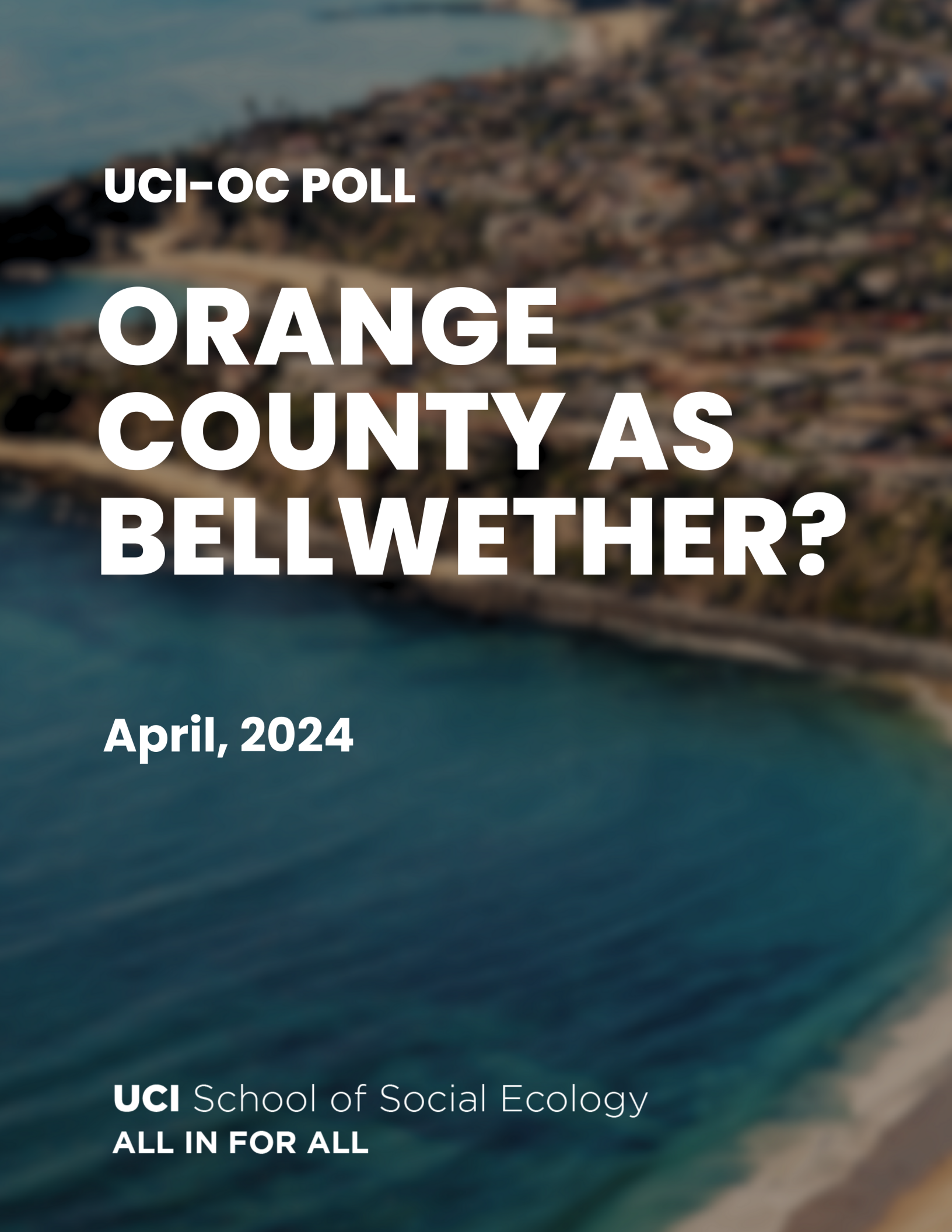

UCI-OC POLL

ORANGE COUNTY AS BELLWETHER?

April, 2024

UCI School of Social Ecology
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UCI-OC POLL

Post-Primary Poll Shows Purple County, Close Races that Could Decide Congress

The UCI-OC Poll, conducted by the School of Social Ecology at the University of California Irvine, recently surveyed Orange County residents following California's primary elections. The results illustrate a politically "purple" county, where close races could decide the fate of the next Congress. The trends seen in several of the races also portend results nationally in the contest for President.

Orange County is now a Purple County

Orange County is almost evenly split among Republicans (32%), Democrats (33%), and Independents (35%). The plurality of White residents favors Republicans (38%), whereas the plurality of Latino residents supports Democrats (40%). The plurality of Asian residents identifies as independent (39%). [Slide 4]

No One is Happy with the Nation's Direction, but OC Residents are More Satisfied with Their County

Only a quarter of Orange County residents believes America is on the right track, a result that mirrors trends across the country. [Slide 5] Women, in particular, are quite dissatisfied with the current state of the nation. [Slide 7]

By contrast, nearly a majority of residents (45%) believes Orange County is on the right track compared to just a third that disagrees. In fact, a majority of Asian residents (55%) feels Orange County is on the right track, compared to pluralities of Latino (44%) and White (42%) residents who agree. [Slide 6 and 8]

Trump is Leading Among Residents, Biden is Winning Across Voters

If the election were held now, Joe Biden would beat Donald Trump by eight points. However, there are tremendous differences based on voter registration status. Trump leads Biden by one point among county residents, but the ratio flips to an 8-point Biden lead among those who are registered and may vote. [Slide 18] Ironically, given Trump's efforts to sow distrust in voting systems, he would benefit if residents were to register and vote.

Substantial Gender and Racial Gaps Exist

Men are evenly split between Biden and Trump, but women give Biden a 14-point advantage. [Slide 20]. White voters prefer Biden by 5 points, whereas Asian voters (17 points) and Latino voters (13 points) significantly support Biden over Trump. [Slide 21]

Trump Loses Each Age Group but One, with Younger Voters Least Likely to Support Trump

Those under 40 do not support Trump, giving him only one-third of their vote. Trump wins the late middle-aged (55-64), but that is the only age group. [Slide 22]

The Most Significant Demographic Difference is College Education

Trump wins White non-college educated voters by 8 percent. He splits non-White non-college educated voters with Biden. However, Biden enjoys nearly a 25-point advantage among any college-educated voters. [Slide 24]

There are Schisms Among Republicans

Strong Republicans are almost uniformly behind Trump and other Republicans [Slides 25, 42 and 49] and are the most enthusiastic of any group to vote. [Slide 32] However, there is greater fall-off in support among other Republican voters than there is among Democrats. [Slides 25, 42 and 49]

Biden is Winning Despite Historically Low Approval Ratings

Biden's approval rating is very low for a sitting president running for re-election, just 38%. [Slide 11] Even one-fifth of Democrats disapprove of his presidency. [Slide 13]

Yet, he is currently winning in Orange County for two reasons. First, his approval rating is ten points higher (48%) among the likeliest voters. [Slide 26] Second, even those who somewhat disapprove of his presidency (13% of likely voters) choose him by a 7-point margin over Trump. [Slide 28] Modest disapproval of Biden does not translate to a refusal to vote for him.

Double Haters Choose Biden

Almost one-quarter of Orange County voters have a negative perception of both Biden and Trump. [Slide 27] However, this group chooses Biden by nearly 30 points over Trump. [Slide 31]

The Third-Party Wild Card is Real

Several voter demographics show support for a third-party candidate. These include, independents (36% of whom are interested in a third-party candidate), "double haters" (30%), those who somewhat disapprove of Biden (25%), not very strong Republicans (18%), and voters under age 40 (up to 19%). [Slides 22, 25, 29, 31] At the moment, a third-party candidate seems to take more support from Trump than Biden.

Biden is Seen as Too Old, Trump as Corrupt

When asked to assign traits to the two candidates, 51% say Biden is "too old to be President" (compared to 26% for Trump), whereas 43% say Trump "has behaved corruptly" (compared to 31% for Biden). [Slide 35]

Adam Schiff is Leading Steve Garvey for Senate

Schiff has a 6-point lead among the likeliest voters. [Slide 37] Demographic trends in the presidential race are matched in the senate race. There is a substantial gender gap, although women are more than twice as likely as men to be undecided for Senate. The racial-education gap is significant. In fact, Schiff is currently losing non-White, non-college educated voters, although 19% of this group are undecided. [Slides 38-41]

Voters Prefer A Generic Democratic Candidate for Congress

The Cook Political Report ranks four OC congressional seats as competitive. Orange County voters say they prefer a Democratic congressional candidate over a Republican by 6 points. [Slide 44] Women and Latino voters and non-White, college-educated voters are most supportive of Democratic congressional candidates. [Slides 45-47] Support for a generic candidate is a baseline for the specifics of particular races.

Everyone is Focused on the Economy. Different Groups Care About Abortion, the Border, and Foreign Affairs

The economy is on everyone's mind. Abortion matters significantly for Democrats, and the situation at the border is important for Republicans. Foreign affairs is also a Republican priority.

Substantial majorities of OC residents identify the economy as very important in affecting their vote. The only substantial distinction is between Democrats' (70%) and Republicans' (88%) and Undecided Voters' (87%) prioritization of the issue. [Slides 50-57]

The other top issues include abortion, which rates as very important for Democrats (65%), women (59%), Latinos (58%), and those under 40 (53%). Only 31% of Republicans cite abortion as very important. [Slides 50-57] This said, the issue likely plays differently for some of these groups, as Latinos are less supportive of abortion than are other groups.

