



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, 35 in-depth surveys were conducted with more than 90,000 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 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 [†])

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Social Security.....	4
Medicare	5
The Federal Budget.....	6-7
Healthcare	8
Immigration.....	9
Federal Poverty Programs.....	10-11
Environment & Energy.....	12-13
Government Reform.....	14-15
Police Reform	16
Sentencing Reform.....	17
Criminal Records	18-19
Treatment in Prison	19
U.S. Postal Service.....	20
International Trade	21
Nuclear Weapons Policy.....	22
International Security.....	23
Sustainable Development Goals.....	24
Net Neutrality	24
Variations by Red/Blue Districts, Primary Voters & Demographics.....	25

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.



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 BENEFITS

58	62 ^T	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)
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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.



REDUCING PAYMENTS FOR BENEFITS



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



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



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



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



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%)



Do NOT increase standard premiums by 15 percent, so that premiums cover 30 percent of all costs to the government rather than the current 25 percent (reduces shortfall by 16%)

CONTROLLING COSTS IN OTHER WAYS



Do NOT limit how much Medigap can cover



Limit payments from malpractice lawsuits to \$250,000 for pain and suffering, and \$500,000 for punitive damages (reduces shortfall by 4%)

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.



DISCRETIONARY SPENDING



Reduce defense budget for general operations by \$7 billion*



Reduce subsidies to agricultural corporations by \$7 billion*



Reduce spending on nuclear weapons programs by \$2 billion*



Reduce spending on agencies that enforce federal law by \$2 billion*

* Included in this percentage are respondents who chose higher levels of change.



GENERAL REVENUES



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)

64 54 74

68 56 79

71 61 79

60 54 67

72 64 79

75 69 80

84 82 86

75 65 86

73 66 80

61 56 65

75 65 83

78 68 86

74 66 83

63 55 71

74 64 84

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.



EXPANDING HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------|----|--|
| 71 | 59 | 84 | Offer a government-run public option open to all individuals (CDD) |
| 79 | 70 | 88 | Allow people aged 55 years or older to purchase a Medicare plan (CDD) |
| 72 | 51 | 87 | Expand federal subsidies in the Affordable Care Act that help the middle class, to include more people (CDD) |
| 60 | 60 ¹ | 82 | Increase federal subsidies in the Affordable Care Act that help the poor (CDD) |
| 60 | 68 | 54 | Change the ACA to allow insurance companies to offer low-premium, high-deductible “copper plans” to people age 30 and over |

PRESERVING ACA RULES ON HEALTH INSURANCE COSTS

- | | | | |
|----|----|----|---|
| 81 | 66 | 94 | Do NOT repeal the ACA requirement that insurance companies cannot set premiums for older people more than three times what they charge younger people |
| 78 | 60 | 93 | Do NOT repeal the ACA requirement that insurance companies cannot consider pre-existing conditions when setting premiums |

REDUCING HEALTH CARE COSTS

- | | | | |
|----|----|----|---|
| 92 | 92 | 92 | Allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices (CDD) |
| 88 | 81 | 92 | 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.



DEALING WITH IMMIGRANTS WITHOUT LEGAL STATUS

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

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

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^T 63

Increase the number of employment-based visas for immigrants who have skills needed in the US labor market

DEALING WITH REFUGEES

93 90 96

Increase personnel to process asylum seekers' claims faster (CDD)

57 65^T 70

Provide aid to reduce poverty and violence in Central America (CDD)

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.



FOOD ASSISTANCE

78	62	91	Increase SNAP benefits for single mothers by at least 13%
81	66	93	Increase SNAP benefits for individuals living alone by at least 25%
88	81	93	Provide discounts on fruit and vegetables purchased using SNAP benefits
73	82	67	Disallow using SNAP benefits for sweetened sodas
76	85	68	Disallow using SNAP benefits for candy

CHILD POVERTY

72	52	90	Make pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds in low-income families and expand the availability of Early Head Start programs
75	59	89	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



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

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

82 73 89

- a conservation program in which US Forest Service would employ 100,000 young people and cost \$250 million a year*

75 58 91

- a childcare and early education program that would employ 100,000 childcare workers and early education teachers and cost \$3 billion a year*

81 69 93

- a school renovation program that would employ 650,000 construction and maintenance workers and cost \$50 billion a year*

80 69 92

- a community projects program that would employ 750,000 people and cost \$30 billion a year*



OTHER POSITIONS

60 67 54

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

73 59 88

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 for reasonably-priced energy. The challenge of finding the right balance between these priorities has been a perennial of policymaking for some time now. A longstanding concern has been the health effects from air pollution caused by the emissions from use of fossil fuels. These are particularly significant for certain vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly and those with asthma.

