? (35 responses; topic counts reflect issues mentioned, voters could name more than one.)

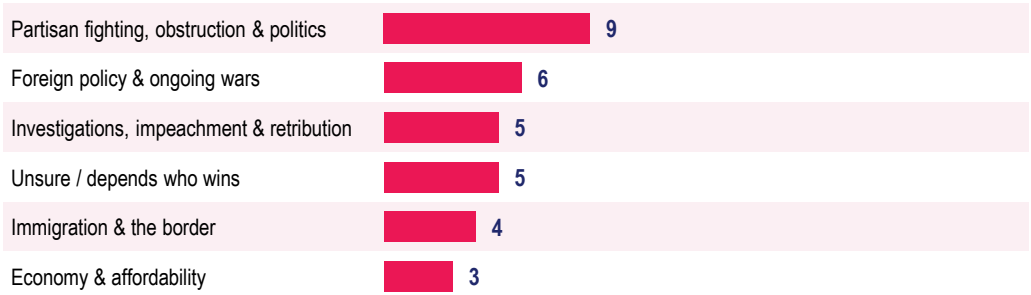
WANT Congress to focus on



"Realistically, I think they'll spend most of their time **fighting with each other, investigating the other party… the issues I actually care about will probably take a back seat to partisan politics.**"

– Male, 18-44, Latino, South, <College, Republican

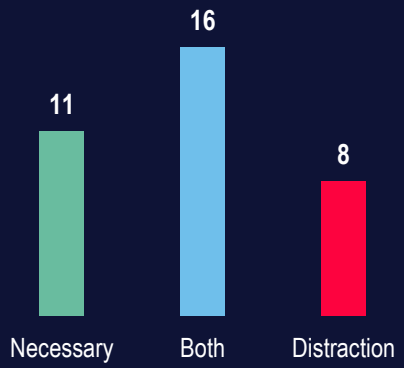
EXPECT Congress to focus on



Voters do not reject oversight, they reject theater: the line nearly all of them draw is proven wrongdoing versus "perceived" wrongdoing

REVENGE POLITICS: ACCOUNTABILITY OR DISTRACTION

How 35 non-primary voters judge investigations into political rivals



Q11. Lately, there is a lot of talk about "revenge politics", where the party in power spends its time investigating, prosecuting, or trying to impeach political rivals. Do you think these types of investigations are a necessary way to hold leaders accountable? Are they a distraction from solving real problems? Both? Is it better to let a politician run out his term, or is it better to actively punish them for perceived wrongdoings? If Democrats win control of Congress and move to impeach President Trump, do you think that will help or hurt the possibility of compromise in Washington? Will an impeachment solve any problems everyday Americans are facing?

IF THE WRONGDOING IS PROVEN → ACT NOW

"They have to be held accountable **not for perceived wrongdoings, but for actual wrongdoings**."

– Female, 65+, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

"Holding office, especially the presidency, **should never make someone exempt from the law**."

– Male, 18-44, Hispanic, South, College+, Democrat

"We do not punish for something that is perceived, **but is proven to be true.**"

– Male, 18-44, White, West, <College, Independent

IF IT IS ONLY "PERCEIVED" → LEAVE IT ALONE

"It is all a game, **a waste of time and money**, and it will never be truly resolved."

– Female, 45-64, White, South, <College, Republican

"I do not think these are necessary. It is all **repayment and punishment for not agreeing with them**."

– Male, 45-64, Hispanic, West, <College, Democrat

"It is just gonna **drag out and distract the general public** from whatever is really going on in DC."

– Male, 18-44, White, Midwest, College+, Independent

Impeachment is the one thing voters across all parties agree will *not* help: 24 of 35 say it solves nothing, and 16 expect it to deepen the stalemate

IF DEMOCRATS WIN CONGRESS AND MOVE TO IMPEACH

24 of 35 voters say **impeachment would solve little or none of Americans' everyday problems**

including the large majority of Reps and Inds and half of Democrats
(9 Reps, 8 Inds, 7 Dems)

"Does that deal with the massive debt? Does that deal with the high price of health insurance? **No, it does not**."
– Female, 65+, White, South, College+, Republican

"An impeachment will not solve everyday problems, **but I do not care, he needs to go**."
– Male, 45-64, White, Northeast, College+, Democrat

Q11. Lately, there is a lot of talk about "revenge politics", where the party in power spends its time investigating, prosecuting, or trying to impeach political rivals. Do you think these types of investigations are a necessary way to hold leaders accountable? Are they a distraction from solving real problems? Both? Is it better to let a politician run out his term, or is it better to actively punish them for perceived wrongdoings? If Democrats win control of Congress and move to impeach President Trump, do you think that will help or hurt the possibility of compromise in Washington? Will an impeachment solve any problems everyday Americans are facing?