The situation at the border is named very important by 55% of OC residents, especially so for Republicans (84%), those over 54 (66-68%), and White people (65%). Only 36% of Democrats cite the border as very important. [Slides 50-57]

U.S. foreign policy is named as very important by 48% of Orange County residents. This is especially so for Republicans (65%), men (55%), White people with a college education (56%), and those over 54 (59-61%). Forty-five percent of Democrats say foreign affairs is very important.[Slides 50-57]

Election Skepticism Remains

Only 1% of Democrats believe Biden's win in 2020 was illegitimate, compared with 23% of independents who say Biden won dishonestly. By contrast, a little more than one-quarter of Republicans believe Biden's prior victory was legitimate. [Slide 64]

Even in a Divisive Time, Residents Make and Keep Friends Across the Divide

Orange County is not only a purple county, its residents reflect that political diversity in their friendships. The majority have close friends from across the aisle; in fact, only one-third report that most of their close friends share similar political views. [Slide 64] Those under 40 are the most likely to have friends of varied political alliances. [Slide 65] Perhaps most encouraging, just 18% of residents say they have ended a friendship over a political disagreement. [Slide 66]

The Election is Far From Over in Orange County

In Orange County, many of the races remain volatile. None of the polling yet shows candidates earning more than 50% of the vote, and residents believe the country is on the wrong track. A lot is at stake, with Orange County boasting four congressional races that could decide the rate of the House of Representatives.

The presidential race is between candidates that few voters like. Both Biden and Trump have negative favorability ratings, and the vast majority of residents disapprove of Biden's presidency. For Biden to win, he will have to hold onto the support of those willing to vote for him even while modestly disapproving of his record, and he will have to hope that voters who dislike both candidates continue to consider Trump to be the worse option. In fact, Biden currently runs two points better than a generic Democratic congressional candidate, suggesting that Trump is, himself, a slight political liability.

Trump would benefit from greater voter registration. The nine-point gap between residents who support him and likely voters who do not could well spell his defeat. Although his staunchest supporters are the most enthusiastic group to vote, Trump's efforts to sow skepticism about voting systems and vote-by-mail may depress turnout among marginal voters or those who are not yet registered. In addition, voter turnout has typically been higher among the more educated. In 2024, college-educated voters skew in favor of Biden and other Democrats.

The economy is the top issue across the board, so any change in economic conditions – or the perception of those conditions – could very well tip the outcome. Biden has to hope that employment and the stock market stay strong while inflation abates. Trump will undoubtedly tout the economy under the first half of his presidency and hammer at lingering inflation under Biden.

Recent attention to abortion in Arizona will raise the profile of this issue, which currently helps Democrats – although not necessarily among Latino voters, who otherwise are supportive of Democrats.

Foreign affairs has legs as a campaign issue for Republicans, which highlights the importance of volatility in the Middle East. By contrast, the situation at the border may be baked in as a political issue for the coming election.

Should any of Trump's criminal trials end in conviction, the concerns of voters that he is "corrupt" will likely jump, threatening his chances.

Finally, the prospect of a competitive third-party candidate could add a "wild card" character to the election. There are multiple groups iffy on Biden (independents, the undecided, and those who mildly disapprove of him) who are showing interest in a third-party candidate. Should that candidate not materialize, these voters could defect to Trump as a protest vote, hold their nose and support Biden for fear of Trump, or simply stay home. At the moment, a third-party candidate seems to hurt Trump more than Biden.

There are more than six months to go in the election, and the UCI OC Poll will be following developments.

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Orange County as Bellwether?

Political Poll Post-Primary Shows Close Races in Influential County

April 2024

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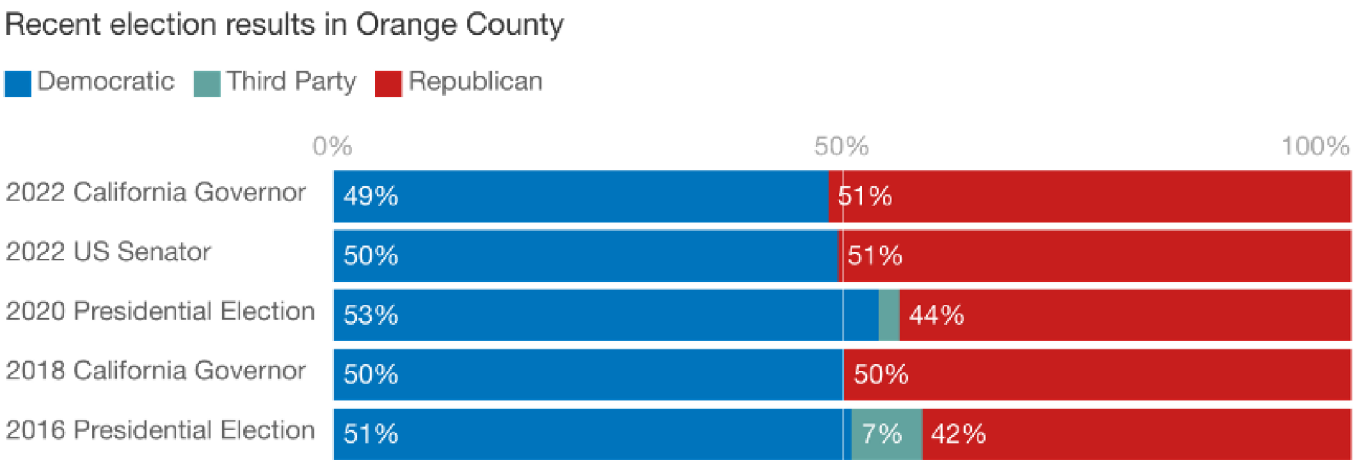
Orange is the New Purple

Slide 2

Orange County is a “Purple” County



UCI School of Social Ecology

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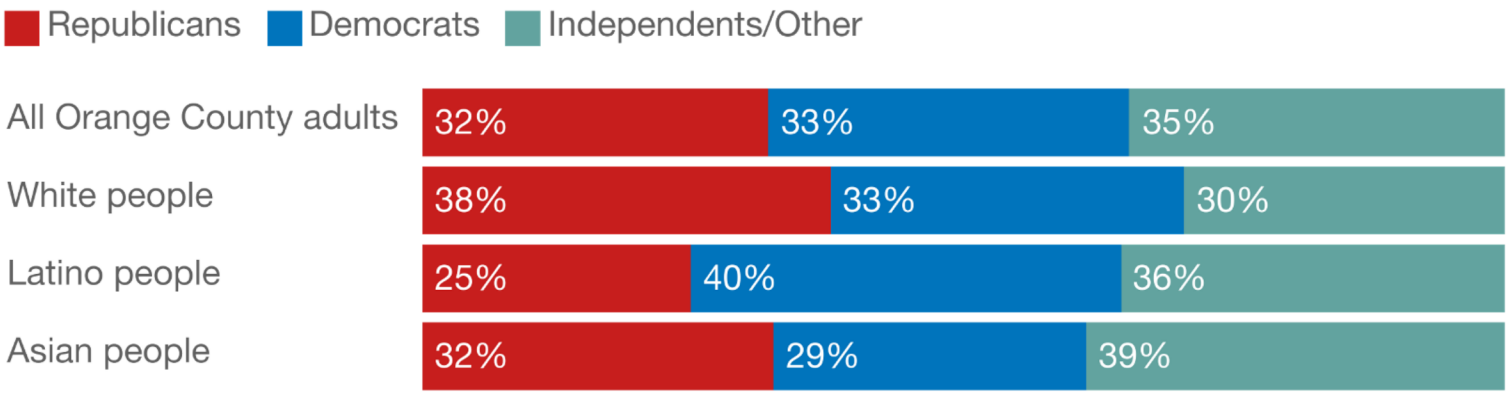
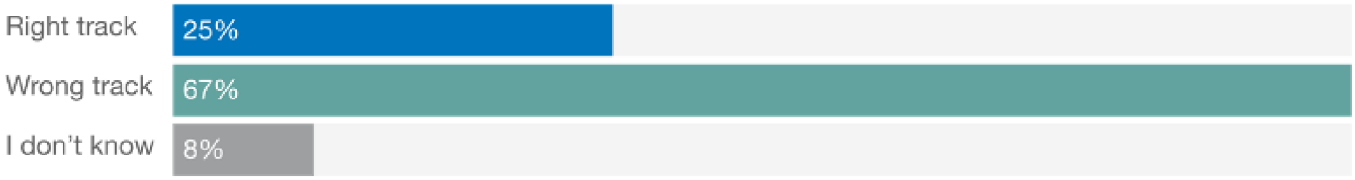
Party Identification

Q. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?



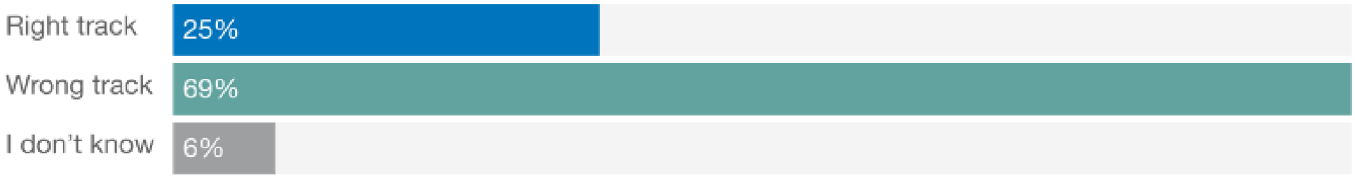
Direction of the Country

Q. Thinking about the country as a whole, do you think things in the United States are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?



