2017 State of the Electorate

Prepared for Democracy Fund Voice

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Overview

Recent research for the Democracy Fund Voice reveals significant concern about the economy, particularly around cost of living, the future for children, and the average person's ability to get ahead. In the context of economic concerns and the future of the economy, there is deep distrust of institutions, including the media and Congress. The growing distrust of major institutions is grounded in the perceived absence of positive outcomes relevant to people's personal lives, and the perception that the nation's elites and institutions do not value the average voter. Compounding these concerns is frustration with partisan discourse voters see as a result of divisive roles being played by the media and political parties. In this environment, voters feel their voices are not being heard. Furthermore, there is frustration with the effectiveness of many government institutions, particularly the immigration system.

On a variety of issues addressed in the research, there are examples of conflicting beliefs that voters are trying to resolve. In several areas, the electorate's center leaned toward the conservative position, and in other cases, leaned toward the liberal position. On some questions, such as whether the US is a welcoming society, there are clear partisan divides with a center that is evenly split. In areas such as views about Islam and related issues with immigration, what the electorate may want to see at a values level conflicts with obstacles and frustrations being presented with the immigration and vetting system. This presents a complex policy and political environment.

However, while there are areas of entrenched divisions along ideological lines, especially in areas like immigration and the media, this research identifies areas of potential consensus to begin overcoming areas of division through understanding shared concerns and possible forward-looking outcomes in each of the issue areas. The way to begin overcoming many of these difficult situations is not through messaging alone, but through offering proof points, or reasons to believe, to move voters toward a different point of view.

This report includes findings from both qualitative and quantitative research done for Democracy Fund Voice in May and June of 2017. The qualitative research consists of four focus groups: Republicans, women with children, Independents, and middle income voters. The quantitative research consists of an online survey of 1000 registered voters. This report focuses on analyzing the survey data based on ideological variation — through the lens of very/somewhat conservative voters, moderates, and very/somewhat liberal voters — based on how voters identified their ideology on the national survey.

For each of the issues addressed in the survey — economy; institutional trust, specifically Congress and the media; and immigration/assimilation — the next section provides a brief summary of the major findings.

Economy

Within the economy, the areas viewed as getting worse were cost of living, the future for children, and the average person's ability to get ahead. There is some recognition of a changing economy but with a lack of confidence in having the skills needed for jobs of the future, even among college graduates, with the largest percentages only being "somewhat confident." This lack of certainty and confidence in having skills for the future is reflected in current perceptions of automation. At present, automation is a moderate-level concern in the context of other economic concerns impacting voters' lives, but as we heard described in Pittsburgh, this is a relatively new concern about which voters have not yet developed clear opinions. The general perception about automation is that it creates jobs in some ways but costs jobs in others, and voters are not yet clear about what that balance may be or how to resolve it. As an important perspective, challenges with automation are still looming, but concerns about cost of living are more immediate and viewed as a more pressing problem.

Institutional Trust

Trust in institutions is grounded in the outcomes that people see — or do not see — impacting their lives. More importantly, there is a clear perception that the nation's elites and institutions do not value the average person. Until this gap is addressed, it will be very difficult for any institution to begin regaining the public's trust.

Congress

In the research, we explored two institutions in more depth: Congress and the media. For Congress, there are some clearly identified concepts that could begin helping to improve its effectiveness, particularly around the concept of accountability. While spending more time with constituents in the district is positive for both Members and voters, and this is something frequently cited in discussions about how Members should be spending their time, the proposals that ranked the highest toward improving the effectiveness of Congress were about legislative action as an institution. Proposals related to a Member's local/district interaction were lower priorities. Across the board — conservative to liberal, as well as among the 71% of the electorate that disapproves of Congress — the proposal of *having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable* was a top priority for improving Congressional effectiveness, and at least beginning to define what an "effective Congress" might look like.

Other proposals related to legislative action on issue priorities would also help improve Congressional effectiveness. Compromise is something that many voters want but ultimately the more important factor is that compromise is a process to get to legislative action on voter priorities. Given concerns about the economy including cost of living, the average person's ability to get ahead, and future for children — concerns that transcend ideological lines — these identify additional key areas to which bipartisan compromise could be applied to achieve positive outcomes.

Media and Journalism

From the research, the strongest feelings about the press seem to manifest the most in the most ideological wings of the electorate. Therefore, the subject of press freedom and trust in journalism is likely to attract interest from the most liberal and the most conservative sides of the electorate, which may invoke belief systems that can be polarizing and potentially unhelpful to a constructive discussion about a way forward in restoring trust. Across the board, there is some concern about freedom of the press — with liberals being more concerned than conservatives — but the concern about the media and press freedom may be driven by very different reasons and manifest in different ways. Liberals are more inclined to believe that journalists are motivated by the public interest, and that the media plays a positive role. Their skepticism will likely come from particular media sources that they do not view as trustworthy, and the presentation of selective facts. Conservatives are more inclined to believe that journalists are politically motivated and driven by ratings, and therefore the press is not "free" because of these perceived suspicious motivations. With a negative outlook about the role of the media, conservatives and center-right groups prioritize a greater number of criteria that make them skeptical of news stories (source, coverage of certain stories to push an agenda, selective facts, and negative portrayal of certain individuals/groups), and therefore have greater potential to become skeptical about news stories than other groups. This also means their threshold for credibility — and regaining trust — will be much higher than other groups.

While there are variations across the ideological spectrum in attitudes about the media, one of the least important factors in determining news credibility was agreeing with the conclusion. Similarly, in terms of factors to make people skeptical of a news story, disagreement was the least important factor. This indicates some level of openness to news coverage that is not necessarily based on agreement or disagreement.

As we heard in the qualitative discussions, people adamantly wanted less editorializing and opinion, and more straight facts. This is what they describe as the basic role of journalism, a view that cut across all ideological groups. With that as a context, another proof point will be emphasizing what is happening in journalism that enables people to have straight facts, and giving people a sense that journalists/media outlets treat them with respect for their intelligence and their desire to be informed while giving them greater ability to form their own opinions.

Emphasis on direct sourcing is one potential entry point to building credibility. Concern about being presented with selective facts is prevalent across all groups, and an area that could be addressed by providing people with tools to validate and independently verify information.

Immigration and Assimilation

Concerns about immigration generally center upon legal status rather than cultural issues, with the immigration system recognized as an obstacle to many immigrants achieving the legal status they pursue. However, as a result of illegal immigration, the burden on the system is growing. Even in discussions of Islam and immigrants from Muslim nations, concerns and questions about compatibility tended to center more on the legal questions and compatibility with the US

Constitution and less on cultural or religious differences. Additionally, voters' criteria for accepting immigrants into the US are generally legal in nature, and related to paying taxes. While cultural assimilation was also desired, the legal components related to following the law and paying taxes were the two highest priority criteria across ideological lines. The focus groups saw the role and contributions of legal immigrants as generally positive. However, illegal immigration pitted participants' values against each other, such as the conflict between being a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. Participants saw unfairness and an overburdened system as the result of this conflict. Therefore, the lens by which many evaluated immigration was in terms of playing by the rules.

Ineffectiveness of the immigration system and lack of confidence in the vetting system causes many people to be conflicted over what they may want to see at a values level, recognizing that individuals may be unfairly penalized in the process. As a result, there are ideological differences as to the extent to which the US is a welcoming society to immigrants and nationals of other countries. Similarly, there are partisan and ideological divides over whether immigration policies should be the same regardless of country of origin, or stricter for some countries. Throughout the focus groups, those who had anecdotal experiences with Muslims in the US were generally positive, but there was still an unknown about other aspects such as Sharia law and the possibility of that belief system moving into the US. Based on the participants' statements, this outlook was not necessarily fear, but rather lack of an answer about how some areas — a frequently cited example being the treatment of women in some Muslim societies — could ever be compatible with US law and society.

Economy

State of Major Economic Factors

The focus group respondents generally felt that the state of the economy was not good, with prices rising and the middle class shrinking. There were some mixed feelings about whether things were getting worse, or staying the same.

> Mom: *In five years, I haven't had a wage increase, because they just can't offer it. If there was better, I'd go get it. For the first time in 18 years, my husband's company isn't giving them this year. I think it's kind of stagnant. I don't think there's a lot of growth. And I know it's an old song, but we're still seeing a lot of outsourcing of the tech jobs. We're still seeing a lot of outsourcing of the customer service jobs that could be here.*

> Republican: *You go to a small town and they are closing businesses left and right. They don't have the manufacturing companies anymore. They've all moved out. That was the heart of that small town. They are suffering.*

> Republican: *I think we've got a lot of things to fix. One is returning our jobs here because that's going to make a big impact. When you return jobs here, then people have to live in these small towns again. I think we need to be creative in thinking of ways to do that. I think that we have sold out and we've gone everywhere else and we just don't have a sense of*

our own personal respect anymore. We've kind of thrown our hands up and said it can't be done. We have our politicians telling us that it's better for us if we do something somewhere else. No, it's not. We need — her daughter needs jobs, my children need to keep working, I want my grandchild to grow in a world where she is able to survive and I want to make it if I live long enough — I want there to be an economy to support me as an elderly person.

From these qualitative discussions, we generated a list of various economic factors and tested whether voters perceived each one as getting better, worse, or not changing. The chart below shows the list ranked in order of "getting worse."

State of Major Economic Factors	Better	Not Changing	Worse
Cost of living	11	24	**65**
Average person's ability to get ahead	21	21	**55**
Future for children	20	18	**54**
US economy	29	24	**46**
Your quality of life	29	44	**27**
State of your personal or family finances	29	44	**27**
Your plans for retirement	22	49	**25**
Your job situation	24	56	**14**

The overall US economy was generally viewed as "getting worse" (46%) rather than "getting better" (29%) or "not changing" (24%). For three economic factors in particular, even larger percentages of the electorate (over a 50% majority in each case) than this 46% who thought the economy overall was getting worse said these factors were "getting worse."

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the electorate views *cost of living* as "getting worse," and this particular factor was by far viewed most negatively by the electorate. The other two included *average person's ability to get ahead* (55% "getting worse") and *future for children* (54% "getting worse").

Although the *state of your personal or family finances* and *your quality of life* were largely viewed as "not changing" (44%) rather than "getting worse," status quo and not moving forward on these two key elements are likely having a negative impact on voters' evaluation of their economic status.

State of Economic Factors by Direction of Country

In terms of differences in outlook by direction of the country overall, there are even more stark contrasts.

State of Major Economic Factors "Getting Worse"	Right Direction	Wrong Track
Cost of living	41	81
Average person's ability to get ahead	25	76
Future for children	24	75
US economy	15	66
Your quality of life	14	35
State of your personal or family finances	14	34
Your plans for retirement	12	34
Your job situation	8	18

Among those who view the country as headed in the wrong direction, eight out of ten (81%) view *cost of living* as "getting worse," compared to 41% among those who view the country as on the right track. Similarly, among those who view the country as being on the wrong track, three out of four believe the *average person's ability to get ahead* (76%) as well as the *future for children* (75%) are declining. Additionally, two-thirds (66%) of the wrong track voters see the economy getting worse, compared to only 15% of those who believe the country is on the right track, indicating that economic factors are a large part of how the electorate determines the overall direction of the country.

State of Economic Factors among Middle Income

Among middle income groups, two-thirds viewed *cost of living* as "getting worse" (67% among 30-50K, 65% among 50-75K). The 30-50K income group was slightly more inclined to see *average person's ability to get ahead* as "getting worse" (60%), even more than the electorate overall (55%).

State of Major Economic Factors Percentage "Getting Worse"	Overall	30-50K	50-75K
Cost of living	65	67	65
Average person's ability to get ahead	55	60	51
Future for children	54	52	53
US economy	46	50	44
Your quality of life	27	32	22
State of your personal or family finances	27	31	28
Your plans for retirement	25	27	24
Your job situation	14	13	14

State of Economic Factors by Ideology

Across the ideological spectrum, *cost of living* is a top concern that cuts across ideology.