More recently the concern has extended to the effect of the use of fossil fuels on the global climate. There is now a clear consensus in the scientific community that energy production from fossil fuels creates greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, with destabilizing effects on the global climate.

To address both of these effects there have been numerous proposals to promote clean energy—i.e. alternatives to fossil fuels, such as wind and solar, that do not produce negative health effects or destabilize the climate—and to promote greater energy efficiency so as to reduce the demand for energy produced by fossil fuels. These proposals primarily focus on tax incentives and regulations. All of these proposals are controversial as tax incentives reduce public revenues and regulations can increase the cost of cars, trucks and buildings.



75 58 91

76 62 89

62 50 74

71 57 83

73 62 85

79 70 88

78 70 87

84 75 93

72 61 83

66 52 78

69 52 84

73 54 89

77 66 88

PROVIDE CLEAN ENERGY TAX INCENTIVES FOR:

Producing Clean Energy

- the cost of equipment that produces clean energy, such as solar panels or wind turbines, or stores clean energy: up to 30%
- the amount of electricity produced with clean energy: equal to up to 5-10% of the average retail cost of electricity
- the production of transportation fuel that produces 25% fewer emissions than the current average: up to \$1 per gallon
- an investment in the development of first-of-its-kind clean energy technology to produce, store or distribute energy: up to 30%
- for installing small residential wind and fuel cell micro-turbines to generate energy for homes

Energy Efficient Buildings

- building a new energy-efficient home or residential building: up to \$3,000
- making energy-saving improvements such as fuel-efficient lighting, doors, windows, or insulation: up to \$6,500
- installing a new energy-efficient heating or air conditioning system: up to \$1500
- building new energy-efficient commercial buildings: up to \$4.75/ft²
- making energy-saving improvements to commercial buildings that reduce energy: up to \$9.25/ft²

Electric Vehicles

- manufacturers of fully electric buses: a tax credit equal to 10% of the sales price of each bus sold
- the cost of installing a charging station that can be used by anyone: up to 50%

Biogas Facilities

- building biogas facilities on farms, capturing methane and converting it into energy: 30% of startup costs

COMMITMENTS TO REDUCING GREENHOUSE GASES

There have been numerous proposals for the US to make commitments to gradually reduce the level of greenhouse gases. The US has participated in a series of international conferences that have led to international agreements to seek such reductions, most recently the "Paris agreement." Domestically, under the Obama administration Congress passed the Clean Power Plan that created a framework for states to commit to plans for reductions, reductions that would fulfill the commitments the US made under the Paris agreement.



Both the Paris agreement and the Clean Power Plan have been highly controversial and have been largely reversed under the Trump administration out of concern for the costs entailed. 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.

70 60^T 91

Commit to the 2014 Paris Agreement to combat climate change (CDD)

68 60^T 85

Go beyond the Paris Agreement and aim for more significant cutbacks on greenhouse gas emissions (CDD)

71 52 89

Adopt the goal of reducing US greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 2% a year, as part of the Paris Agreement

69 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

REGULATIONS

73 57 86

Require higher fuel efficiency standards for light cars and trucks

71 56 84

Require higher fuel efficiency standards for heavy-duty vehicles

74 56 89

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

77 65 90

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

OFFSHORE DRILLING

Another area of controversy has been the extraction of fossil fuels offshore and in environmentally sensitive areas. Offshore drilling has resulted in environmentally damaging numerous oil spills and fossil fuel extraction in certain sensitive areas has posed threats to wildlife.



These concerns align with the broader goals of reducing the use of fossil fuels due to its impact on health and the climate. But, once again, imposing constraints on the extraction of fossil fuels has the potential to reduce supply and increase the cost of energy.

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

OIL AND GAS DRILLING IN ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

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.