Compared to National Study

Q. Thinking about the country as a whole, do you think things in the United States are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?

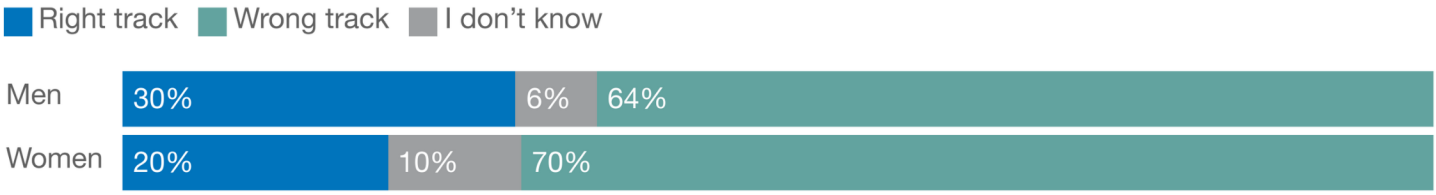


Direction of Orange County

Q. Now thinking just about Orange County, do you think things in Orange County are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?

Direction of Country and OC by Gender

Q. Thinking about the country as a whole, do you think things in the United States are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?



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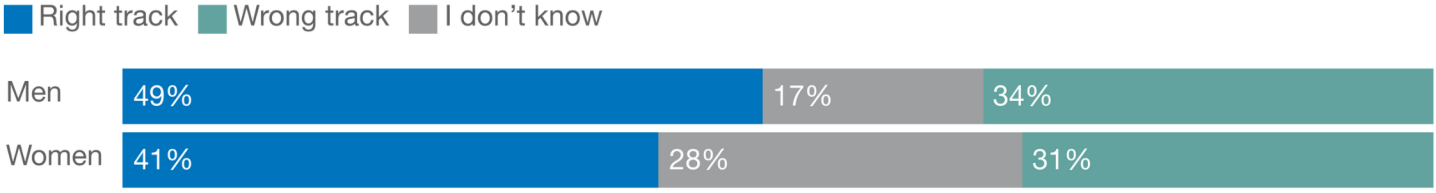
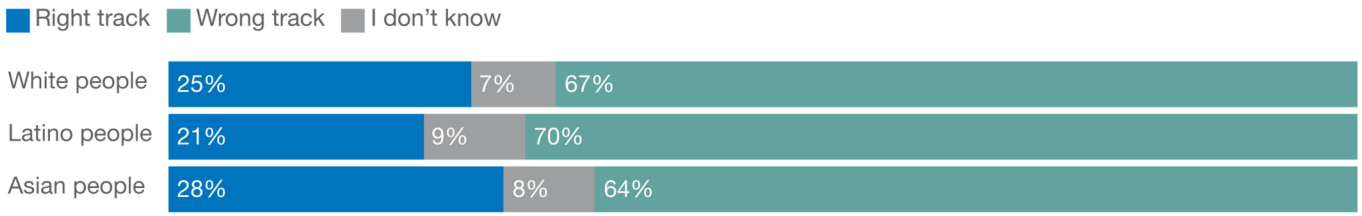
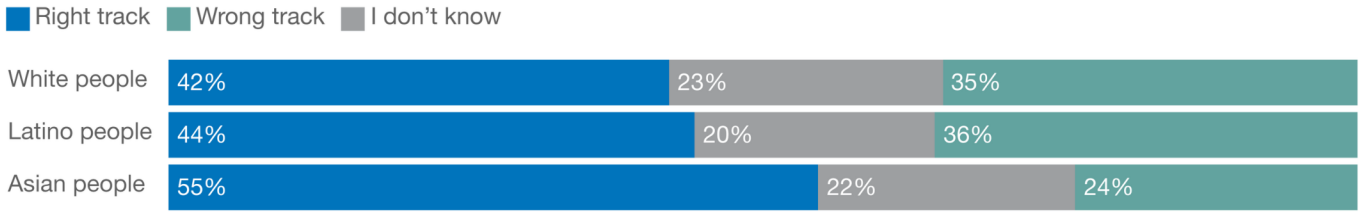


Direction of Country and OC by Race

Q. Thinking about the country as a whole, do you think things in the United States are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?

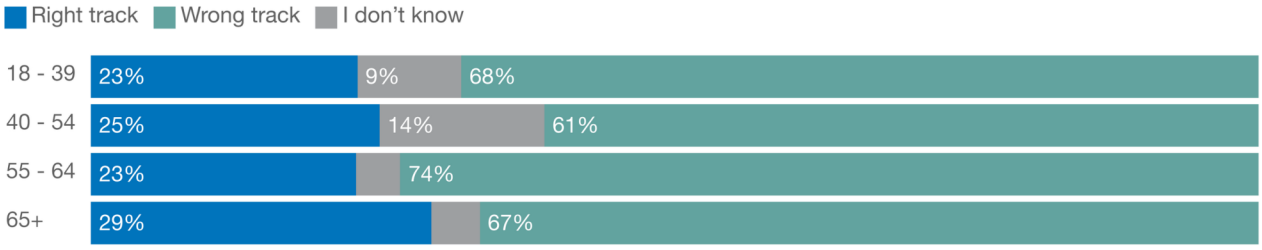


Q. Now thinking just about Orange County, do you think things in Orange County are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?

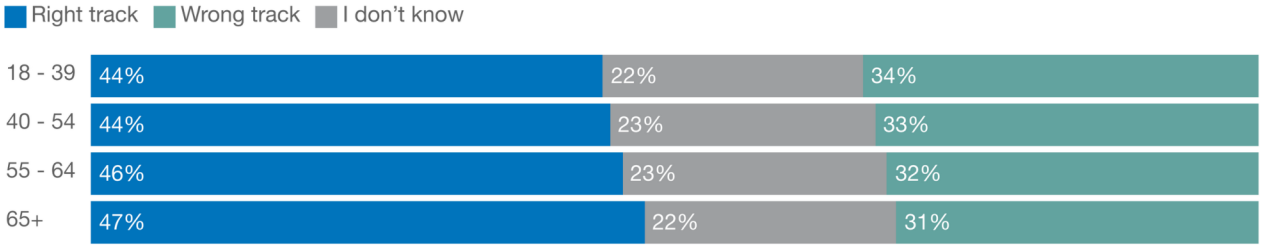


Direction of Country and OC by Age

Q. Thinking about the country as a whole, do you think things in the United States are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?

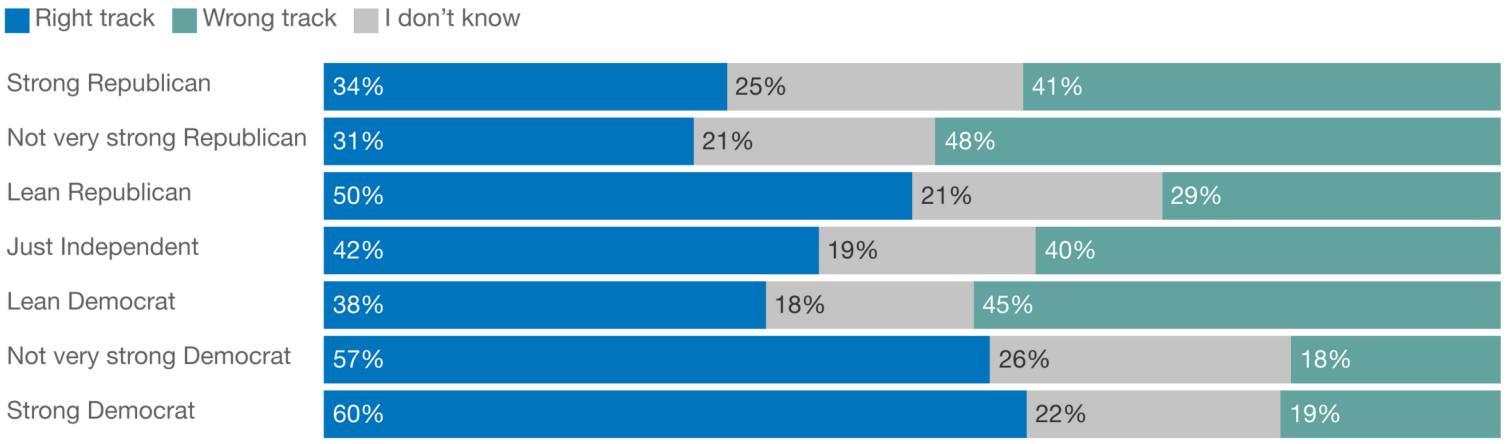


Q. Now thinking just about Orange County, do you think things in Orange County are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?



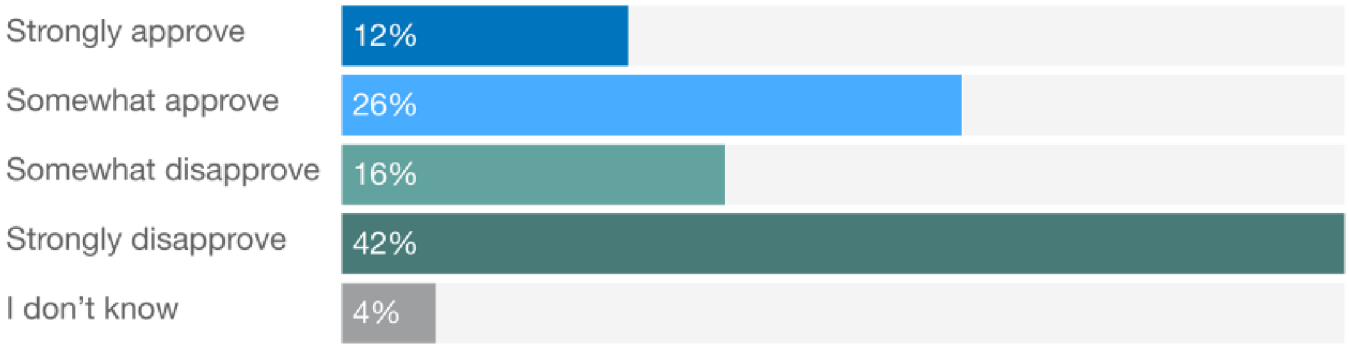
Direction of OC by Party Groups

Q. Now thinking just about Orange County, do you think things in Orange County are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?