State of Major Economic Factors	Overall	Very cons	Some cons	Mod	Some lib	Very lib
Cost of living	65	55	62	66	75	67
Average person's ability to get ahead	55	35	45	56	77	71
Future for children	54	35	40	59	77	63
US economy	46	37	32	50	60	53
Your quality of life	27	21	20	29	36	35
State of your personal or family finances	27	20	24	28	35	27
Your plans for retirement	25	23	20	26	36	26
Your job situation	14	8	15	13	16	23

More than half of conservative-leaning groups (55% among very conservative, 62% among somewhat conservative), two-thirds of moderates (66%) and majorities of liberal groups (75% among somewhat liberal, 67% among very liberal) say this is "getting worse." In terms of the other economic factors, moderates and liberals tend to view more economic factors as "getting worse" than conservatives, particularly the *average person's ability to get ahead* and the *future for children*. *Cost of living* is the only economic factor seen by a majority of the very conservative as getting worse, while the somewhat liberal were the most negative about the direction of all of these economic factors except *your job situation*.

As a window into the interconnected nature of many of these factors and their impact on views of the economy, one focus group participant described her experience as part of the sandwich generation, trying to take care of aging parents as well as help her young adult children who were economically struggling, all while she felt she was being aged out of the workforce and outsourced.

> Republican: *I care for my mom. She's 93 with dementia. She lives with me. I also have a 26-year-old daughter who lives with me. So, I have that whole thing living in my house. I have preached to my daughter, "While you are living here, you max on 401K, max on stock purchases." Company matches it for her. "You do what you can do until you have to be responsible." I have gone the opposite. I love my job. I absolutely – I'm probably one of the few people who can say, "I love my job." But I don't think my job's going to be there. I am where I thought I would work until 70. I'm praying that I make two and a half more years, or two years, three months. That's my goal, and then I'll hit 65. So, I'm praying that I hang in there that long. I don't know though. And if everything goes well, then I'll hang in there until 66 or whatever. I'm one who thought that retirement was a long way away, but I'm seeing it much closer for me.*

Among the middle income voters in Pittsburgh there was a sense of unaddressed economic struggle — all knew someone laid off since 2008 and they felt that the average person in their area was not able to get ahead. In particular, many in this group felt that there was a burden on working people who could not get ahead, while others were unwilling to work, which tied into concerns about illegal immigration that are addressed elsewhere in this report.

> Middle income: *I don't really feel that unemployment is as much of an issue as people who can stay home and live off of people that are working, and make more money and do better, and will permanently be like that until something changes. Because they can continue on making more money than people that work.*

In the battery of questions below about challenges to economic opportunity, illegal immigration arose as a top three item for very and somewhat conservative voters.

Challenges to Economic Opportunity

The survey provided a list of items that could be challenges to economic opportunity, drawn from discussions in the qualitative research.

Challenges to Economic Opportunity *Scale of 1-9 with 1 being not at all a challenge, 5 neutral and 9 being the most significant challenge*					
Overall	**Very Cons**	**Some Cons**	**Mod**	**Some Lib**	**Very Lib**
1 Health care (7.30)	Illegal immigration (7.42)	National debt (7.31)	Health care (7.24)	Health care (7.58)	Health care (7.45)
2 National debt (6.84)	Health care (7.35)	Health care (7.18)	National debt (6.82)	Lack of Affordable Education (7.12)	The education system not preparing students for the future (7.38)
3 The education system not preparing students for the future (6.82)	National debt (7.24)	Illegal immigration (7.04)	The education system not preparing students for the future (6.71)	The education system not preparing students for the future (6.94)	Lack of Affordable Education (7.14)
4 Outsourcing/ jobs moving overseas (6.54)	Government spending on programs like welfare and food stamps (6.91)	The education system not preparing students for the future (6.89)	Outsourcing/ jobs moving overseas (6.49)	Poverty (6.86)	Poverty (7.10)

Challenges to Economic Opportunity
Scale of 1-9 with 1 being not at all a challenge, 5 neutral and 9 being the most significant challenge

	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
5	Lack of affordable education (6.49)	Outsourcing/ jobs moving overseas (6.85)	Outsourcing/jobs moving overseas (6.71)	Poverty (6.48)	Special interests (6.48)	Special interests (6.52)
6	Poverty (6.42)	Things not made here anymore (6.66)	Things not made here anymore (6.65)	Lack of Affordable Education (6.46)	Outsourcing/ jobs moving overseas (6.34)	National debt (6.27)
7	Special interests (6.32)	Personal taxes (6.65)	Work ethic (6.61)	Personal taxes (6.23)	National debt (6.16)	Outsourcing/ jobs moving overseas (6.25)
8	Things not made here anymore (6.29)	The education system not preparing students for the future (6.61)	Personal taxes (6.52)	Special interests (6.23)	Things not made here anymore (5.95)	Things not made here anymore (5.78)
9	Personal taxes (6.22)	Business taxes (6.58)	Special interests (6.48)	Things not made here anymore (6.20)	Work ethic (5.72)	Personal taxes (5.68)
10	Illegal immigration (6.19)	Regulations on the private sector and business (6.24)	Lack of Affordable Education (6.33)	Illegal immigration (6.13)	Personal taxes (5.64)	Trade (5.54)
11	Work ethic (6.07)	Work ethic (5.97)	Government spending on programs like welfare and food stamps (6.28)	Work ethic (6.09)	Trade (5.48)	Work ethic (5.38)
12	Business taxes (5.85)	Special interests (5.95)	Regulations on the private sector and business (6.25)	Business taxes (5.84)	Automation (5.45)	Automation (5.37)
13	Government spending on programs like welfare and food stamps (5.78)	Trade (5.93)	Poverty (6.23)	Regulations on the private sector and business (5.75)	Business taxes (5.34)	Business taxes (5.22)

Challenges to Economic Opportunity					
Scale of 1-9 with 1 being not at all a challenge, 5 neutral and 9 being the most significant challenge					
	Overall	**Very Cons**	**Some Cons**	**Mod**	**Some Lib**	**Very Lib**

	Overall	**Very Cons**	**Some Cons**	**Mod**	**Some Lib**	**Very Lib**
14	Regulations on the private sector and business (5.75)	Lack of Affordable Education (5.72)	Business taxes (6.03)	Government spending on programs like welfare and food stamps (5.72)	Regulations on the private sector and business (5.04)	Regulations on the private sector and business (4.95)
15	Trade (5.74)	Poverty (5.65)	Trade (5.95)	Trade (5.71)	Illegal immigration (4.88)	Illegal immigration (4.63)
16	Automation (5.26)	Automation (4.86)	Automation (5.27)	Automation (5.31)	Government spending on programs like welfare and food stamps (4.83)	Government spending on programs like welfare and food stamps (4.63)

Overall, *health care* was seen as a significant challenge, being the top challenge overall (7.30), particularly among moderates (7.24) and liberals (7.58 among somewhat liberal, 7.45 among very liberal). For conservatives, *health care* was the second most significant challenge (7.18 somewhat conservative, 7.35 very conservative), after *illegal immigration* for the very conservative (7.42), and *national debt* for the somewhat conservative (7.31). Some areas with the most difference included how much of a challenge education-related factors were, which were of much greater significance to liberal and moderate groups than to conservatives. *Government spending on welfare and food stamps programs* stood out as uniquely significant to the very conservative (6.91). *Poverty* was ranked fourth by both liberal groups (6.86 among somewhat liberal, 7.10 among very liberal) and fifth by moderates (6.48) but thirteenth by somewhat conservatives (6.23) and second to last at fifteenth by very conservatives (5.65).

Challenges to Economic Opportunity by Income

Among middle income groups, the top three items track with the electorate's ratings overall — *health care* (7.36 among 30-50K, 7.39 among 50-75K), *national debt* (7.12 among 30-50K, 6.91 among 50-75K), and *the education system not preparing students for the future* (6.91 among 30-50K, 6.72 among 50-75K).

Challenges to Economic Opportunity		
Scale of 1-9 with 1 being not at all a challenge, 5 neutral and 9 being the most significant challenge		
	Overall	**30-50K Income**	**50-75 K Income**

	Overall	**30-50K Income**	**50-75 K Income**
1	Health care (7.30)	Health care (7.36)	Health care (7.39)
2	National debt (6.84)	National debt (7.12)	National debt (6.91)

Challenges to Economic Opportunity *Scale of 1-9 with 1 being not at all a challenge, 5 neutral and 9 being the most significant challenge*		
Overall	**30-50K Income**	**50-75 K Income**
3 The education system not preparing students for the future (6.82)	The education system not preparing students for the future (6.91)	The education system not preparing students for the future (6.72)
4 Outsourcing/jobs moving overseas (6.54)	Outsourcing/jobs moving overseas (6.79)	Poverty (6.64)
5 Lack of affordable education (6.49)	Lack of Affordable Education (6.69)	Outsourcing/jobs moving overseas (6.52)
6 Poverty (6.42)	Poverty (6.54)	Lack of Affordable Education (6.47)
7 Special interests (6.32)	Things not made here anymore (6.46)	Things not made here anymore (6.33)
8 Things not made here anymore (6.29)	Special interests (6.26)	Personal taxes (6.28)
9 Personal taxes (6.22)	Personal taxes (6.25)	Illegal immigration (6.24)
10 Illegal immigration (6.19)	Illegal immigration (6.19)	Special interests (6.16)
11 Work ethic (6.07)	Work ethic (6.08)	Work ethic (6.00)
12 Business taxes (5.85)	Trade (6.03)	Government spending on programs like welfare and food stamps (5.85)
13 Government spending on programs like welfare and food stamps (5.78)	Business taxes (5.88)	Business taxes (5.76)
14 Regulations on the private sector and business (5.75)	Regulations on the private sector and business (5.86)	Regulations on the private sector and business (5.73)
15 Trade (5.74)	Government spending on programs like welfare and food stamps (5.85)	Trade (5.47)
16 Automation (5.26)	Automation (5.20)	Automation (5.27)

From there, both groups prioritize *poverty*, *lack of affordable education*, and *outsourcing* as significant challenges, with some variation in order as a second tier — again looking very much like the electorate overall. In general, the middle class seems to share similar prioritization of concerns about challenges and to be driving the averages overall.

Retirement

In the focus groups, many of these economic factors came into play when discussing retirement, which was not seen as a possibility for many people. They "*don't want to choose between*

medication and food" one day if they have not saved enough money, and many younger participants were not expecting Social Security to be there for them. The middle income group had modest expectations for retirement. Right now, many of their investments and the market are doing well, but some are planning to work until they die, or at least keep part-time jobs.

> Mom: *It's really dependent on Social Security and to be completely honest, I just started my 401k this year. Being 30 years old, will I be able to live off that? I have no idea. I look at my grandparents. They are living off Social Security right now and they're having to live off of credit which they've never had to do in their entire lives. Even the Social Security now, people are barely getting by. What's it going to be like when it's my turn?*

> Middle income: *The only thing that would help me, and it's already helped me, is the stock market is way up. And my investments are way up. I don't have any – all I have is 401k stuff, but regardless. When I retired, that was the most apprehensive year of my life. I've been working since I was 15 years old, gainfully employed. And when I suddenly was leaving a job like U.S. Steel — I was a union electrician. I was a basket case for six months. My wife kept saying, "Relax. It'll be OK."*

> Middle income: *I'm going to be working till I drop because there's not going to be any Social Security left so I'm not even looking about retirement. Haven't even thought about it.*

The Republican group tied this challenge of retirement to welfare programs and thought that spending on some other programs was making it likely that Social Security would not be there for them to be able to retire (another viewpoint that ties into discussions of illegal immigration in a later section of this report).