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



LIMITING DIRECT FUNDRAISING

Prohibit direct person-to-person fundraising by Members of Congress

LIMITING POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY NON-PROFITS



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

LIMITING LOBBYING BY FORMER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

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



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

MAKING HOUSE REDISTRICTING LESS PARTISAN



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



Create multi-member districts to better reflect the partisan distribution of the state

IMPOSING CONGRESSIONAL TERM LIMITS



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



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

ENABLING INDEPENDENT & THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES



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



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



Adopt ranked choice voting in federal elections to counter the potential spoiler-effect of independent or third-party candidates

POLICE REFORM

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.



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^T

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^T

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^T

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[†] 84

Require police departments to get local government approval for requests for surplus military equipment, and prohibit requests for certain high-powered military equipment

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.



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

LIMITING NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF CRIMINAL RECORDS

Currently, one in three American adults - about 78 million people - have a criminal record. Many of these people have just been arrested or charged, but were never convicted, while many other have been convicted of minor, non-violent crimes. These criminal records often stay with people for their entire life.

There has been a long-standing controversy about the negative consequences that such criminal records have on people's ability to become employed, get housing, and vote.

In some cases, these negative consequences are due to the actions of the government and public institutions such as public housing authorities and licensing boards. Across the country, there are over 30,000 rules which prohibit people with criminal records from jobs, licenses and public housing. In many states, licensing boards can reject an applicant with a criminal record because they do not meet a "moral character" requirement. In other cases, the negative consequences of a criminal record are the result of discrimination by private employers, who may implicitly see people as too much of a liability. Studies have found that this discrimination falls hardest on racial minorities with criminal records.

To address these concerns, several proposals have been introduced by Members of Congress. Some of these proposals would prohibit employers, licensing boards and public housing authorities from disqualifying people (rejecting applicants, firing employees or evicting tenants) based solely on certain criminal records. Other proposals would make it easier for records of arrests or non-violent drug offenses to be sealed from the public. And another would restore voting rights to people with felony records once their prison sentences have been completed.



EMPLOYMENT & LICENSING

81 72 90

Prohibit employers and licensing boards from disqualifying a person on the basis that they were arrested but not charged, or charged but not convicted

74 64 83

Limit the period of time during which licensing boards and employers can disqualify a person for certain convictions: for a misdemeanor, one year after they complete their sentence; for a felony, five years after they complete their sentence

78 75 82

In the event that an employee with a criminal record commits a crime while on the job, prohibit the employer from being held responsible on the basis that they knowingly hired someone with a criminal record

79 68 89

Prohibit employers and licensing boards from disqualifying a person on the basis that they were convicted of a petty, non-violent crime

76 65 87

Prohibit employers and licensing boards from disqualifying a person on the basis that they were convicted of a crime unrelated to their ability to responsibly perform the job