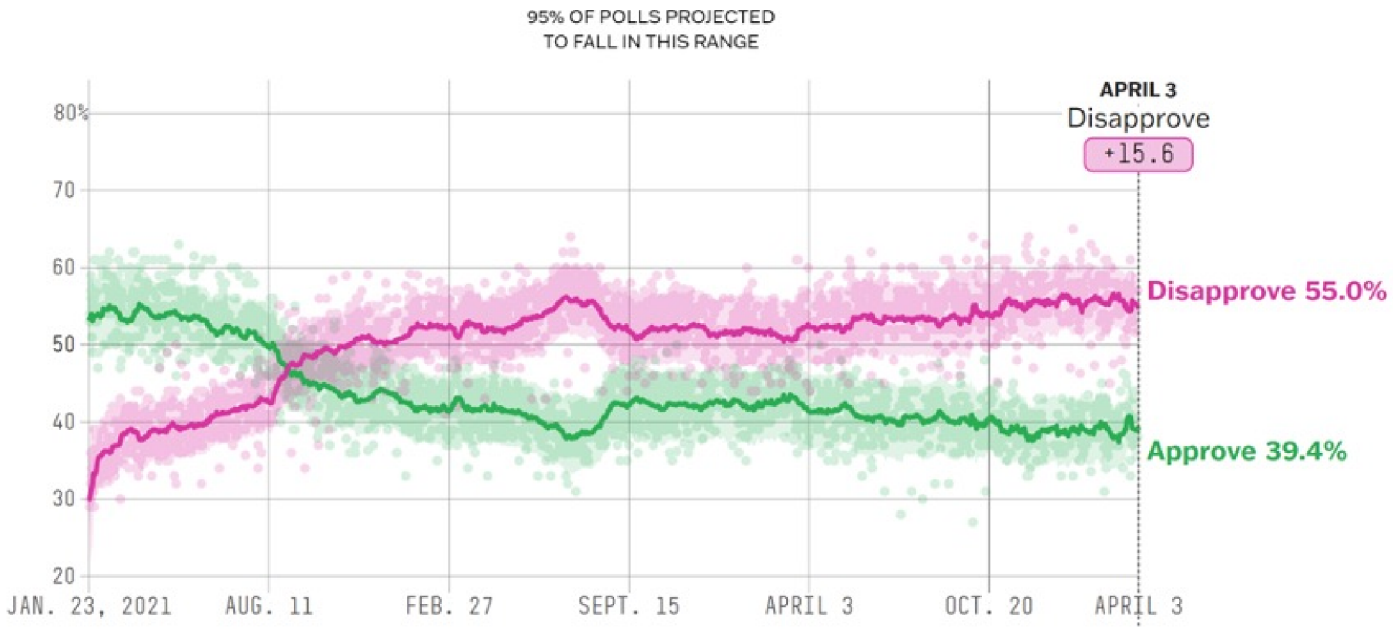


Biden Approval

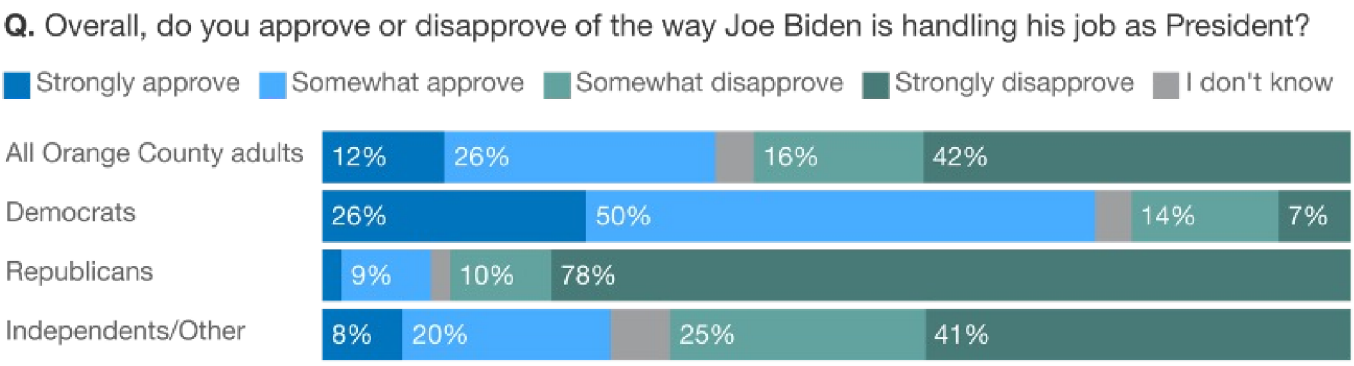
Q. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Joe Biden is handling his job as President?



FiveThirtyEight: Biden Approval Nationally

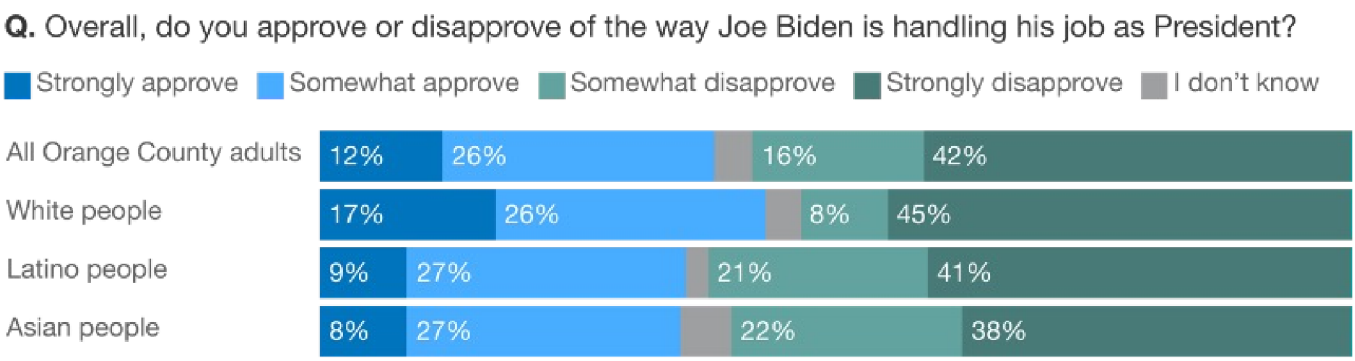


Biden Approval by Party



Slide 13

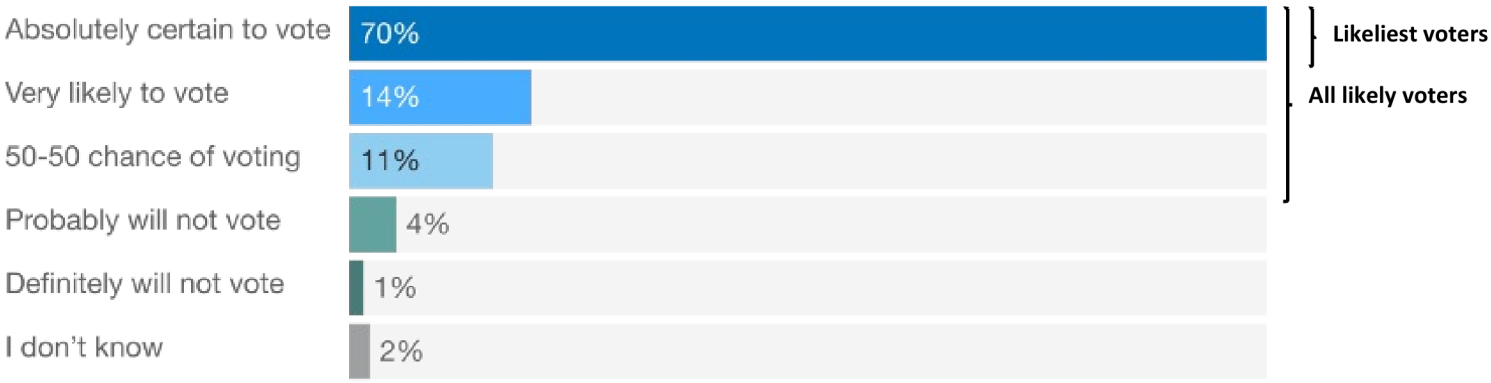
Biden Approval by Race



Registered Voters: Likeliness of Voting

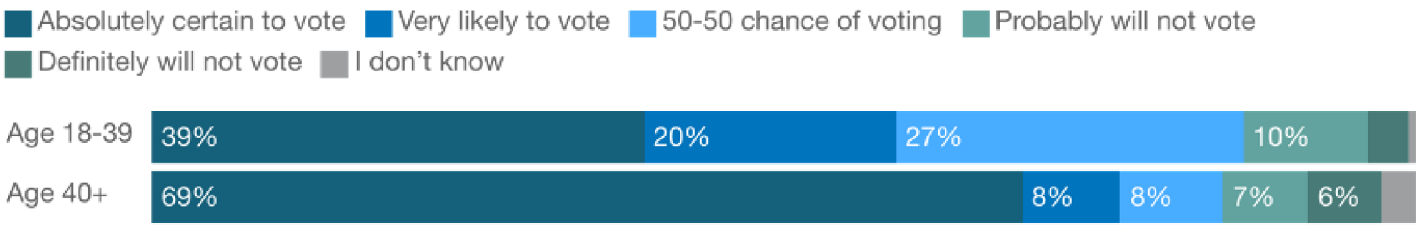
Among registered voters (75% of Orange County adults)...