> Republican: *I have a feeling I'm going to die behind a desk still working when I'm 98 years old. There is no such thing as retirement. Yes we are saving and saving and saving, but the cost of living is going up as you save. … Social security is gone. All of that went to welfare and food stamps and all this other stuff and so there is no retirement plan for somebody my age.*

Automation

In the focus groups, respondents had mixed views about automation, tending slightly negative. Some thought that it would cost more jobs than it would create and that technology was not always a good thing in terms of business. Meanwhile, others saw automation as innovation and part of inevitable progress that would cut costs and open up more jobs in new sectors.

> Middle income: *I think there's a lot of positions that are getting eliminated due to the technology and robots. Assembly workers are starting to be obsolete. Welders are being obsolete now because there's a machine that's running. … There's jobs being created to create those machines and stuff, but I think it's just eliminating too many jobs.*

> Independent: *It's automation, as a society we progress. Things change, I don't know how you can stop that. Sometimes automation is a good thing, so I think the whole push of kids*

towards STEM is absolutely the right way to go because that's really the future, because a lot of the jobs are being automated so the needs are in different areas. How do you stop automation? You can't, it's the way it is so you have to approach it as to how do you redefine, as a society, what kind of jobs do you need?

Middle income: *It's a natural progression. It's going to happen. There's no controlling it. We cannot stay competitive internationally if we don't do it. It's bad enough that we're fighting all the dumping and the government subsidies that are going on over there, but we have to do it. There's just no choice about it.*

Republican: *If the automation happens naturally and organically, people will find other jobs. But if the government pushes it, incentivizes it, tax breaks and all that stuff, then it's going to happen way too quick and people won't have jobs.*

Personal impact of automation	Overall	<30K	30-50K	50-75K	75-100K	100K+
Great deal of impact	12	13	12	12	11	15
Some impact	43	40	49	51	40	28
Little to no impact	39	39	34	34	41	52

In the quantitative research, the electorate tends to view automation as having a moderate level of impact on them personally (43% "some impact," rather than 12% "great deal of impact," 39% "little to no impact"). Compared with higher income groups, more voters among middle income groups feel that automation has "some impact" rather than "little to no impact" on them.

Impact of Automation by Income

In terms of automation's impact on the economy overall, there does seem to be a recognition of a changing economy, but there are mixed views about whether automation has a positive or negative impact (36% *good for the economy and people like me*; 27% *good for the economy but not people like me*; 15% *not good for the economy*). A significant percentage of the electorate is still undecided (22%).

Impact of automation on the economy	Overall	30-50K	50-75K	75-100K	100K+
Automation is good for the future of the US economy, including people like me.	36	31	36	38	50
Automation is good for the future of the economy, but not for people like me.	27	29	25	30	22
Automation is not good for the future of the US economy, including people like me.	15	15	19	14	13
Don't know	22	25	20	18	15

However, the higher the income bracket, the greater tendency to see automation as good for the economy, with 50% of the 100K+ income group seeing automation as good for the economy including people like them. As we heard in the Pittsburgh focus groups, there is both a concern that automation costs jobs, as well as a recognition that some jobs are being created. People are not yet clear on whether and how the positive and negative impact on jobs will balance out. This is a relatively new issue, and people are still working through their perceptions of the consequences.

Impact of Automation by Education

By education, college graduates (42% *good for the economy including people like me*) and post graduates (44% *good for the economy including people like me*) are somewhat more confident in the positive impact of automation on the economy. Even so, there is not majority-level confidence among these more educated voters, indicating that even this group is not fully convinced of the positive impact.

Impact of automation on the economy	Overall	High school or less	Some college	College	Post graduate	Union
Automation is good for the future of the US economy, including people like me.	36	24	32	42	44	31
Automation is good for the future of the economy, but not for people like me.	27	27	28	26	25	29
Automation is not good for the future of the US economy, including people like me.	15	18	18	13	12	18
Don't know	22	30	22	19	20	23

Those voters who are in a household with at least one union member are less likely to say that automation is good for people like them as well (31% *good for the economy including people like me*; 29% *good for the economy but not people like me*; 18% *not good for the economy*), with less than a third saying it is good for the economy including people like them.

Confidence in Having Skills for Jobs of the Future

The electorate has a similarly mixed view as to whether they have the skills needed for the future, with the largest percentages of most voter groups being only "somewhat confident."

How confident are you that you have the skills needed for jobs of the future?	Overall	High school or less	Some college	College	Post graduate
Very confident	30	19	23	33	46
Somewhat confident	39	35	40	40	40
Somewhat not confident	13	14	15	14	9
Not confident at all	11	16	15	9	2

In terms of confidence levels by education, this "somewhat confident" state holds true even among college graduates. Reflecting the electorate's concerns about the education system preparing students for the future, only one-third (33%) of college graduates are very confident they have the skills needed for jobs of the future. Only among post-graduates is there a larger percentage of "very confident" than "somewhat confident." And even among this highly educated group, there is only 46%, not a majority, that are "very confident."

Confidence by Age

By age, those who are workforce age (under 55) are only "somewhat confident" in their skill level for the jobs of the future. About one in two (47% among 18-34, 51% among 35-44) describe themselves this way.

How confident are you that you have the skills needed for jobs of the future?	Overall	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Very confident	30	33	29	36	21	30
Somewhat confident	39	47	51	36	41	23
Somewhat not confident	13	13	9	16	16	11
Not confident at all	11	5	9	9	15	15

Trust in Institutions

Value from Institutions

Focus group discussions suggested that present distrust of institutions is largely grounded in the perceived outcomes that are being generated — or the lack of satisfactory outcomes. Across the groups, participants expressed repeatedly that they were looking for outcomes, such as from the federal government or political parties, that they could not find:

> Republican: *The only role I see [Congress] playing right now is roadblocks. Nothing … nothing gets done. It's a shame.*

Middle income voter: *I think there is a level of trust [in the federal government] that we wish that we had and we don't always because of conflicting things that you hear on the news all the time.*

Independent: *For me, it's impossible to really judge what a Member of Congress does. They are not like a quarterback where you can go Google their stats and make an objective evaluation.*

Independent: *My expectation level, regardless of who I vote for president, if they have a mandate based on they have a majority in the Congress and/or the Senate, my expectation level is that their agenda would go forward.*

In addition to dissatisfaction with outcomes, there was also an accompanying sense that most of these institutions had in some way left the boundaries of their particular role. Thus, they were evaluated more skeptically, and ultimately, were less trusted. There is clearly a disconnect between voters and institutions, with two-thirds of the electorate (60%) believing that *the middle class feels value in what they are doing and the work they do, but are not valued by the nation's elites and institutions.*

Which statement do you agree with more?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
The middle class does not feel useful or needed in what they are doing and the work they do.	27	22	22	30	27	36
The middle class feels value in what they are doing and the work that they do, but are not valued by the nation's elites and institutions.	60	65	64	55	63	52
The middle class feels value in what they are doing and the work that they do, and are valued by the nation's elites and institutions.	8	9	9	8	3	9

Across the ideological spectrum, a majority of voters believes that the middle class feels value in what they are doing but are not valued by elites or institutions. This feeling is particularly acute among conservatives. Among the very liberal, a slightly higher percentage (36%) attributes this national sentiment to the middle class itself not feeling useful or needed, but more than half of this group (52%) still attributes the problem to lack of ascribed value from elites and institutions.

Value From Institutions By Income

Among middle class groups, there is a sense that the nation's elites and institutions do not value them, with about two-thirds of these income groups believing this statement (60% among 30-50K; 59% among 50-75K).

Which statement do you agree with more?	Overall	30-50K	50-75K
The middle class does not feel useful or needed in what they are doing and the work they do.	27	30	31
The middle class feels value in what they are doing and the work that they do, but are not valued by the nation's elites and institutions.	60	60	59
The middle class feels value in what they are doing and the work that they do, and are valued by the nation's elites and institutions.	8	6	5

Rankings of Institutional Trust

Of the set of institutions that were evaluated, the least trusted was *political parties* (3.19). Only the *Supreme Court* was somewhat trusted, but it barely made it above a neutral level of trust (5.28).

Trust in Institutions *Scale of 1-9, with 1 being you do not trust the institution at all, 5 neutral, 9 being a great deal of trust in that institution*	Mean
Supreme Court	5.28
The presidency	4.00
Media	3.85
Federal government	3.68
Congress	3.41
Political parties	3.19

While the level of trust in the media and Congress will be explored in greater detail later, there are insights from the qualitative research on where others of these items struggle to gain the trust of voters.

As we heard with other institutions, there was a low level of trust in the federal government. There was a struggle across many of the focus groups with a lack of trust in the federal government, tied to issues such as media misrepresentation, the level of division they perceived, and the sense that *"career politicians"* and others involved in government were out of touch with the average American:

> Middle income: *I think there's a level of trust, too, that we wish that we had and we don't always because of conflicting things that you hear on the news all the time.*

> Middle income: *That is their business, their job. … These are lawyers living off government money, and that's totally wrong. They should have term limits, and until that happens, I don't believe any of them.*

Mom: *Federal government pretty much is supposed to represent people, but they are, at this point, separating us on purpose.*

Institutional Trust By Ideology

Across the ideological spectrum, there are significant differences in institutional trust. Each ideological group is at least somewhat trusting (ranking above a five) of at least one institution. As shown in the chart below, conservative-leaning groups have a somewhat higher level of trust in certain institutions as compared to other ideological groups, but a particularly low level of trust in others. Moderates and liberal-leaning groups tend to have a lower level of trust in institutions across the board.

Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Supreme Court (5.28)	Presidency (6.04)	Supreme Court (5.59)	Supreme Court (5.21)	Supreme Court (5.42)	Media (5.02)
The presidency (4.00)	Supreme Court (5.21)	Presidency (5.22)	Media (4.15)	Media (5.17)	Supreme Court (4.71)
Media (3.85)	Federal government (3.32)	Federal government (3.66)	Federal government (3.83)	Federal government (3.62)	Federal government (3.77)
Federal government (3.68)	Congress (3.07)	Congress (3.58)	Presidency (3.54)	Political parties (3.42)	Political parties (3.56)
Congress (3.41)	Political parties (2.74)	Political parties (3.12)	Congress (3.54)	Congress (3.27)	Congress (3.10)
Political parties (3.19)	Media (2.13)	Media (3.02)	Political parties (3.22)	Presidency (2.59)	Presidency (2.12)

The very conservative are most trusting of the *presidency* (6.04) and *Supreme Court* (5.21), given the ideological composition of those institutions, and had a particularly low level of trust in *political parties* (2.74) and *media* (2.13). However, there is a significant difference in institutional trust of very conservative versus somewhat conservative. The somewhat conservative are moderately trusting of the *Supreme Court* (5.59), and while they still have some level of trust of the *presidency* (5.22), it is much lower than the trust level among the very conservative (6.04). Among the somewhat conservative, *political parties* (3.12) and *media* (3.02) are trusted the least.

The conservatives (both very and somewhat) drove up the overall trust ranking for the presidency. The primary ways the more conservative focus group participants described the role of the president were as Commander in Chief and the representative of our nation abroad, a unifier around ideas, and the person in charge of making decisions to implement those ideas.

Republican: *He's the Commander in Chief and the head of the government, and he's the one everyone should look to, to make the right decisions, and enforce what we're talking about. The policies and the rules of the government.*

Republican: *I think his job is to really work with our foreign affairs… He is the one who will be foremost in our relationship with foreign leaders.*

Republican: *I believe one of his jobs is to represent our country worldwide… I think that having unity is very important. I understand that we're very different people, and everybody's feelings are different…, but to try to unify our country is very important.*

Based on the rankings of the sequence of institutions, trust among moderates is even lower than among conservative-leaning groups, with only the *Supreme Court* (5.21) reaching over a five. However, they have a higher trust in *media* (4.15) than more conservative groups, who rank the media much lower at a two to three. Among the somewhat liberal, the *Supreme Court* (5.42) is the most trusted institution, with *media* (5.17) being somewhat trusted. Also not unexpectedly, the *presidency* is the least trusted institution among this group (2.59).