WHAT IT WOULD DO TO COMPROMISE IN WASHINGTON

HURTS COMPROMISE 16 of 35

"Both can be true - **the need to hold people accountable, and that doing so causes more division**."
– Male, 18-44, White, Northeast, College+, Republican

CHANGES NOTHING 9 of 35

"It will **not hurt the current lack of compromise we are already facing**."
– Female, 18-44, Black, Northeast, <College, Democrat

HELPS 7 of 35

"I do NOT think it will hurt compromise. **A great amount of people who voted for Trump have stopped supporting him**."
– Male, 18-44, Hispanic, Northeast, College+, Independent

**Three participants did not provide a clear assessment of how impeachment would affect compromise in Washington.*

Democrats winning both chambers is the clear plurality pick but wanting Congress to check the President cuts across every scenario preference

THREE SCENARIOS – THE VERDICT

"**It's better to have a check and balance Congress** – it's why we have 3 branches of government. But when those laws were made they didn't expect a madman to be president."

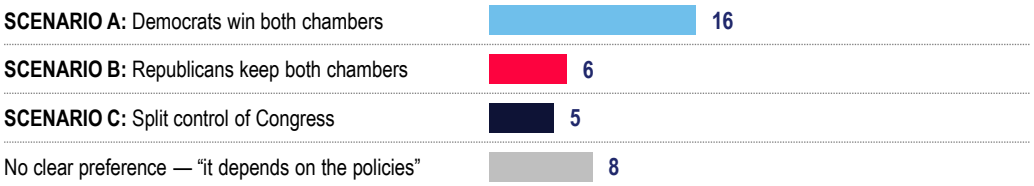
– Male, 45-64, White, Northeast, College+, Democrat

"Because I am a Republican, **I do think having an all Republican government is best**, but they have sure been letting everyone down!"

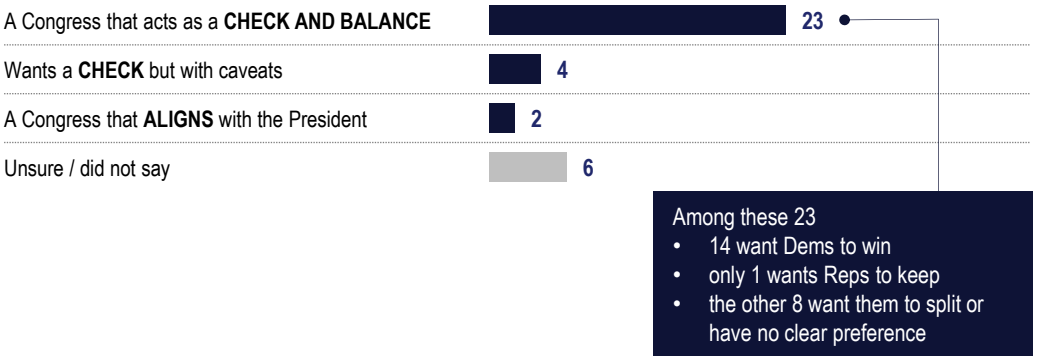
– Female, 18-44, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

Q12. Right now, Republicans control the White House, the House of Representatives, and the Senate. How do you think the country would fare under these three different scenarios after November while working with President Trump? In each of these scenarios, what do you think the primary focus of Congress will be? Of these three scenarios, which do you think is best for the US economy, jobs, and foreign affairs? Ultimately, do you think it is better to have a Congress that acts as a check and balance against the President, or one that completely aligns with him?

Which scenario is best for the US economy, jobs, and foreign affairs?



Is it better to have a Congress that checks the President, or one that aligns with him?



Voters expect each scenario to produce conflict, not progress — and most would rather Congress check the President than back him

THREE SCENARIOS FOR THE NEXT CONGRESS

Q12. Right now, Republicans control the White House, the House of Representatives, and the Senate. How do you think the country would fare under these three different scenarios after November while working with President Trump? In each of these scenarios, what do you think the primary focus of Congress will be? Of these three scenarios, which do you think is best for the US economy, jobs, and foreign affairs? Ultimately, do you think it is better to have a Congress that acts as a check and balance against the President, or one that completely aligns with him?

SCENARIO A: Democrats win the House and Senate

What Congress would focus on

- Oversight, investigations, impeachment **16**
- Policy: health care, jobs, rights **6**

How the country fares

"The country would still get slightly worse in terms of the economy before it gets better." (Ind)

"If Democrats control both the House and Senate, I think their focus should be on **providing a stronger check on President Trump** while also addressing the economy, healthcare, jobs, and protecting people's rights."

– Male, 18-44, Latino, South, College+, Democrat

SCENARIO B: Republicans keep the House and Senate

What Congress would focus on

- Trump's agenda advances unchecked **15**
- Delivers on immigration, taxes, energy **5**

How the country fares

"I would expect much of the current administration's agenda to continue with less resistance." (Dem)

"**Republicans will allow Trump to become a dictator** and hardly meet during the next 2 years to accomplish anything."