Q. If the candidates in the November 2024 Presidential election are Donald Trump, the Republican, and Joe Biden, the Democrat, how likely are you to vote in that election?



Likeliness of Voting by Age

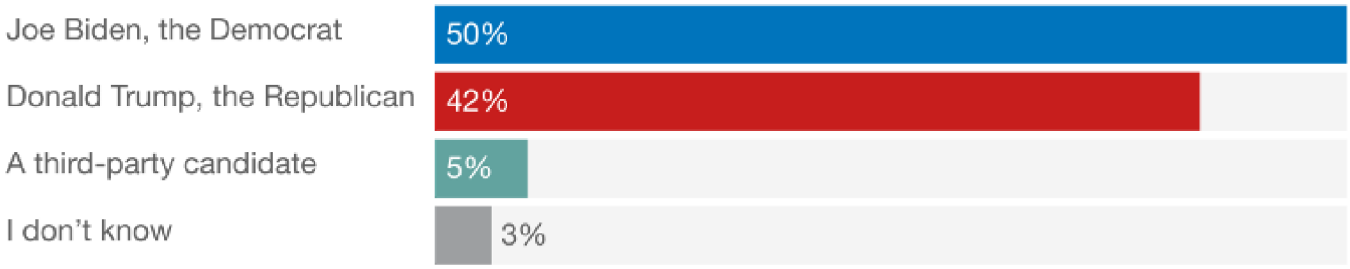
Q. If the candidates in the November 2024 Presidential election are Donald Trump, the Republican, and Joe Biden, the Democrat, how likely are you to vote in that election?



Likeliest Voters: 2024 Presidential Election

Q. If the 2024 election for President was held today, and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican and Joe Biden, the Democrat, who would you vote for?

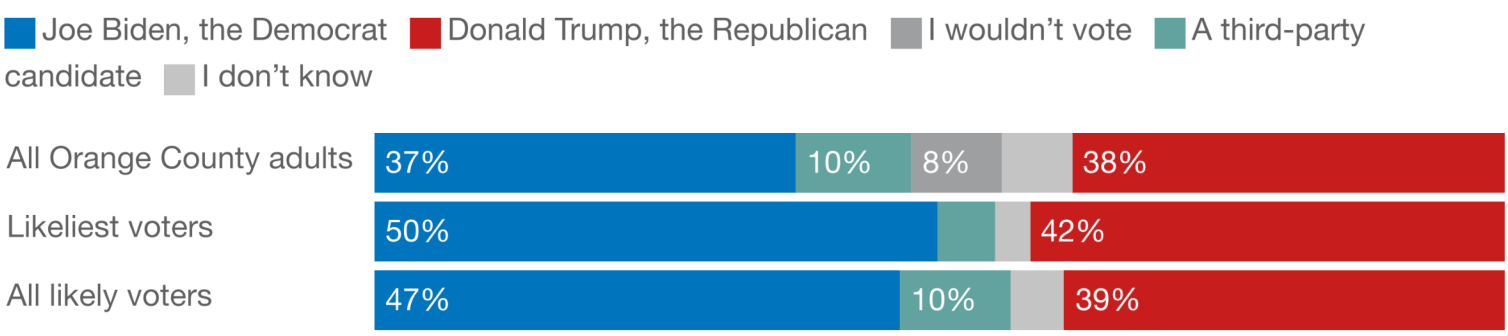
Displaying results among likeliest voters



2024 Presidential Election by Vote Likelihood

Q. If the 2024 election for President was held today, and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican and Joe Biden, the Democrat, who would you vote for?

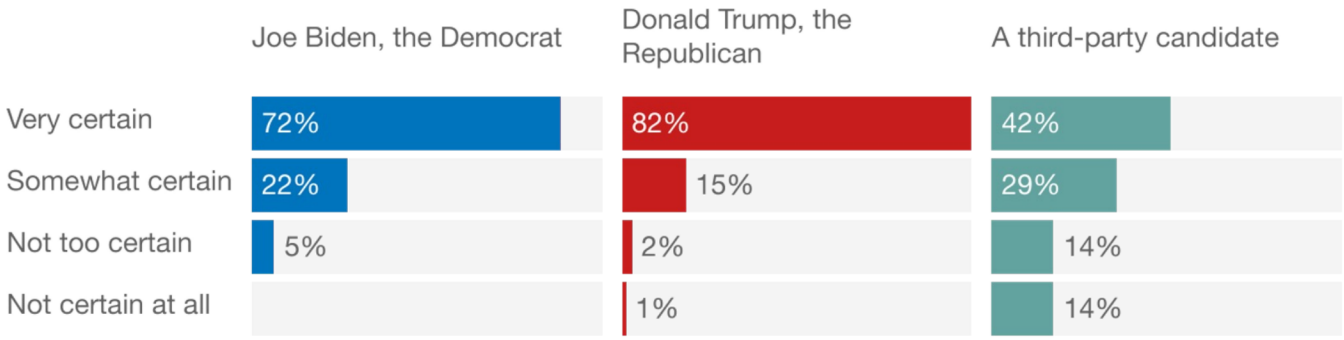
Displaying results by likelihood of voting



Third-Party Voters Less Certain of Choice

Q. How certain are you that you will vote for _____ in the 2024 election for President?

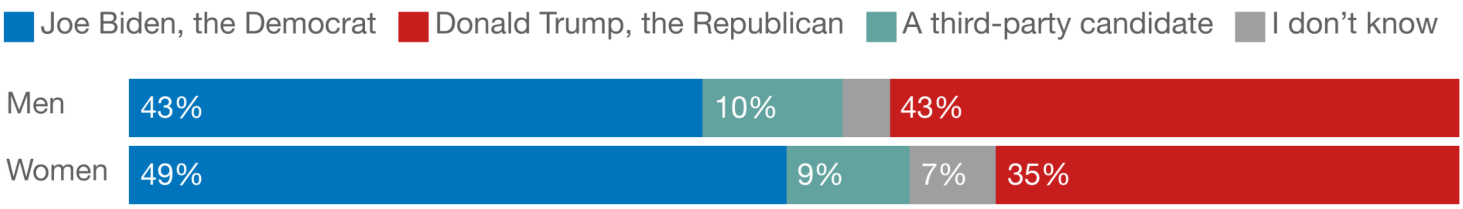
Displaying results among likeliest voters



2024 Presidential Election by Gender

Q. If the 2024 election for President was held today, and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican and Joe Biden, the Democrat, who would you vote for?

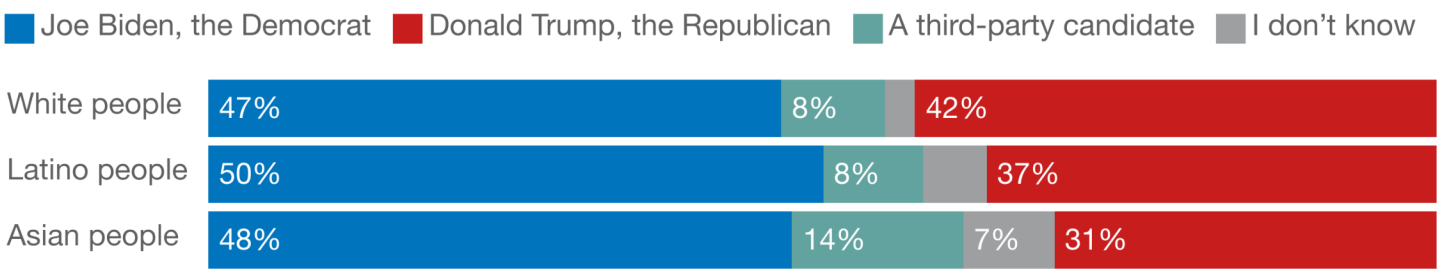
Displaying among all likely voters



2024 Presidential Election by Race

Q. If the 2024 election for President was held today, and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican and Joe Biden, the Democrat, who would you vote for?