Among the very liberal, institutional trust is the lowest of any ideological grouping, with only *media* (5.02) reaching a neutral rating of trust. Again, the *presidency* (2.12) receives the lowest level of liberals' trust.

The acute distrust of political parties may be tied to the perception that they are divisive and inhibit lawmaker willingness to focus on solutions and get things done. Some also felt that parties created an additional barrier between Washington and *"regular people."*

Republican: *Since the beginning of the country, the ideas that have formed have split into groups. That's how we ended up with the two-party system. I would prefer not to have a two-party system. It's getting old, and it seems like we keep spinning out the same thing over and over again.*

Middle income voter: *That's the main reason I voted for Trump … he's not abiding to nobody. He doesn't believe in catering to any of the political dominant figures in Washington.*

Republican: *The near success of Sanders and the success of Trump indicates the party leadership has absolutely no idea how regular people think. … I hope it may be the parties may start actually listening to people.*

Mom: *They're either so far right or so far left that there is no common ground anymore, and the people like us, every day, get lost in the shuffle, and nobody's pushing our agenda.*

Congress

Congressional Job Approval

Given the low rating of trust in institutions overall and in Congress specifically, it is not surprising that Congressional job approval is low (14-71 approve-disapprove, 15% don't know). With Republicans holding majorities in the House and Senate, approval is slightly better among Republicans (20-61), but is lower among independents (12-71) and Democrats (11-80).

In the qualitative research, all groups had frustrations with Congress as they currently see it. However, some did see a positive role for Congress as an institution — not necessarily as it is currently functioning — to represent the people of their district, inform them on policy decisions, and help produce good economic and safety outcomes. This was sometimes driven by a positive view of their own Member.

> Republican: *Right now, Congress is a joke. I like the Congressman that I voted for. I like a lot of Congresspeople who are not from our state. I value their opinions and their judgment, but I think the saddest thing is when a bill comes to Congress, and the one party who's not in charge immediately says, "Dead in the water. Not going to look at it." Look at it. You may find something in there you like, or you may be able to contribute something that will change it and make it a better bill.*

> Mom: *I kind of feel like Congress should be a big giant, like, let's together and work these problems out. But, I feel like that rarely happens. I feel like everyone goes, "I'm on this side of the table, you're on that side," and nobody's going to concede anything. I feel like the negotiation isn't there, or if there's a negotiation, it might be, "Well, I'll vote for your thing, but in return, you have to do this for me." I don't feel like they're going there trying to achieve a goal, necessarily.*

In light of these positive possibilities, in the national survey, we took a look at several concepts and ideas that emerged in the qualitative discussions as ways that Congress could be more effective.

Member Representation of the District

A common concern across the focus groups was how well a Member of Congress was connecting with constituents, including ensuring that a Member was truly representing district concerns rather than personal concerns, showing they are listening to constituent concerns, and making an effort to explain why they are taking certain actions.

To understand further how they thought about the dynamic between a Member and his or her constituents, we posed a scenario in which a Member wanted to support a proposal his constituents opposed. Many saw this scenario as directly related to the broader question of whether or not their voices were heard, and whether or not Members have enough interaction with voters.

Middle income: *If they changed what they were saying, then they should be held accountable in some way — by the people, for the people.*

Middle income: *These guys — they get in there and they forget who sent them, too often.*

Mom: *It has to start in the local. You know, starts in that local community, you have to be involved, you have to know what's going on.*

Republican: *One way he can do that is to educate himself about the issue. A lot of times, they're swayed by their peers. … Their peers have their ears, their people don't. So, educate themselves. If it's a really hot topic, then educate your people. Go back to them. Spend time with them. They spend too much time in Washington. They don't spend enough time with their people. Then ask two questions. How does it affect our state? What will it do for our state, and then what will it do for our country as a whole? Then does it really represent our constitution, because we're supposed to be making laws and rules and things based on the principles of our constitution.*

Participants were asked how the Member should resolve such a situation. While many would want to hear the Member explain his or her reasoning, participants also indicated they would be interested in a compromise.

Mom: *They need to give us what they're — why? Why they think it's better. The facts and stuff behind it.*

Middle income: *It'd be nice if they could split that somehow and compromise and have, instead of an all or nothing, be able to allot funds, a reasonable amount of funds for an issue such as that.*

Mom: *If we voted that person in as the constituents, we have some respect for him, and would want to at least listen to why he wants this program even though we don't, and he needs to convince us. And with social media, he can hear our voices.*

Republican: *I think it has to be an open dialogue, because I'm sure there are things he knows that I do not, but he also needs to know how I feel about it.*

In light of these concerns, the focus groups had several suggestions as to how to improve the effectiveness of Congress. The Republican group discussion emphasized that members of Congress were intended to represent specific districts, but felt that many had forgotten that. Participants tied this to a critique of *"career politicians,"* which they felt the founders of the nation did not intend. Along these lines, many were supportive of term limits.

Republican: *Represent your people. The only way for you to know your people is not to be disconnected. You must know your people and represent them fairly and lose the idea of it's my own personal agenda when you walk into Congress. It's not your personal agenda. It's the people that voted for you. It's the people that pay your salary. It's the taxes that are generated in your state, so you can keep your job. That's representing your people.*

Republican: *I don't think our founders intended that we'd have career politicians.*

Mothers and Republicans also discussed fulfilling campaign promises and making a clear effort to explain why they are taking certain actions to show they are listening.

Mom: *That they do what they say they're going to do.*

Mom: *I think they need to listen to both sides of an issue, and weigh it out, and then they have to explain to us why they've come to the decision they've come to, and not just make this decision because they're the politician. But we have to know why, and you have to just be settled with that if it's not what you agree on, as long as you know why.*

Mom 1: *Even though I don't agree with them, and they're trying to make this policy, if they explain why they made that decision, then what can I say? I can say, "Then it's your decision. I don't agree, but it's your decision."*
Mom 2: *As long as there's facts behind it, not just opinions. That there's statistics.*

The middle income participants looked for actions that would indicate good faith such as ensuring they were on the same health care system as their constituents, and did not vote themselves pay raises. They saw these items as examples of ways Congress was out of touch with their own experiences, and could be made more accountable.

Middle income 1: *Well, number one thing I could see — Congress would beholden to taking the same health care that the average working person in this country has.*
Middle income 2: *That's a good one.*
Middle income 1: *That would impress me.*
Middle income 2: *That was a real good one.*

Middle income 1: *I'd say not vote themselves raises all the time.*
Middle income 2: *Health care and pay. That's what I had immediately thought of too.*

Proposals to Improve Effectiveness of Congress

Building from these discussions, the survey asked voters to rank a series of proposals that could help Congress be more effective. Voters were asked to rank the proposals from most helpful to least helpful.

Rank the following proposals in terms of how helpful each one would be toward Congress being more effective	
Priority Ranking	**Overall**
1	Having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable
2	Congress having the same health care as everyone else has
3	More compromise between the two parties in Congress

Rank the following proposals in terms of how helpful each one would be toward Congress being more effective	
Priority Ranking	**Overall**
4	Reducing government spending
5	Passing legislation on issues that are priorities to you
6	You feel that your voice is heard
7	Being a check and balance on other branches of government
8	Being a check and balance on their own party
9	Having Your Member of Congress explain his or her vote or positions more clearly to you
10	Your Member of Congress spends time in the district to hear constituents' view
11	More communication between you and your Member of Congress
12	Being able to understand the legislative process and have more insight into the process

The priority proposals overall related to things that could be done to improve the institution of Congress: *having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable* (which addresses some of the concerns about *"doing what they say they will do"* described above), *Congress having the same health care as everyone else has*, and *more compromise between the two parties in Congress* — all proposals that would have to be implemented at a national level.

Proposals to Improve Effectiveness by Congressional Approval/Disapproval

The chart below shows the prioritizing of the proposals by approval or disapproval of Congress.

Rank the following proposals in terms of how helpful each one would be toward Congress being more effective		
Priority Ranking	**Approve of Congress**	**Disapprove of Congress**
1	Congress having the same health care as everyone else has	Having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable
2	Reducing government spending	Congress having the same health care as everyone else has
3	Having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable	More compromise between the two parties in Congress
4	More compromise between the two parties in Congress	Passing legislation on issues that are priorities to you
5	You feel that your voice is heard	Reducing government spending

Priority Ranking	Approve of Congress	Disapprove of Congress
6	Being a check and balance on other branches of government	You feel that your voice is heard
7	Being a check and balance on their own party	Being a check and balance on other branches of government
8	Passing legislation on issues that are priorities to you	Being a check and balance on their own party
9	Your Member of Congress spends time in the district to hear constituents' view	Having Your Member of Congress explain his or her vote or positions more clearly to you
10	More communication between you and your Member of Congress	Your Member of Congress spends time in the district to hear constituents' view
11	Having Your Member of Congress explain his or her vote or positions more clearly to you	More communication between you and your Member of Congress
12	Being able to understand the legislative process and have more insight into the process	Being able to understand the legislative process and have more insight into the process

Rank the following proposals in terms of how helpful each one would be toward Congress being more effective

Among the 71% who disapprove of Congress, the top four included having more ways for Members to be accountable, having the same health care as everyone else, more compromise, and passing legislation on issue priorities. It is important to note that among the voters that disapprove of Congressional performance, these proposals ranked higher than many of those related to what Members could do in their districts, such as spending time in the district to hear constituents' views. This does not mean that district-related activities are not important, but in terms of the way voters prioritized proposals for improving the effectiveness of Congress, the highest ranked related to legislative action that Congress could execute as an institution.

Proposals for Congressional Effectiveness by Ideology

Across the ideological spectrum, the top two proposals tended to be *having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable* and *having the same health care as everyone else has*. Not unexpectedly, conservative-leaning groups were more interested in the idea of *reducing government spending* than liberal groups, who ranked *more compromise between the two parties* higher than conservatives.