– Male, 45-64, White, Northeast, College+, Democrat

SCENARIO C: Control of Congress is split

What Congress would focus on

- Gridlock and budget fights **17**
- Forced negotiation and compromise **3**

How the country fares

"The country would be on pause for two years." (Ind)

"If Congress were split, I'd expect **more gridlock and fighting over budgets and major legislation**."

– Male, 18-44, Latino, South, <College, Republican



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CENTER FORWARD

Appendix

Turnout intent surges as voters unite behind party platforms over candidates

VOTER ENGAGEMENT



31 of 35 voters said they plan to vote, wanting to stop the current direction and by their own sense of civic duty

Reasoning divides: about 12 weigh policy first, 6 weigh character first, and several refuse to separate the two



3 remain undecided, held back by gridlock, unclear platforms, and smear-driven campaigns

Hesitancy is driven by voters alienated by gridlock and fatigued by political smear campaigns



Only one voter plans to stay home, disenchanted and doubting that voting changes outcomes

Civically unengaged, this voter feels detached from the process and doubts their vote matters.

Q7. Are you currently planning to vote in November? Why or why not? What is the main factor driving you to the polls (or keeping you home)? When making your decision at the ballot box this year, are you voting more based on the specific policies a candidate supports, or are you voting based on the person (their character, personality, and values)? Which matters more to you right now?

WILL VOTE

"Yes, I will vote in November**. I think it's important to have a say on who will get elected and actually think it should be compulsory to vote.** I will not look at name, sex, age, race or party, rather what are they saying the will do about: affordability, security, and AI regulation."

– Male, 18-44, White, Northeast, College+, Republican

"The current administration is driving me. **This is the first time in my life that I'm voting for a party and not a candidate**. That keeps me up at night. We need to have strong people who aren't afraid to do what is right for our country. I miss the days of voting for a person. I want it back."

– Female, 45-64, White, Midwest, <College, Independent

NOT SURE

"I'm undecided at the moment as to whether I'll vote or not. **The candidates have these smear campaign ads that don't make it clear what are the plans for the constituents**. I vote based on the policies and promises made by the candidates."

– Female, 65+, Black, South, >College, Democrat

"Right now, I'm still not sure if I'm going to vote in November. The biggest thing keeping me home **is feeling like the outcome may not change much and that we could just end up with more gridlock in Washington**. If I do vote…I care more about what a candidate actually supports…than whether I personally like them…"

– Male, 45-64, Latino, South, <College, Republican

WILL NOT VOTE

"No, I have no plans to vote. I have continued to be disenchanted with our democratic process and **perhaps feeling like voting makes no real difference to the outcomes**."

– Female, 18-45, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

Primary voting status is driven more by perceived impact than by habit itself

PRIMARY VOTER STATUS

13 voters — Some are becoming **more engaged** because politics increasingly feel consequential to their daily lives

7 voters — Primary participation is **situational** and rises when races feel competitive, local, or personally important

15 voters — are not tuned out, they just think the **race is already decided**

Participation relies less on civic interest than on whether voters see a real choice and believe their vote can affect the result.

Q6. Historically, you have not been a primary election voter. Since we began this project, have you participated in any of your state's primary elections? Why or why not?

HAVE VOTED IN PRIMARIES

"…**I've made voting more of a priority. I want to have a voice in making change where it matters, whether that's within my own state or in elections that can ultimately affect the direction of the country and its government. It matters now more than ever since I feel my rights are now being placed under attack**."

– Male, 18-44, Latino, South, College+, Democrat

"Yes, I participated in our most recent primary**. But being registered as an Independent voter I received a nonpartisan ballot with primarily local issues** and elections being addressed."

– Male, 65+, White, South, <College, Independent

CONDITIONAL/SITUATIONAL VOTERS

"I usually vote in all elections, but in recent years I haven't cared as much about elections that are not big, like presidential. **I feel like it doesn't make that big of a difference. I do still try to get to as many as I can. I absolutely do not miss presidential elections."**

– Female, 18-44, White, Midwest, <College, Republican

"Since we began, I have not voted in any of my state's primary elections. I have not because it didn't feel as important and I wasn't very educated on it**. But now - as I get older and care more about politics and the future, I will definitely be voting in my state's primary election.**"

– Female, 18-44, White, Midwest, College+, Democrat

STILL NOT VOTING IN PRIMARIES

"I did not participate in primary elections because **in my state it is always the Democratic party who wins. Therefore, I did not think it would be useful.**"

– Female, 65+, White, Northeast, College+, Independent

"**Primary elections are not necessary in certain communities.** I live in an area where the general elections is the only thing that matters."

– Male, 45-64, Black, Northeast, College+, Democrat