Displaying among all likely voters



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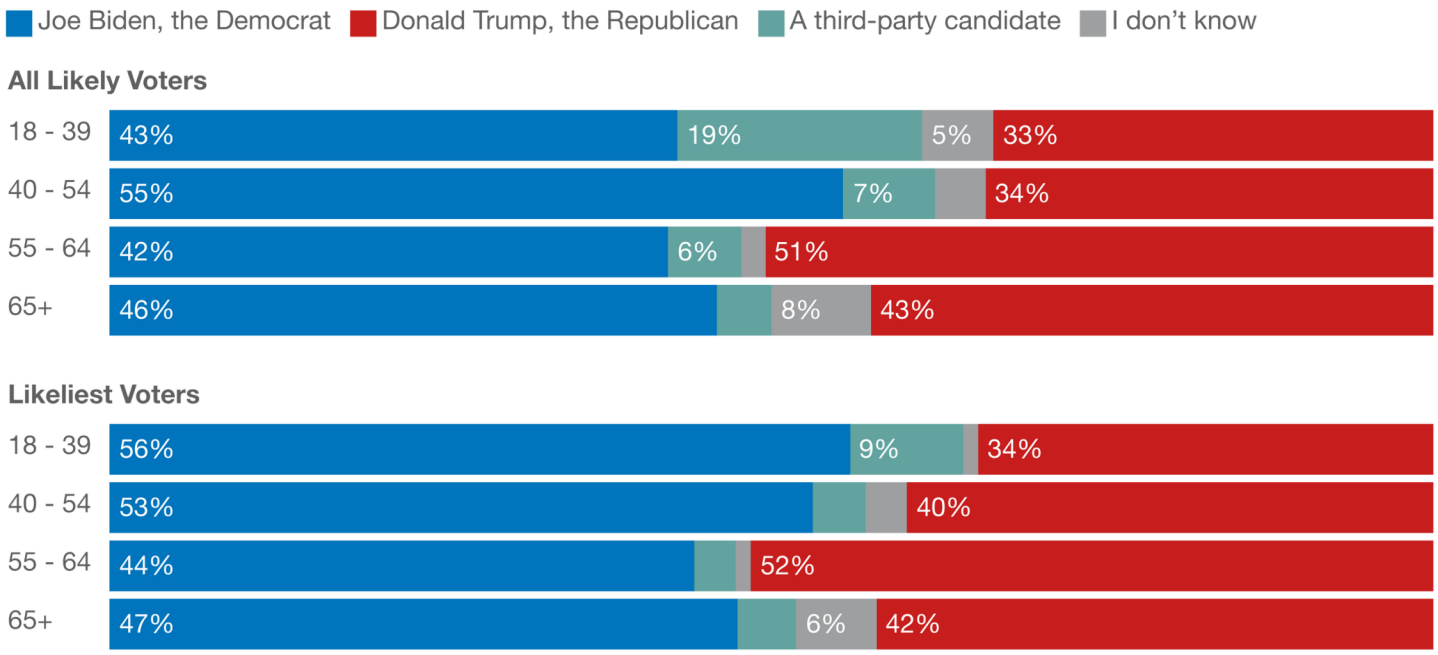
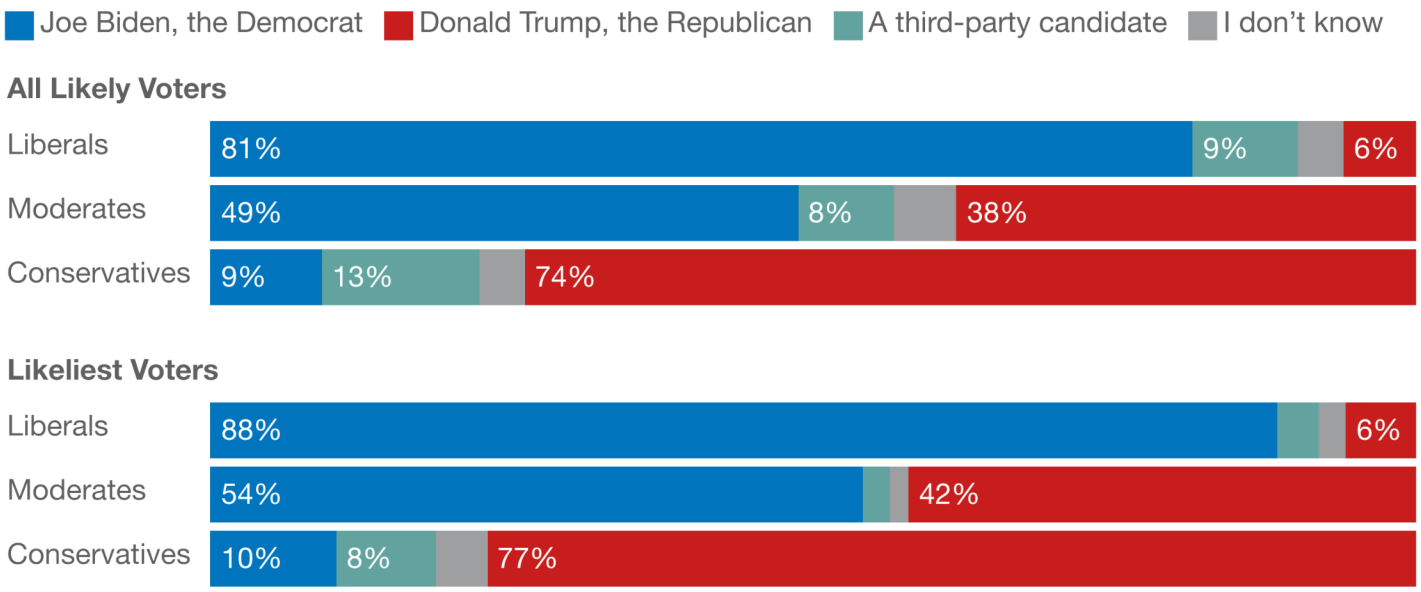
2024 Presidential Election by Age

Q. If the 2024 election for President was held today, and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican and Joe Biden, the Democrat, who would you vote for?



2024 Presidential Election by Ideology

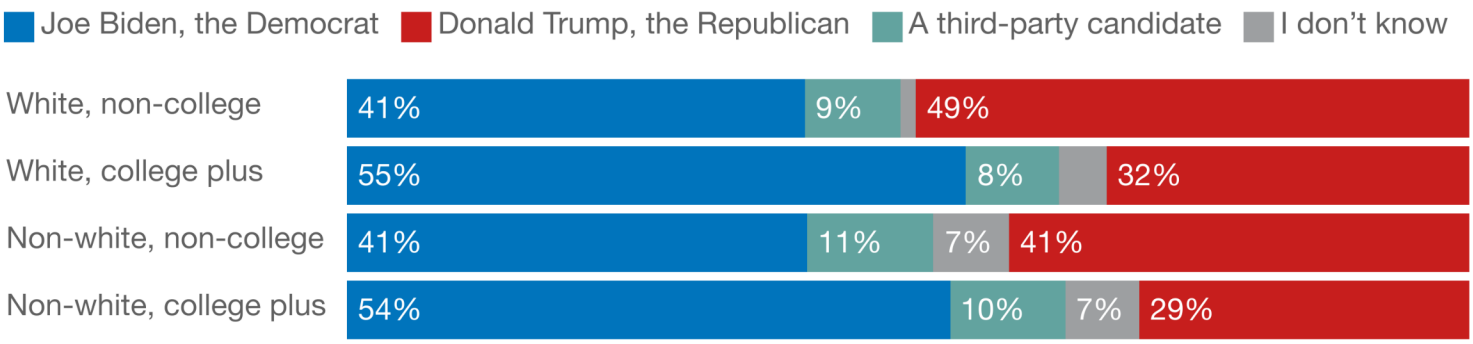
Q. If the 2024 election for President was held today, and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican and Joe Biden, the Democrat, who would you vote for?



2024 Presidential Election by Race/Education

Q. If the 2024 election for President was held today, and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican and Joe Biden, the Democrat, who would you vote for?

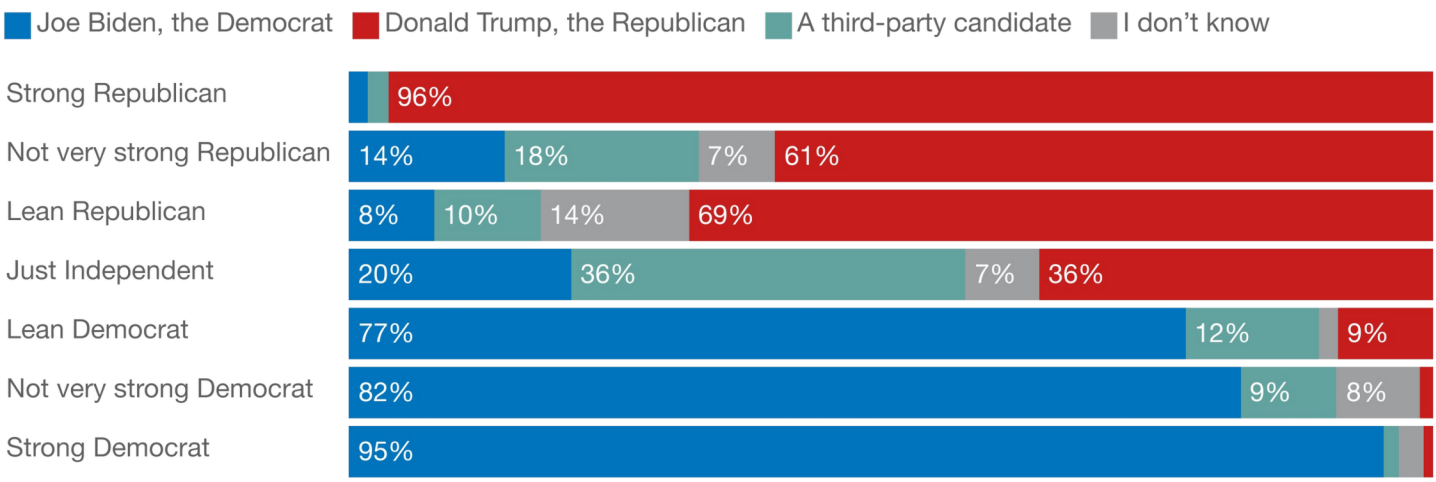
Displaying among all likely voters



2024 Presidential Election by Party Groups

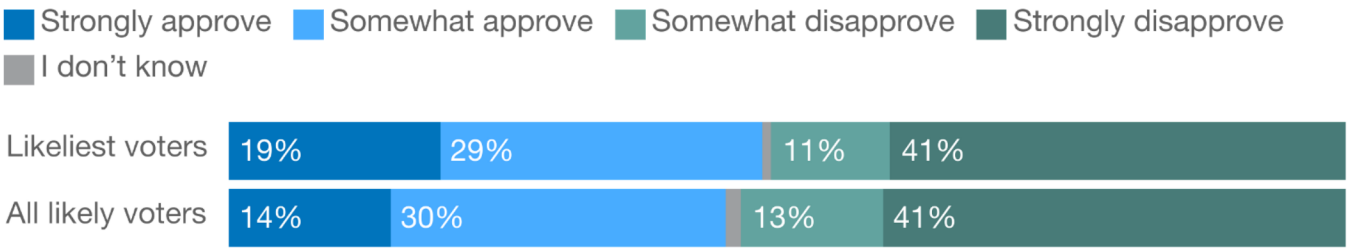
Q. If the 2024 election for President was held today, and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican and Joe Biden, the Democrat, who would you vote for?