Rank the following proposals in terms of how helpful each one would be toward Congress being more effective...						
	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
1	Having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable	Having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable	Having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable	Congress having the same health care as everyone else has	Having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable	Congress having the same health care as everyone else has
2	Congress having the same health care as everyone else has	Congress having the same health care as everyone else has	Reducing government spending	Having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable	Congress having the same health care as everyone else has	Having more ways for Members of Congress to be accountable
3	More compromise between the two parties in Congress	Reducing government spending	Congress having the same health care as everyone else has	More compromise between the two parties in Congress	More compromise between the two parties in Congress	Passing legislation on issues that are priorities to you
4	Reducing government spending	Passing legislation on issues that are priorities to you	More compromise between the two parties in Congress	Reducing government spending	Passing legislation on issues that are priorities to you	More compromise between the two parties in Congress
5	Passing legislation on issues that are priorities to you	You feel that your voice is heard	Passing legislation on issues that are priorities to you	Passing legislation on issues that are priorities to you	You feel that your voice is heard	You feel that your voice is heard
6	You feel that your voice is heard	More compromise between the two parties in Congress	Being a check and balance on other branches of government	Being a check and balance on other branches of government	Being a check and balance on other branches of government	Being a check and balance on other branches of government
7	Being a check and balance on other branches of government	Being a check and balance on other branches of government	You feel that your voice is heard	You feel that your voice is heard	Being a check and balance on their own party	Being a check and balance on their own party
8	Being a check and balance on their own party	Your Member of Congress spends time in the district to hear constituents' view	Being a check and balance on their own party	Being a check and balance on their own party	Your Member of Congress spends time in the district to hear constituents' view	Having Your Member of Congress explain his or her vote or positions more clearly to you

	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Rank the following proposals in terms of how helpful each one would be toward Congress being more effective...						
9	Having Your Member of Congress explain his or her vote or positions more clearly to you	Being a check and balance on their own party	Having Your Member of Congress explain his or her vote or positions more clearly to you	Your Member of Congress spends time in the district to hear constituents' view	Having Your Member of Congress explain his or her vote or positions more clearly to you	Your Member of Congress spends time in the district to hear constituents' view
10	Your Member of Congress spends time in the district to hear constituents' view	Having Your Member of Congress explain his or her vote or positions more clearly to you	Your Member of Congress spends time in the district to hear constituents' view	Having Your Member of Congress explain his or her vote or positions more clearly to you	Reducing government spending	Being able to understand the legislative process and have more insight into the process
11	More communication between you and your Member of Congress	More communication between you and your Member of Congress	More communication between you and your Member of Congress	More communication between you and your Member of Congress	More communication between you and your Member of Congress	Reducing government spending
12	Being able to understand the legislative process and have more insight into the process	Being able to understand the legislative process and have more insight into the process	Being able to understand the legislative process and have more insight into the process	Being able to understand the legislative process and have more insight into the process	Being able to understand the legislative process and have more insight into the process	More communication between you and your Member of Congress

Media

As discussed in the previous section about trust in institutions, there tends to be a low level of trust in the media. Overall, the electorate has a negative view of where the media currently is. As we heard across the various focus groups, voters struggle with trust, feeling like they are not getting all the facts and receiving too much editorializing and opinion. They felt the media perpetuates a level of division, saying they like *"stirring the pot"* or that media is a *"joke"* creating false controversies:

Middle income: *You can flip to all these different channels and everybody tells you something different. I don't know how you can really tell who to trust.*

Independent 1: *Everything's just so editorialized. I'm very frustrated. I just want to know what's going on, that's all.*
Independent 2: *Just give me the facts.*

Mom: *I think we get a lot of partial facts. They tell us half the story, as well as what they want us to hear.*

Direction of Discourse

At 20-67 right direction-wrong track, voters' perception of the direction of the public discourse has deteriorated further since the January survey for Democracy Fund (27-55).

Direction of Discourse		Overall	Very Cons	Some cons	Mod	Some lib	Very lib
January	Right Direction	27	35	26	25	22	31
	Wrong Track	55	48	56	54	62	61
June	Right Direction	20	24	21	21	19	16
	Wrong Track	67	67	61	66	74	75

Very and somewhat conservative voters are somewhat less pessimistic about the discourse than voters who are somewhat liberal or very liberal. However, across all ideological groups, there has been a decline since the beginning of the year, as shown in the chart above.

The dissatisfaction with the current discourse led some in the focus groups to consume less news. Several of the moms and independents mentioned they have either eliminated or significantly reduced their consumption of cable news. This is not because they do not want to be informed — they described it more as irrelevant. They saw a particular disconnect in both tone and priorities between the media and their own lives.

Middle income: *I want to keep up on current events, but I don't dwell on all of the bad news and terrible stories that you hear.*

Middle income: *I want a fair and balanced reporting of the facts and I really want to know what's happened. I don't really want to hear opinions. I don't watch national TV news at all any longer because of that.*

Independent: *Just give me the facts. I don't need fluff. My life doesn't consist of fluff, you've got to be kidding me … they just want to suck you in and it's like I don't have time for this… When you start filtering through and taking out all the fluff, the adjectives and all that, then you can make up your own mind.*

Impact of the News Media

Just as voters perceive public discourse to be headed in the wrong direction, they also are more likely to see news media as negatively affecting their understanding of national issues, news events, and elected officials' actions. Some 48% said the news media is having a "negative" impact, compared to a "positive" impact (18%) or "no impact" (18%).

Impact of News Media	Overall	Very Cons	Some cons	Mod	Some lib	Very lib
Positive	28	7	9	30	55	56
No impact	18	9	14	25	15	16
Negative	48	78	74	38	26	19

Liberals are more dissatisfied with the public discourse than conservatives or moderates, but they are significantly more positive about the impact of the news media. While only 7% of very conservative voters and 9% of somewhat conservative voters said the news media has a positive effect on their understanding of national issues and events, 55% of somewhat liberal voters and 56% of liberal voters said the same.

In the focus groups, we heard some describe modern journalism as more of a barrier between what is actually happening and what they can find out, rather than as the means to convey information to the public. This was particularly true among the Republican focus group.

> Republican: *I think it's a joke right now. I think all they're trying to do is separate, divide the country. Whether it's race relations or party relations or whatever. They're trying to make a mockery out of various people.*

> Mom: *You're taking a piece of a story, you know, whichever piece you want to make the person see this way about this person and this way about this person.*

> Independent: *No matter what source I look at, it demonizes one side and makes the other side look great. Then you look at it the other way and it doesn't make any sense.*

Concern about Press Freedom

By 2:1, the electorate is concerned about the state of freedom of the press (66-31 concerned-not concerned).

How concerned are you about the state of the freedom of the press?	Overall	Very Cons	Some cons	Mod	Some lib	Very lib
Very concerned	30	32	18	27	43	56
Somewhat concerned	36	39	36	34	39	31
Somewhat not concerned	14	9	16	19	9	4
Not concerned at all	17	16	26	15	9	6
TOTAL CONCERNED	66	71	54	61	81	87
TOTAL NOT CONCERNED	31	25	42	35	19	11

Voters at both extremes of the ideological spectrum indicated higher degrees of concern about freedom of the press, with very conservative (32% "very concerned") being more concerned than somewhat conservative (18% "very concerned") and moderate voters (27% "very concerned"). Very liberal voters (56% "very concerned") also indicated being more concerned than somewhat liberal voters (43% "very concerned").

While there are varying levels of concern about press freedom among different groups, there are likely to be different motivations behind these concerns. For instance, conservatives' concern about the state of freedom of the press may be grounded in the belief that the press is too politically motivated and incentivized by ratings, as will be discussed in the section on journalist motivation. Liberals' concern about press freedom may be coming from other issues such as journalist safety and political pressure.

Role of the Media

In the survey, voters were presented with a list of roles for the media and asked to rank each from most to least important.

Roles of the Media (ranked most important to least important)	Ranking
Presenting facts or information directly from a source, event or scene to the public — without opinion or editorializing	1
Fact checking material that comes from a primary source	2
Covering stories that are important to people	3
Check and balance on public figures and institutions	4
Interpreting current events for the public with expert analysis	5

Overall, the electorate ranks *presenting facts or information directly from a source* as the most important role. The electorate tended to see the least important media role as being *interpreting current events for the public with expert analysis*.

The following quote from an independent voter in Pittsburgh illustrates why voters view presentation of facts directly from a source as the most important role for the media, and how they describe a negative view of editorializing:

> Independent: *[The media have] gotten away from what reporting really is, which is here's the information, here are the facts, here are statistics and derive your own opinions from that. Now it's like they are sprinkling in statistics and they are giving their opinion along with it. It's all opinion journalism and that's what has totally taken over.*

Despite differences in how they view the overall impact of the news media, there is general consensus among most groups about the prioritization of the roles of the media. Republicans, Independents and Democrats all prioritize the five potential media roles in the same order. Even

though these groups differ in many respects in their views of the news media, they appear to feel similarly about the importance of reliable sources and objectivity.

In the focus groups, when asked about how news media could regain their trust, many respondents were looking for the top two roles to be prioritized:

> Republican: *Stick to the facts. When there is crisis in this country nationally we need to be able to go to something and find truth and facts and I don't think that we really are able to do that.*

> Mom: *I think more, like, them being out there in what's going on. More interviews with people that are involved in it.*

> Independent: *I think you find, for me, my go to as far as track record, integrity, reporting, and then I try to stick with that, is based on supporting sources. … Again, I'm looking for something that's going to give me the facts, give me the truth, it's got to be credible and it's got to be supported by something.*

> Middle income: *Fair and unbiased facts without sensationalism, without the he said/she said, unless it is exactly what he said/she said. … Don't give me your opinion. I'm old enough to have my own opinion. … For journalism, facts only.*

Journalist Motivation

By 2:1, there is skepticism about the motivation of journalists. Only one-third of the electorate believes *journalists are trying to get the objective facts of a story to the public for the public interest* (32%), while the remaining two-thirds (62%) believes it is either for political/personal reasons (30%) or for ratings/page views (32%).

What do you think the majority of journalists today are trying to do when they report?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Journalists are trying to get the objective facts of a story to the public for the public interest.	32	5	15	38	56	53
Journalists are trying to get their own view of a story to the public for political or personal reasons.	30	61	40	24	12	15
Journalists are trying to get their own view of a story to the public for ratings or page views.	32	29	42	30	27	18

Across the ideological spectrum, the more conservative a person is, the more likely they are to believe in the political motivation of journalists, with 61% of very conservative respondents believing that journalists are trying to get their own view of a story to the public for political or personal

reasons. However, the somewhat conservative are evenly split between political reasons (40%) and ratings (42%) as journalistic motivations. Moderates tend to be more evenly divided, with a plurality (38%) believing journalists intend to serve the public interest. Among both somewhat liberal and very liberal, the largest percentages — 56% and 53% respectively — believe that journalists are motivated by the public interest. However among somewhat liberal voters, one out of four (27%) attributes journalistic motivation to ratings.

We heard these doubts arise in the focus groups as some questioned whether there was a conflict of interest between ratings, money, and/or personal motivation, and the public interest of reporting objectively:

Independent: *When ratings trump truth, you've got a big problem and I think that's where it's at.*

Republican: *I think it's a lot of entertainment. And because of the entertainment if you can get people to like you then whatever you want to tell them.*

Mom: *I think sometimes the media's too involved, and I think they put things out there before they get all the facts, and they start a lot of ruckus going on that's not even true.*

Independent: *All of the search engines will point you to what they want you to see and click on. They're paid based on that, and it's all based on power. Power and money.*

Criteria for Credibility of News Stories

When asked how they determined the credibility of a news story, the focus groups listed a variety of criteria. Some said they tried to get to the most basic facts and the original sources. Many others mentioned validation of information, direct sourcing, interviews with people involved, on-scene reporting, answering the basic journalistic questions ("*who, what, when, where, and why*"), and not having as many talking heads or commentators. Video or other external documentation was also noted by several in the independent and middle income groups.

From the group discussions, we generated a list of criteria to quantify how the electorate as a whole determines credibility. Consistent with what we found in the focus groups, the top two most important criteria for credibility were direct sourcing (rather than using anonymous sources) and confirmation from multiple news outlets.

Criteria for Determining Credibility of a News Story *(scale of 1-9, with 1 being not important at all, 5 somewhat important, 9 extremely important)*	Mean
Direct sources rather than anonymous sources	7.04
Confirmation from multiple news outlets or sources	6.96
The source, network or media outlet the story is coming from	6.86
Independent validation such as video clips, citations and references	6.80

Criteria for Determining Credibility of a News Story (scale of 1-9, with 1 being not important at all, 5 somewhat important, 9 extremely important)	Mean
Whether it is an issue or story you think is important and you care about	5.74
You generally agree with the conclusion of the story	4.93
If a friend or family member recommended it or passed it along to you	4.85

Sources — as the witnesses of news content, or the media outlets themselves — were extremely important in establishing credibility.

> Independent: *As far as what makes news credible, is their sources. If there is a fire, are you talking to the firemen on the scene? Are you talking to the potential survivors? Who are you speaking to? Are you speaking to the neighbor from three blocks away? That's basically it, it comes down to sources.*

> Independent*: Who, what, when, where, why, and sometimes how. Try to get the facts based on that and try to discern if somebody's really giving you their opinion. If you can keep the opinion out of it then you've got a decent news story of what's actually happening.*

In the focus groups, one voter cited Trump's tweets as a credible source of news because they are directly accessible by the public.