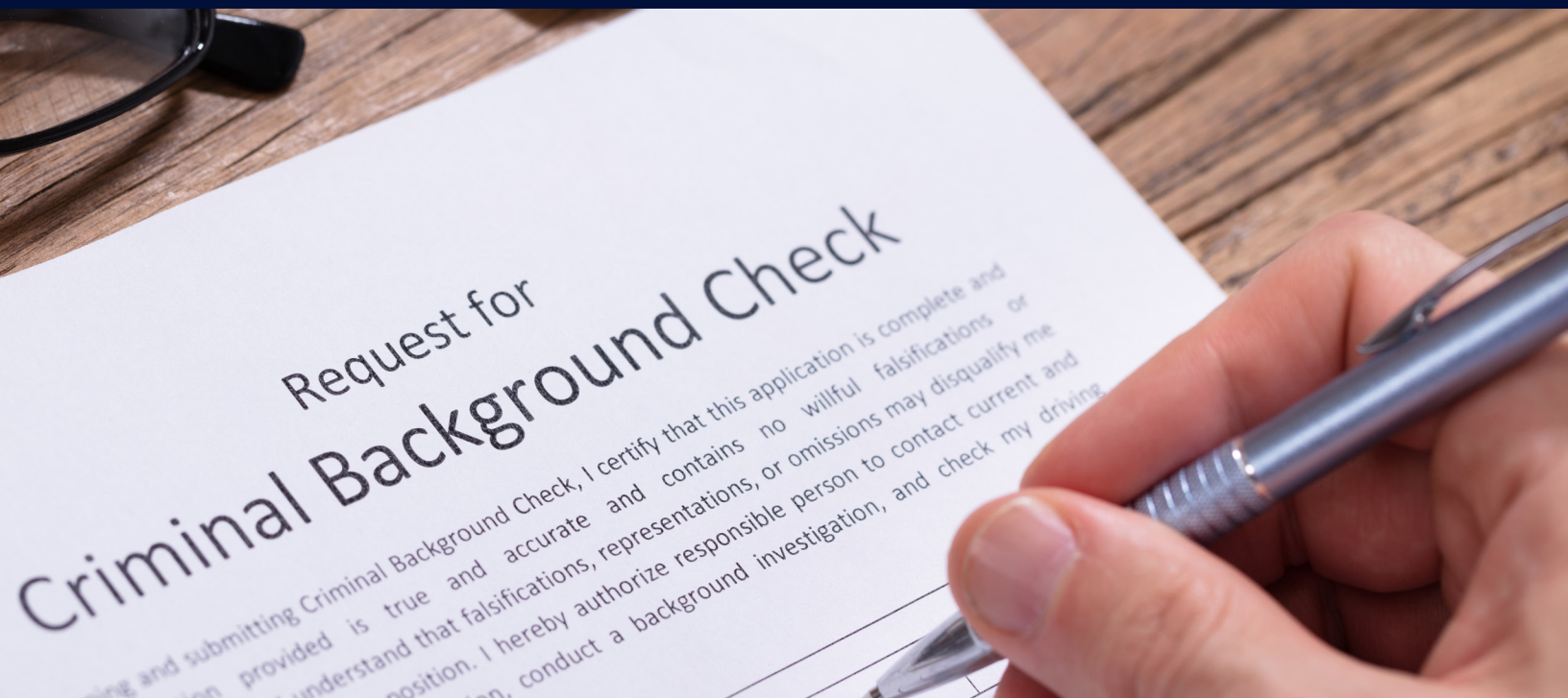


PUBLIC HOUSING

79 70 88

Prohibit public Housing Authorities from rejecting an applicant or evicting a tenant on the basis that they were arrested but never convicted, convicted of a minor non-violent crime, or committed a felony but a tenant review board has deemed them not a threat





SEALING CRIMINAL RECORDS

77 70 85

Provide people who have been arrested but not charged, or charged but not found guilty the right to have their records sealed from the public, for a minor cost

75 68 84

Automatically seal the record of a non-violent drug offense, five years after the offender completes their sentence

VOTING RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE WITH FELONY CONVICTIONS

69 55^T 87

Automatically reinstate the right to vote for people with felony convictions after they have completed their prison sentence

TREATMENT IN PRISON



PHONE CALLS FROM PRISON

77 66 88

Require prisons and jails to charge inmates no more for phone calls than rates companies normally charge for comparable service

RESTRICT THE USE OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

86 84 90

Require that solitary confinement only be used for the prisoner's own safety or for punishment for serious violations, for no more than 30 days in a row or 40 days in a two-month period*

52 62^T 70

Require that solitary confinement only be used for safety reasons, and never as punishment, for no more than 15 days in a row or 20 days in a two-month period

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

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.



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*

59 56 60

Allow postal rates to rise faster than inflation

62 73 63^T

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

International trade has been controversial for 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.



INTERNATIONAL TRADE



HAVING INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

87 84 93

As a general principle, continue to promote international trade through a set of internationally agreed-on rules

72 54 89

Continue to be part of the World Trade Organization

72 55 88

Have a free trade agreement with Mexico and Canada

74 62 88

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

- Include enforceable labor standards in new trade agreements

86 79 94

- Include enforceable environmental standards in new trade agreements

INCREASING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

78 70 85

- Increase the amount of unemployment benefits a person receives as a percent of their prior earnings—currently an average of 39%

69 60 75

- 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

- Encourage employers to have more extensive apprenticeship programs by offering them a tax credit of up to \$5,000 for each apprentice

81 74 90

- Increase the amount spent on training programs for cybersecurity jobs

82 72 93

- Increase the amount spent on training programs for jobs in the energy industry

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.



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[†] 83

The US recommitting to the Iran Nuclear Agreement (CDD)

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.



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

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.



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:

69 51 87

- 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

72 53 91

- 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*

70 51 89

- 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*

72 62 83

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.



86 82 90

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



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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