Displaying among all likely voters



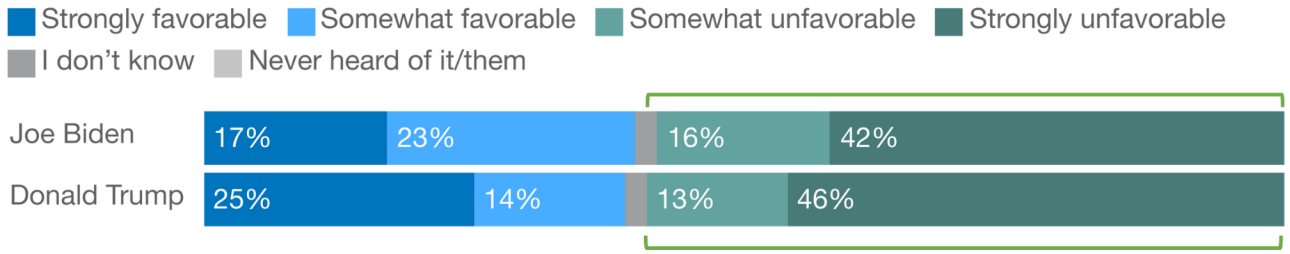
Biden Approval Among Likely Voters

Q. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Joe Biden is handling his job as President?



Biden v. Trump Favorability

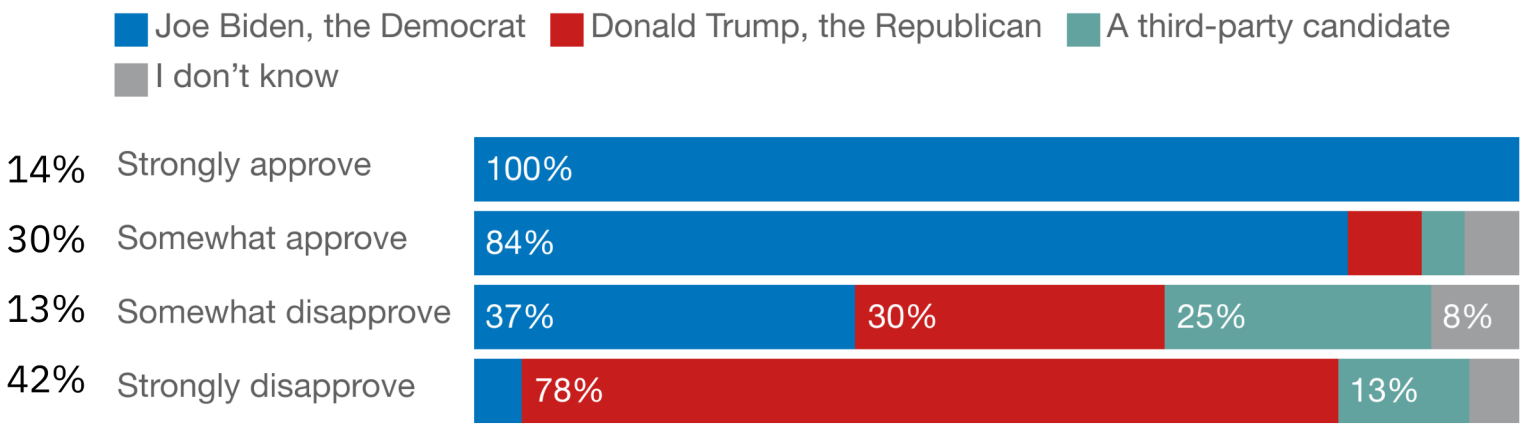
Q. Below are various people and organizations mentioned in the news recently. For each, please indicate whether you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of them. If you don't know or haven't heard of them, just say so.



22% of Orange County adults have an unfavorable impression of both Biden and Trump

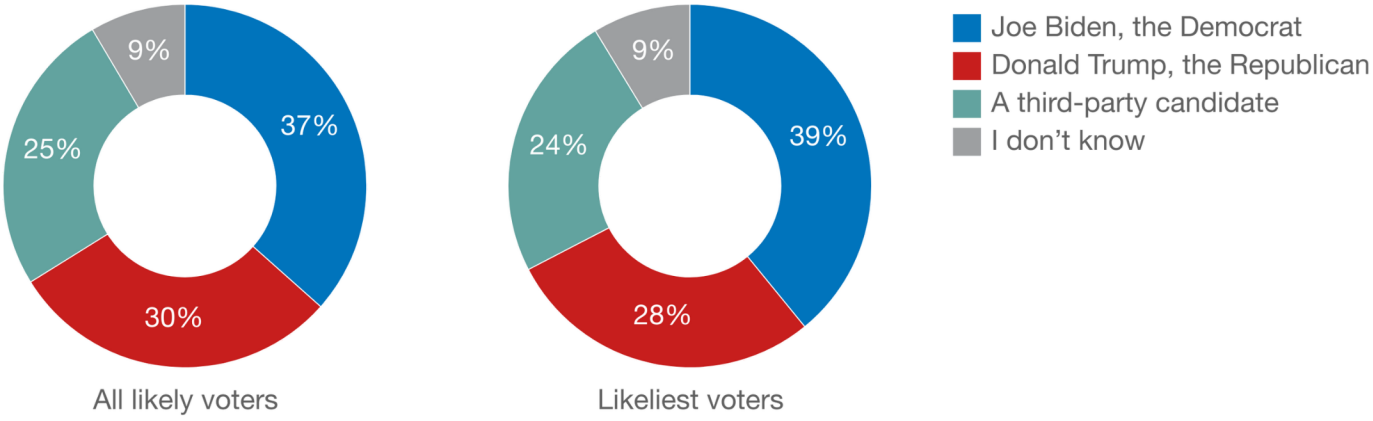
Presidential Choice by Biden Approval

Among registered voters who are likely to vote in the 2024 Presidential election...

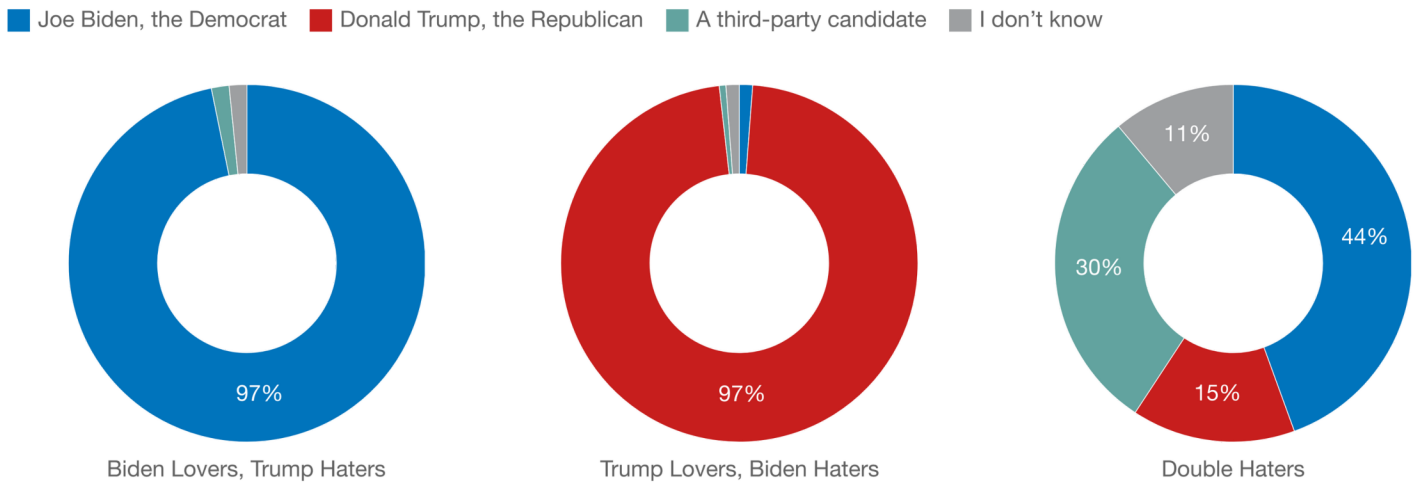


Somewhat Disapprove of Biden: 2024 Election

Among the 16% of Orange County adults who “somewhat disapprove” of Biden, ‘all likely voters’ (54% of “somewhat disapprovers”) are +7D. The ‘likeliest voters’ (34%) are +11D.