> Republican: *I think it's a joke. I think that the media enjoy stirring the pot. I think they create a bigger and better story. Personally that's why I don't mind the Trump tweets because I know its coming straight from him instead of whatever somebody is telling me.*

Criteria for Credibility by Ideology

When we examined this list by ideological leaning, some interesting distinctions emerged between liberal voters and voters who are moderate or conservative.

Criteria for Determining Credibility of a News Story (scale of 1-9, with 1 being not important at all, 5 somewhat important, 9 extremely important)						
	Overall	Very cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
1	Direct sources rather than anonymous sources (7.04)	Direct sources rather than anonymous sources (7.46)	Direct sources rather than anonymous sources (7.34)	Direct sources rather than anonymous sources (6.97)	Confirmation from multiple news outlets or sources (7.17)	The source, network or media outlet the story is coming from (7.29)

	Overall	Very cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
	Criteria for Determining Credibility of a News Story *(scale of 1-9, with 1 being not important at all, 5 somewhat important, 9 extremely important)*					
2	Confirmation from multiple news outlets or sources (6.96)	The source, network or media outlet the story is coming from (7.03)	Independent validation such as video clips, citations, and references (7.09)	Confirmation from multiple news outlets or sources (6.88)	The source, network or media outlet the story is coming from (7.02)	Confirmation from multiple news outlets or sources (7.11)
3	The source, network or media outlet the story is coming from (6.86)	Confirmation from multiple news outlets or sources (6.89)	Confirmation from multiple news outlets or sources (6.98)	Independent validation such as video clips, citations, and references (6.67)	Independent validation such as video clips, citations, and references (6.79)	Independent validation such as video clips, citations, and references (6.78)
4	Independent validation such as video clips, citations and references (6.80)	Independent validation such as video clips, citations, and references (6.76)	The source, network or media outlet the story is coming from (6.91)	The source, network or media outlet the story is coming from (6.64)	Direct sources rather than anonymous sources (6.63)	Direct sources rather than anonymous sources (6.78)
5	Whether it is an issue or story you think is important and you care about (5.74)	Whether it is an issue or story you think is important and you care about (5.57)	Whether it is an issue or story you think is important and you care about (5.91)	Whether it is an issue or story you think is important and you care about (5.96)	Whether it is an issue or story you think is important and you care about (5.18)	Whether it is an issue or story you think is important and you care about (5.64)
6	You generally agree with the conclusion of the story (4.93)	You generally agree with the conclusion of the story (4.83)	You generally agree with the conclusion of the story (5.03)	You generally agree with the conclusion of the story (5.00)	You generally agree with the conclusion of the story (4.61)	You generally agree with the conclusion of the story (5.16)
7	If a friend or family member recommended it or passed it along to you (4.85)	If a friend or family member recommended it or passed it along to you (4.70)	If a friend or family member recommended it or passed it along to you (4.99)	If a friend or family member recommended it or passed it along to you (4.99)	If a friend or family member recommended it or passed it along to you (4.43)	If a friend or family member recommended it or passed it along to you (4.83)

Among conservatives, somewhat conservatives, and even moderates, direct sourcing emerged as the most important factor in determining credibility. The Republican focus group cited anonymous sourcing as part of the larger problem of blatant worldview differences between news sources coloring the facts they felt they were getting. Many participants across the spectrum felt they were getting different stories on the same subject from different sources, with anonymous sources being a significant barrier in their being able to evaluate the credibility of a story. Because the source was anonymous, they did not feel they could make an informed decision about whether the story was credible. Just as they wanted to be able to make a decision about the facts being presented

independent of any bias, they wanted to be able to evaluate for themselves the credibility of a source or story.

> Republican: *Journalism should be recording facts as they are without any slant whatsoever of what they think you want. It should be up to me. What I heard should be the same from every channel to the next. And this practice of the anonymous source … they should be naming the source so you can make the decision on where you get your information.*

Good journalism, they felt, would give them just the facts directly from the sources so that they could make this evaluation. When asked about examples of good journalism, many were looking for information that was consciously non-divisive and apolitical wherever possible. They did not want the news to "*try to make someone out to be a good or bad guy*" and felt that because of this tendency, it was almost impossible to have good coverage of politics. One person liked that the BBC has newsreaders who seemingly do not offer commentary, and some mentioned newsmagazine style programming like 60 Minutes and 20/20.

> Mom: *But good journalism is that they have to do the fact finding, they have to do the research. You know, I want to hear from people that are out there and in it, and in the field, and are seeing what's going on, like over in the Middle East. They're there, and they can tell you from seeing it directly, you know. Not somebody back in the States saying, "Oh, well this is going on over here, and this is what we're hearing." No, I want to — this is what we're seeing, this is what happened last night.*

> Republican: *Good journalism looks like reporting the news the way that it's meant to be reported. Not trying to make people out to be a good guy or a bad guy. You shouldn't have to worry about whether your news station is Republican or Democrat or anything like that. Liberal or Conservative. There shouldn't be this big divide between CNN and MSNBC and Fox News and things like that. There shouldn't be that. It should be just people that are reporting the news, what's actually out there.*

Among somewhat liberal and very liberal, the most important criteria are confirmation from multiple outlets and the source of news. Focus groups also mentioned they would look for stories that were covered by outlets across the spectrum. Throughout each of the focus groups, plain facts (without an editorial slant) and consistency across sources (despite ideological differences) were key factors in determining credibility.

> Middle income: *And I read a lot of different apps and a lot of different sources of news, especially when something big happens. Especially if something happens in one, then I'm trying to see what the people in the other are saying about it.*

> Middle income: *My sole source just about these days … is Drudge Report. And the reason I consider them to be fair and balanced is because he doesn't state anything. He merely presents a bunch of articles from every – the complete range from everything from MSNBC to CNN to Fox to everything.*

As for voters overall, the least important factors for credibility across each ideology are whether a friend or family member passed the news along to you and agreement with the conclusion of a story.

Criteria for Skepticism

The focus group discussions about credibility and frustration with the media generated an additional list of reasons to be skeptical of a news story, which we also tested in the survey. Participants raised concerns including too much editorializing, the feeling they were only being presented with certain facts, and the frustration at other barriers they saw as standing between them and knowing the facts of the story.

Criteria for Making You Skeptical of a News Story *(scale of 1-9, with 1 being not important at all, 5 somewhat important, 9 extremely important)*	Mean
Your belief that you are only being presented with selective facts	6.72
The source, network or media outlet the story is coming from	6.70
Coverage of certain stories that you think are pushing an agenda and trying to sway opinion	6.62
Portraying certain individuals or groups in a negative way	6.13
Commentary or opinion shaping the story	5.72
Use of anonymous sources	5.71
A piece of information with which you disagree	5.04

Concurrent with their desire for direct sourcing and confirmation of a story from multiple news sources, voters overall rated *your belief that you are only being presented with selective facts* as the top factor that would make them skeptical of a news story.

In particular, some in the moms group described how they felt the presentation of selective facts was an attempt to be manipulative:

> Mom: *I think we get a lot of partial facts. They tell us half the story, as well as what they want us to hear.*

> Mom: *You're taking a piece of a story, whichever piece you want, to make the person see this way about this person and this way about this person.*

Criteria for Skepticism by Ideology

As with the factors of credibility, there were differences when voters were split by ideology. Conservatives, for example, placed a higher emphasis on the agenda of a story.

Criteria for Making You Skeptical of a News Story
(scale of 1-9, with 1 being not important at all, 5 somewhat important, 9 extremely important)

	Overall	Very cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
1	Your belief that you are only being presented with selective facts (6.72)	The source, network, or media outlet the story is coming from (7.39)	Coverage of certain stories that you think are pushing an agenda (6.87)	The source, network, or media outlet the story is coming from (6.49)	Your belief that you are only being presented with selective facts (6.78)	The source, network, or media outlet the story is coming from (7.03)
2	The source, network or media outlet the story is coming from (6.70)	Coverage of certain stories that you think are pushing an agenda (7.35)	Your belief that you are only being presented with selective facts (6.86)	Your belief that you are only being presented with selective facts (6.47)	The source, network, or media outlet the story is coming from (6.61)	Your belief that you are only being presented with selective facts (6.59)
3	Coverage of certain stories that you think are pushing an agenda and trying to sway opinion (6.62)	Your belief that you are only being presented with selective facts (7.30)	The source, network, or media outlet the story is coming from (6.66)	Coverage of certain stories that you think are pushing an agenda (6.42)	Coverage of certain stories that you think are pushing an agenda (6.37)	Coverage of certain stories that you think are pushing an agenda (6.34)
4	Portraying certain individuals or groups in a negative way (6.13)	Portraying certain individuals or groups in a negative way (6.90)	Portraying certain individuals or groups in a negative way (6.54)	Portraying certain individuals or groups in a negative way (5.94)	Commentary or opinion shaping the story (5.66)	Commentary or opinion shaping the story (5.86)
5	Commentary or opinion shaping the story (5.72)	Commentary or opinion shaping the story (6.36)	Use of anonymous sources (6.02)	Use of anonymous sources (5.61)	Portraying certain individuals or groups in a negative way (5.63)	Portraying certain individuals or groups in a negative way (5.71)
6	Use of anonymous sources (5.71)	Use of anonymous sources (6.06)	Commentary or opinion shaping the story (5.68)	Commentary or opinion shaping the story (5.55)	Use of anonymous sources (5.27)	Use of anonymous sources (5.66)
7	A piece of information with which you disagree (5.04)	A piece of information with which you disagree (5.35)	A piece of information with which you disagree (5.31)	A piece of information with which you disagree (4.88)	A piece of information with which you disagree (4.68)	A piece of information with which you disagree (5.20)

Voters who consider themselves very conservative rate certain criteria higher on the scale of importance in making them skeptical than do other groups. There are four factors the very conservative respondents rated at or above a seven in importance — the source/media outlet, coverage of certain stories that you think are pushing an agenda, selective facts, and portrayal of individuals/groups in a negative way.

The high rating of these factors, particularly the top two relating to the source and suspicion of underlying agendas, reflect their feelings about the political motivation of journalists. However, those on the opposite end of the political spectrum — the very liberal — only had one factor above a seven: the source/media outlet.

Portraying certain individuals or groups in a negative way was rated around a five to six by most ideological groups, but with the very conservative voters rating it almost a seven in importance, reflecting the views of some in the focus groups:

> Middle income: *If it's throwing somebody under the bus, then I don't trust it. If it's just facts and then – if it's slanted in any way to throw somebody under the bus or I feel like it's trying to get somebody to think in one particular way, then I don't trust it.*

Skepticism due to selective facts, agendas, or certain sources cuts across the ideological spectrum, making up the top three factors for each ideological group. Similar to the prioritization of criteria for determining credibility of a news story, agreement or disagreement with a news item is the least important factor, consistent across ideological lines.

Press Safety

As reflected throughout the results of the survey questions about the media, the strongest feelings about the press — either positive or negative — are most manifest in the most ideological wings of the electorate.

Recently there have been a few examples of threats to reporters and media outlets, in some cases resulting in altercations. Do you find these incidents to be sometimes acceptable in certain cases, or never acceptable?						
	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Sometimes acceptable in certain cases	16	21	18	14	13	19
Never acceptable	77	74	74	76	86	78

On the question of whether threats to the media are ever acceptable, the very conservative and somewhat conservative have a slightly higher percentage saying "sometimes acceptable" (21% and 18% respectively), although a similar percentage of very liberal (19%) also finds this acceptable in some cases. There is also a slight gender gap on this question, with men more open to this concept (19% "sometimes acceptable") than women (13% "sometimes acceptable").

In the Pittsburgh focus groups, when looking at the specific scenario of the incident between a reporter and a political figure in Montana, the general sense was that the reporter was obnoxious and possibly exaggerated the scenario, and that they understood the impulse of the candidate, but the candidate's response was not acceptable.

> Middle income: *In my opinion, the reporter's side was a complete exaggeration and on the candidate's side, it was off the line reaction.*

> Independent: *What he did, I don't know, it wasn't right. Was he provoked? He may have been provoked, but still, you can't body slam somebody.*

> Middle income: *To be physically assaulted, there's no line. The guy was an idiot – the reporter was. But if he actually was body slammed, if that's a fact, it's a crim*e.

> Independent: *I think it was a natural reaction, but I think it was not necessary. I don't think at any point, you need to be physical with anyone.*

A few respondents wanted to withhold judgment on the scenario.

> Independent: *My thought is the reporter probably went overboard and people can only take so much and if you get in their space, they have to do something to counteract it. Did the guy go overboard? Maybe. I can't make a judgement on that because I wasn't there.*

Nevertheless, both groups generally knew details about the story, including that a large percentage of the state had early voted before the incident. Despite their lack of trust in the news and statements that they consumed less news now than they used to, they were informed about this particular incident, and generally believed this incident clearly crossed a line.

Immigration and Assimilation

Current State of the Immigration System

With regard to immigration, one point of consensus across demographic groups is that the current US system does not work well (28-68 well-not well).

How well or not well does the US immigration system work?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Very well	4	4	2	4	5	11
Somewhat well	23	8	15	26	35	34
Somewhat not well	30	12	35	32	35	24
Not well at all	38	73	44	31	22	24

How well or not well does the US immigration system work?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
TOTAL WELL	28	12	17	31	40	45
TOTAL NOT WELL	68	84	79	63	57	48

Conservative groups (12-84 among very conservative, 17-79 among somewhat conservative) and moderates (31-63) share the belief that it does not work well by at least 2:1. Liberal-leaning groups tend to be less pessimistic than conservatives about how well the system works, but nevertheless do not see the system working well (40-57 among somewhat liberal, 45-48 among very liberal).

In all focus groups, participants drew a distinction between legal and illegal immigration, which often made a sharp difference in their descriptions of the overall issue. Legal immigrants tend to be viewed as making a positive contribution to the economy and society, while illegal immigrants were seen as taking advantage of the benefits of the US without *"playing by the rules"* and contributing their fair share.

Mom: *I think that immigrants do a lot in our country. I think that the bigger issue isn't necessarily immigration, it's whether it's being done illegally or not. I think that most people who quote/unquote oppose immigration are not necessarily opposing that an immigrant may come in and take my job for example. It's the way that it's happening and what types of benefits or what things is this person getting that I can't get, or now I'm not getting because they're getting it.*

Republican: *I have no problem with people coming into the country. That's what our country was built on. We were all immigrants at one point. I think that it has to be done the right way. You can't be illegal, an illegal immigrant, and be able to get all of this.*

Middle income: *And this is a nation of immigrants, and I have no problem with immigration now, if done in the right and lawful manner. Coming in through an immigration location, going through all the paperwork, learning the language.*

Middle income: *People of different races come to this country as legal immigrants and have done really well, no different than myself. But they came here legally, just like my grandparents did. And I have no problem with that. Borders should be controlled. That's why we have borders. We're a sovereign nation. We have the right to control. I have no problem with people because of their race, their ethnicity. I just believe you should follow the laws. We're a nation of laws, period.*

Independent: *Immigrants in the country is positive; my grandparents were immigrants from Europe. But the problem you have is, you have wide open borders you got people coming in illegally and it's not about immigration, it's about the illegal immigrants who are here illegally.*

Illegal immigration was closely connected to economic and safety concerns for many focus group participants. Although there was some recognition that they may contribute to the economy, this was seen as offset by being an economic *"drain"* on state governments and infrastructure.

> Middle income: *Just because I feel like we're overpopulated and that could be a drain on our economy as well. And then we're outsourcing to those same people in their countries and it just makes no sense. At least start with closing the borders.*

> Middle income: *But the only jobs that they're taking are the jobs that Americans are too lazy to take for themselves.*

> Middle income: *Yes, a lot of these people do the jobs that maybe the average American doesn't want to do. But the burden on the infrastructure, especially in [places like] California. It's unbelievable the financial burden on government due to the – everything from police, medical, education.*

> Middle income: *They shouldn't have special privileges either. They should be treated the way we're treated.*

Standardization of Immigration Policies

One of the questions with the largest variation across the ideological spectrum was in regard to the standardization of immigration policies. Overall the electorate is split (47-45) as to whether policies should be the same for immigrants/nationals from any country or whether they should be more strict for immigrants/nationals from certain countries. But as shown in the chart below, there are major differences on this question by ideology.

In thinking about policies regarding immigrants and nationals coming into the US from other countries, which statement do you agree with more?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Government policies should be the same for immigrants and nationals from any country	47	21	30	52	65	80
Government policies should be more strict for immigrants and nationals from certain countries more than others	45	74	65	37	27	13

Those who describe themselves as very conservative (21-74) and somewhat conservative (30-65) believe that policies should be more strict for certain countries. Those who describe themselves as very liberal (80-13) and somewhat liberal (65-27), as well as moderates (52-37), believe in having more uniformity of immigration policies regardless of country of origin.

Vetting Process

Compared to the overall immigration system (28-68 works well-not well), the vetting process is viewed as ineffective but slightly better than the overall system (37-53 effective-not effective).

How effective or not effective is the vetting process for individuals coming into the US?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Very effective	8	2	4	8	13	20
Somewhat effective	29	15	17	33	43	43
Somewhat not effective	27	16	43	26	24	10
Not effective at all	26	61	29	21	11	13
TOTAL EFFECTIVE	37	18	21	41	56	63
TOTAL NOT EFFECTIVE	53	77	71	46	35	23

However, this belief comes more from liberal-leaning groups. The very conservative (18-77 effective-not effective) and somewhat conservative (21-71) believe by large margins that vetting is not effective. Moderates lean toward the belief that the vetting system does not work well (41-46), but this is significantly better than how they view the overall immigration system (31-63 works well-not well). Compared to other demographic groups, liberals have a much more positive view of the effectiveness of the vetting system (56-35 among somewhat liberal, 63-23 among very liberal). This is significantly better than how they view the overall immigration system (40-57 works well-not well among somewhat liberal; 45-48 among very liberal).

This greater faith in the effectiveness of the vetting system may bolster liberal opposition toward policies like the travel suspension. The view among conservatives that vetting is not effective may encourage their agreement with increased strictness of government policies for immigrants/ nationals from certain countries.

Refugees

Vetting procedures have recently been discussed in regard to the acceptance into the US of refugees. Although not addressed directly in the survey, the insights about vetting and policies shed light on conversations about views toward refugees from the qualitative research. The respondents' general outlook on refugees was that helping them was a worthy goal, but that the government's priority should be protecting American citizens.

> Mom: *I think we need to worry about ourselves before we go out and worry about any other countries and that's in all aspects of it. I think we need to worry about the US instead of going out and fighting everybody else's battles.*

Middle income: *And to me I feel take care of the people here in our country before you do anything with other people in the other country.*

Is the US a Welcoming Society?

About one out of two (52%) believes the statement that *the US is a welcoming society to immigrants from other countries* (52-35 believe-do not believe), but with significant differences by party. Republicans (61-22) and independents (54-35) are more inclined to believe in this concept than Democrats (42-47) who tend toward not believing the US is a welcoming society.

The US is a welcoming society to immigrants from other countries.	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Believe	52	66	64	45	44	43
Do not believe	35	24	18	41	47	46

Across the ideological spectrum, there are differences in views about this concept. Conservative-leaning groups tend to see the US as a welcoming society (66% of very conservative and 64% of somewhat conservative believe the statement) while moderates (45-41), somewhat liberal (44-47), and very liberal (43-46) are evenly split.

Groups that are skeptical about this statement include young voters (39-52 believe-do not believe), African-Americans (42-51) and Hispanics (39-50).

Consensus Around a Potential Goal for Immigration Policy

However, by a large margin (72-17 possible-not possible), there is more consensus across party, ideology and demographics that it is possible to achieve a welcoming society for immigrants that also has secure borders and appropriate vetting procedures.

Do you believe it is possible or not possible to have a welcoming society for immigrants that also has secure borders and appropriate vetting procedures?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Possible	72	74	71	67	77	80
Not possible	17	21	16	20	15	9

Despite significant differences in views about the effectiveness of vetting procedures and the concept of whether the US is a welcoming society right now, voters across the ideological spectrum believe in the possibility of achieving a society that can be both welcoming and secure. Large majorities of very conservative (74-21) and very liberal (80-9) believe this goal is possible.

Criteria for Immigrants to be Accepted

In this context of voters' distinctions between legal and illegal immigration, their concerns about safety and vetting, but their belief in the possibility of a welcoming and secure society, what items are most important to voters in terms of immigrants assimilating well into the United States?

The basic thresholds that the focus group participants felt legal immigrants should have to meet to integrate into American society included paying taxes, learning English, and possibly having a citizen vouch for or sponsor that immigrant. Republicans also emphasized that immigrants should be motivated to work, assimilate, and love America.

> Republican: *If you want the benefits and the greatness of this country, then you need – I'm not saying you forget that you're from Spain, or you forget you're from wherever you are, nationally, in your heart. But, if you want to come here, then you need to love America. You need to love what we represent. … It's a privilege.*
>
> Middle income 1: *Come to the country legally. Know the language. Learn the language.*
> Middle income 2: *Become a citizen and abide by the same rules that we have to abide by.*

It is not surprising, then, that among the survey-tested criteria, the most important items for immigrants to be accepted relate to legal status and taxes.

Most important criteria that any immigrant to the US should have to follow in order to be accepted into the US *Scale of 1-9, with 1 being not at all important, 5 neutral, 9 being the most important*	Mean
Playing by the rules and following the law	8.01
Paying taxes	7.85
Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and the Constitution	7.41
Becoming a citizen	7.38
Learning English	7.37
Having a good work ethic	7.34

All six potential criteria were rated above a 7 and were considered important. However, reflecting focus group discussions about legal status being the critical factor in immigration, the top priority shared by all groups was *playing by the rules and following the law* (8.01). Also across all groups, the second highest priority was *paying taxes* (7.85). Conservative-leaning groups had slightly higher rankings for the criteria. All items rated above a 7 among both conservatives and moderates, indicating that these groups have higher thresholds for acceptance than liberal groups. However, the priority order of the criteria was not dissimilar between liberal and conservative groups. While liberal groups ranked most of the criteria items slightly lower than conservative groups, none of the potential criteria were rated at a low level and viewed as unimportant.

Most important criteria that any immigrant to the US should have to follow in order to be accepted into the US					
Scale of 1-9, with 1 being not at all important, 5 neutral, 9 being the most important					
Overall	**Very Cons**	**Some Cons**	**Mod**	**Some Lib**	**Very Lib**
Playing by the rules/following the law (8.01)	Playing by the rules/following the law (8.24)	Playing by the rules/following the law (8.32)	Playing by the rules/following the law (7.79)	Playing by the rules/following the law (7.97)	Playing by the rules/following the law (7.85)
Paying taxes (7.85)	Paying taxes (8.14)	Paying taxes (7.93)	Paying taxes (7.77)	Paying taxes (7.77)	Paying taxes (7.81)
Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and the Constitution (7.41)	Learning English (7.92)	Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and the Constitution (7.75)	Learning English (7.42)	Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and the Constitution (7.07)	Having a good work ethic (7.14)
Becoming a citizen (7.38)	Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and Constitution (7.88)	Learning English (7.67)	Having a good work ethic (7.40)	Becoming a citizen (7.07)	Becoming a citizen (6.90)
Learning English (7.37)	Becoming a citizen (7.69)	Having a good work ethic (7.62)	Becoming a citizen (7.39)	Having a good work ethic (6.94)	Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and the Constitution (6.62)
Having a good work ethic (7.34)	Having a good work ethic (7.27)	Becoming a citizen (7.57)	Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and the Constitution (7.36)	Learning English (6.79)	Learning English (6.49)

By race/ethnicity, the top two criteria were the same across white, African-American and Hispanic voters: *playing by the rules and following the law,* and *paying taxes*.

Most important criteria that any immigrant to the US should have to follow in order to be accepted into the US *Scale of 1-9, with 1 being not at all important, 5 neutral, 9 being the most important*			
Overall	White	African-American	Hispanic
Playing by the rules/ following the law (8.01)	Playing by the rules/ following the law (8.08)	Paying taxes (7.83)	Playing by the rules/ following the law (7.86)
Paying taxes (7.85)	Paying taxes (7.89)	Playing by the rules and following the law (7.64)	Paying taxes (7.74)
Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and the Constitution (7.41)	Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and Constitution (7.56)	Becoming a citizen (7.32)	Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and the Constitution (7.23)
Becoming a citizen (7.38)	Learning English (7.46)	Learning English (7.14)	Having a good work ethic (7.16)
Learning English (7.37)	Becoming a citizen (7.44)	Having a good work ethic (7.10)	Becoming a citizen (7.13)
Having a good work ethic (7.34)	Having a good work ethic (7.38)	Assimilating and supporting values and freedoms of US society and the Constitution (7.03)	Learning English (6.94)

State of Religious Freedom

A majority of the electorate is concerned about religious freedom (58-40 concerned-not concerned), but with greater concern coming from conservative-leaning groups (74-23 among very conservative; 64-35 among somewhat conservative).

How concerned are you about the state of religious freedom in the US?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Concerned	58	74	64	50	55	54
Not Concerned	40	23	35	46	44	44

Among the very conservative, about half (51%) consider themselves "very concerned" about religious freedom in the US. Liberal-leaning groups also express concern (55-44) concerned-not concerned among somewhat liberal; 54-44 among very liberal) but with only one-third (33%) of the very liberal describing themselves as "very concerned."

Compatibility of Religions with US Society, Laws and Values

Concerns about religious freedom raise the issue of whether different religions are understood to be compatible with the rest of US society and values. Not unexpectedly, Christianity was perceived to be the most compatible of the four religions, but at 7.32 this can be considered moderately compatible rather than completely compatible. Judaism was viewed as the second most compatible (6.25), with atheism (5.30) and Islam (4.46) being categorized as compatible in some ways but not others.

Compatibility Scale with US Society, Laws and Values *(scale of 1-9 with 1 being not compatible at all, 5 being compatible in some ways but not others, 9 very compatible)*						
	Overall	**Very Cons**	**Some Cons**	**Mod**	**Some Lib**	**Very Lib**
Christianity	7.32	8.09	7.93	7.11	6.66	6.77
Judaism	6.25	6.41	6.64	5.92	6.38	6.29
Atheism	5.30	4.05	5.01	5.33	6.31	6.29
Islam	4.46	2.94	3.96	4.62	5.52	5.51

There were variations across the ideological spectrum. The very conservative and somewhat conservative rated Christianity particularly high, with Islam being rated much lower among these groups. The somewhat liberal and very liberal rated all four religions in the same 5-6 range. Christianity was rated the highest among liberal-leaning groups but with only about a point difference above the ratings for Islam, which at 5.51 among very liberal was rated as just above *compatible in some ways but not others*.

These results seem to indicate that Islam is not necessarily perceived to be incompatible with US society and laws, but reflecting what we heard in the qualitative discussions, there are concerns that certain areas present societal and potentially legal conflict. Examples of these areas that we heard in the focus groups include the treatment of women and Sharia law's compatibility with the US Constitution. Voters are not sure how to resolve those areas of potential conflict.

> Republican: *I don't have a problem with them if they know they're coming here and they are going to be Americanized. I have a problem with the ones who come here and say, "No. You need to accept my Sharia law. I'm not accepting your constitution. Sharia law. That's it." Those are the ones that we need to really be cautious of.*

> Independent: [On Sharia law] *Oh absolutely not in this country. Absolutely not. We have our own laws, we have our own way of life.*

> Republican: *They're not wanting to be Muslims in America. They want a Muslim America; it's a huge difference.*

The chart below shows the ratings of the four religions among the religious groups that had approximately 50 or above interviews in the survey, which is the baseline for statistical significance.

Compatibility Scale with US Society, Laws and Values *(scale of 1-9 with 1 being not compatible at all, 5 being compatible in some ways but not others, 9 very compatible)*						
	Overall	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Atheist/ Agnostic
Christianity	7.32	8.12	7.86	7.78	7.24	5.78
Judaism	6.25	6.50	6.94	6.53	7.48	5.77
Atheism	5.30	3.69	5.56	5.39	7.29	7.31
Islam	4.46	3.14	4.91	4.47	5.40	4.74

Similar to the results among conservative-leaning groups, evangelical Protestants rated Christianity as very compatible (8.12) with Judaism being viewed as compatible (6.50). Atheism (3.69) and Islam (3.14) were rated particularly low. Mainline Protestants had a similar ranking from most compatible to least compatible, but with a higher rating of Islam (4.91) and Atheism (5.56) than evangelical Protestants. Among Catholics, Christianity (7.78) and Judaism (6.53) were rated the highest, with Atheism (5.39) and Islam (4.47) generally considered in the range of compatible in some ways but not others.

Views About Muslims

Those focus group participants with personal experiences with Muslims described their relationships in positive terms. And there was recognition across groups that there were "*good and bad*" people in any particular group, with a level of hesitation about drawing any broad conclusions about an entire group of people and wanting to judge on an individual basis.

Mom 1: *Everybody swears by Muslims being the terrorists. Most Muslims are very at peace with everything. At least all the ones I know are. … I don't think it has anything to do with the refugees.*
Mom 2: *I think a lot of — it's been reported that a lot of refugees came in that were terrorists. They just snuck right on in with all the other ones.*
Mom 1: *The reports don't always mean anything.*

Middle income: *When I am looking at an application, if I see a name that's Middle Eastern, then I know that they're going to come to work every day. I know that they're going to pass their background check and their drug test, and I know that they're going to work hard for minimum wage jobs that are absolutely horrible. I can't do any better than that and they are amazing, hardworking people that show up and do crap that nobody else wants to do. And I'm just absolutely in awe of them. … The Middle Eastern people I hire have engineering degrees. They're doctors, they're chemists, they're biologists. And their English is better than a lot of the American people that work for me.*

However, participants in the Republican, middle income, and independents groups said they did not see many Muslim organizations or individuals denouncing terror. They wanted to see more clearly the Muslim community establishing parameters for what is and is not acceptable within their communities.

Travel Suspension

As we heard in the qualitative discussions, personal interactions with Muslims here have been positive experiences, but the perceptions of Sharia law are still there, and people have concerns that these kinds of beliefs could come to the United States. The construct of many of the beliefs examined above provides an understanding of how voters are approaching the travel suspension issue.

In terms of the recent executive order surrounding suspension of entry from certain countries, there is — not surprisingly — a very partisan and ideological split on this proposal.

Do you support or oppose the recent executive order to suspend entry of nationals from certain countries into the US, which some refer to as a temporary suspension or a travel ban?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Support	49	85	77	41	17	14
Oppose	39	10	17	40	73	79

Conservatives heavily support the executive order (85-10 among very conservative, 77-17 among somewhat conservative) with liberals strongly opposing it (17-73 among somewhat liberal, 14-79 among very liberal), and moderates being evenly split (41-40). It should be noted that this policy was a Trump initiative, and views about him may be playing a part in shaping responses to this question.

Although moderates lean toward believing that government immigration policy should be the same for all immigrants rather than having stricter standards for certain countries (52-37), they are evenly split on the travel suspension policy. Additionally they are split on whether the vetting system works effectively (41-46), so their views about support of the travel suspension (41-40) tend to reflect their feelings about the vetting system.

Many focus group participants definitely wanted increased security — and often their problem was with the system, not necessarily the individuals who were trying to enter the country. This led to many being comfortable with a temporary travel suspension for the short-term while security processes were updated. The moms did not seem to like monolithic treatment of any group and they didn't like the travel ban overall. However, they did make the caveat that there was no way to know about a person's background unless they were individually vetted. The middle income voters felt that it was a reasonable measure temporarily while the country works on security issues.

Republican: *Anybody who truly wants to come here and be part of the US, assimilate into our culture, they're not going to bat an eye at being vetted, and possibly a waiting period, because they're coming here for the right reasons.*

Mom: *Historically, statistically speaking with Middle East and the hatred towards us, at that point with this election and this policy, it wasn't a permanent ban, it was a temporary ban until they can get things fixed and sorted out. I don't see anything wrong with temporary bans in the name of safety. … Temporary fixes like that, they need to happen. It's inconvenient, but it's safety.*

Middle income: *It's a good idea, at least temporarily. With the terrorism, ISIS, all that, terror cells that are being built up. I don't know how many there are now at this point in America, but they're out there. That's a real threat. For now, temporarily again, yeah, that's a good idea.*

Middle income: *For the travel ban to figure out who actually is, but a very short travel ban for a short period of time. Because there's some pretty good people that are going to be affected by it, but at the same time, it's something. It's real.*

Independent: *I'm for a travel ban for certain instances, but if people have the correct paperwork, then by all means. They've been vetted, they're allowed to travel, they should be allowed to travel.*

In order for these concerns that lead to support for the travel ban to be overcome, particularly among moderates, there would need to be greater assurances about the effectiveness of the vetting system, as well as the cultural proof points to resolve concerns about compatibility with US laws and society.

Is the Travel Suspension Policy a Muslim Ban?

By about 2:1, conservative-leaning groups reject the idea that this policy is a Muslim ban (36-60 agree-disagree among very conservative; 32-62 among somewhat conservative), while liberal groups believe that it is (64-30 among somewhat liberal; 76-17 among very liberal). On this question, moderates tend to lean toward the belief that it is a Muslim ban (48-37), even though they are split on their support of the policy itself (41-40 support-oppose).

Some have called this policy a "Muslim ban." Do you agree or disagree with that description of this policy?	Overall	Very Cons	Some Cons	Mod	Some Lib	Very Lib
Agree	47	36	32	48	64	76
Disagree	43	60	62	37	30	17

As stated above, conflicting beliefs over the travel suspension may stem from broader concerns about how Islam is compatible with US society and law, and how bright lines can be drawn with extremist elements that do not reflect Islamic teachings.

Conclusion

The research presented in this report highlighted several key concerns and opportunities for leadership in each issue area. Voters have many important concerns and hold sometimes conflicting beliefs relative to each of the issues addressed in the research. In some cases — as in concerns related to immigration and the media — these concerns and beliefs break along ideological lines, with a center that splits evenly between two conflicting views. In other cases however, there is more agreement, and even within more divisive issues, the research has identified potential areas of consensus. These will be especially important in overcoming division, as they identify shared concerns across the ideological spectrum and indicate the kind of forward-looking outcomes voters seek in each issue area.

As noted in the overview, there are areas of agreement despite ideological differences, and the way to begin overcoming many of these disagreements is not through messaging alone, but by offering voters a reason to move toward a different point of view.

Methodology

This is a summary of findings from both qualitative and quantitative research.

The qualitative research consisted of focus groups of Republicans and women with children in Orlando, FL on May 23rd, 2017, and independents and middle income voters in Pittsburgh, PA on May 31st, 2017.

The quantitative research included an online national survey of 1000 registered voters, conducted June 22-23, 2017. Margin of error +/- 3.1