Likeliest Voters: Lovers & Haters in 2024 Election

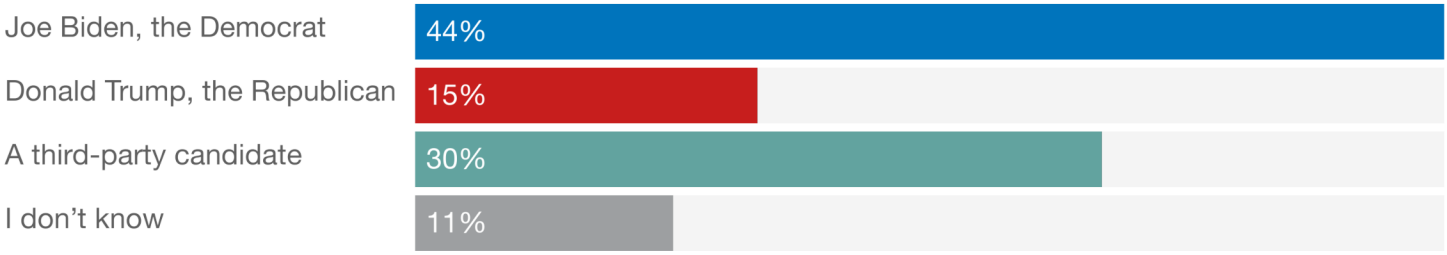


Among likeliest voters

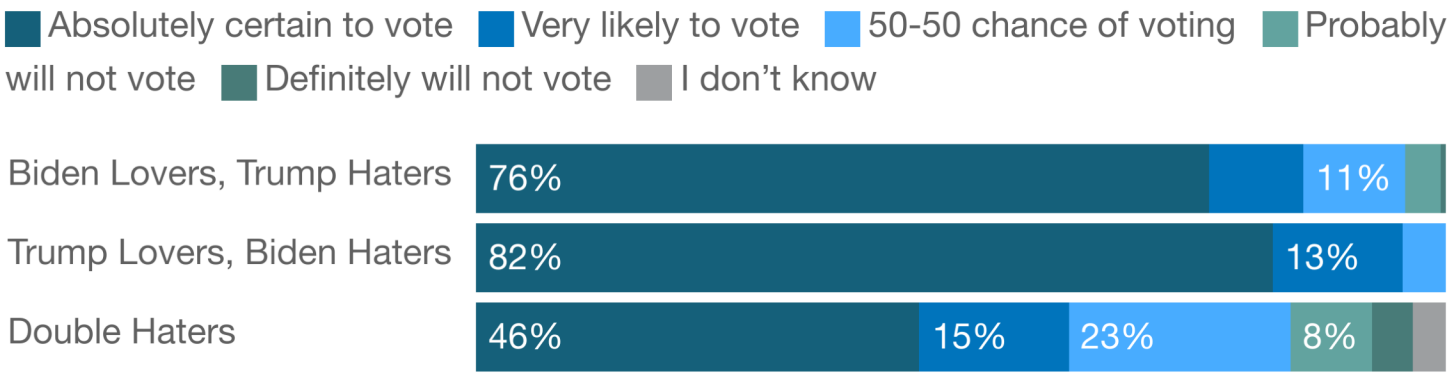
Likeliest Voters: Double Haters in 2024 Election

Among likeliest voters who have an unfavorable impression of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden...

Q. If the 2024 election for President was held today, and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican and Joe Biden, the Democrat, who would you vote for?

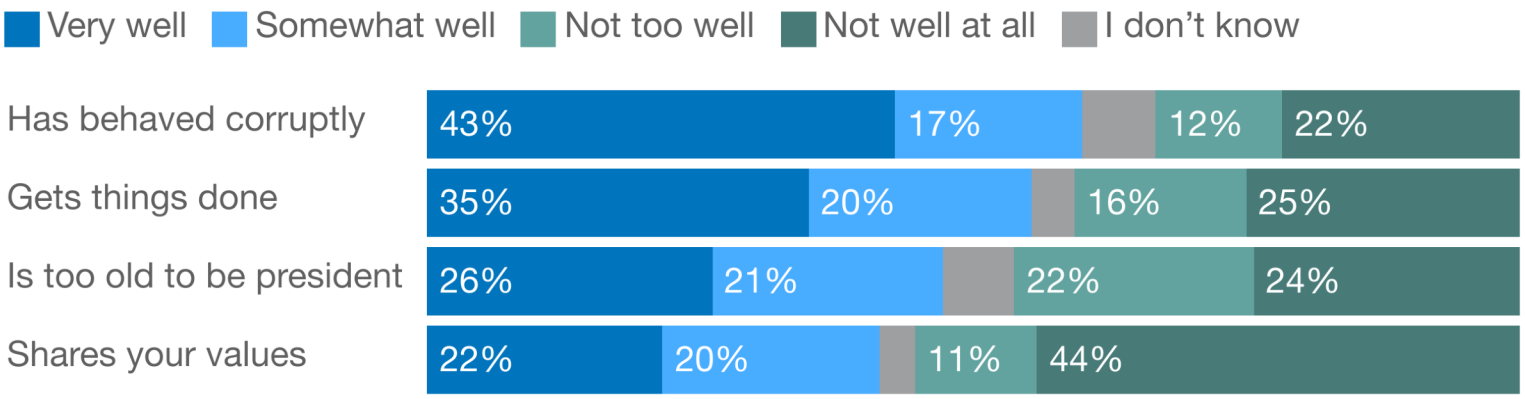


Registered Voters: Trump Lovers More Motivated



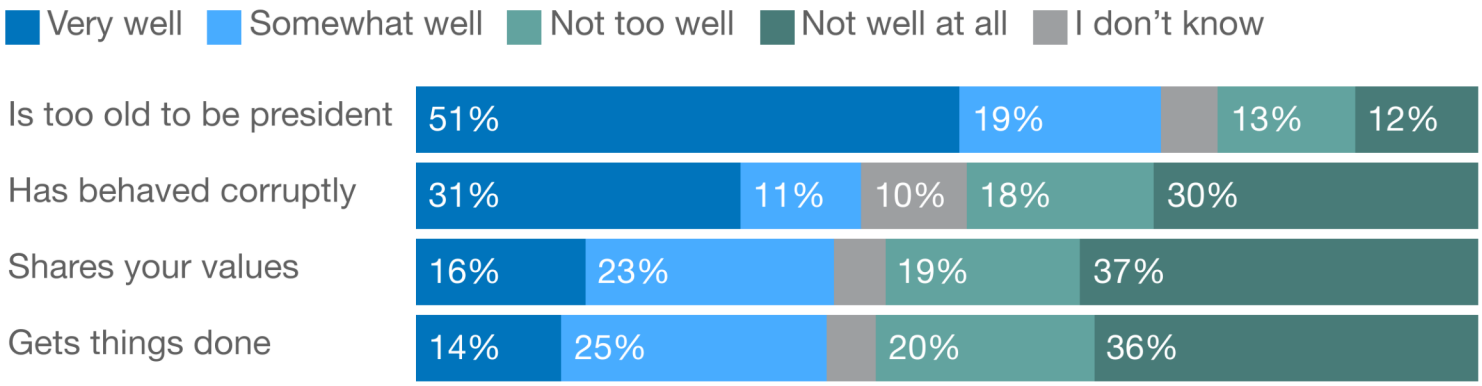
Trump Traits

Q. For each of the following phrases, please indicate how well it describes Donald Trump. If you don't know, just say so.



Biden Traits

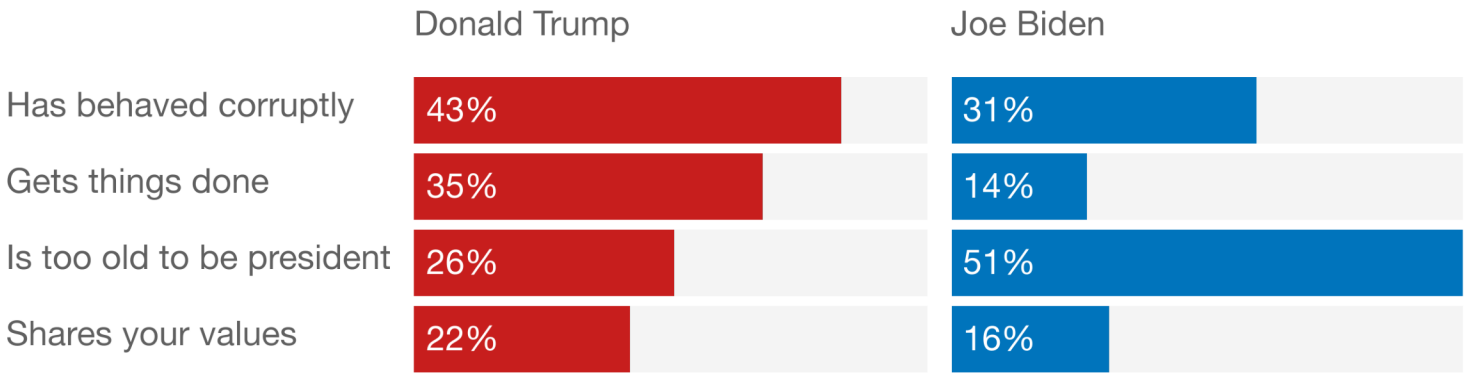
Q. For each of the following phrases, please indicate how well it describes Joe Biden. If you don't know, just say so.



Trump v. Biden Traits

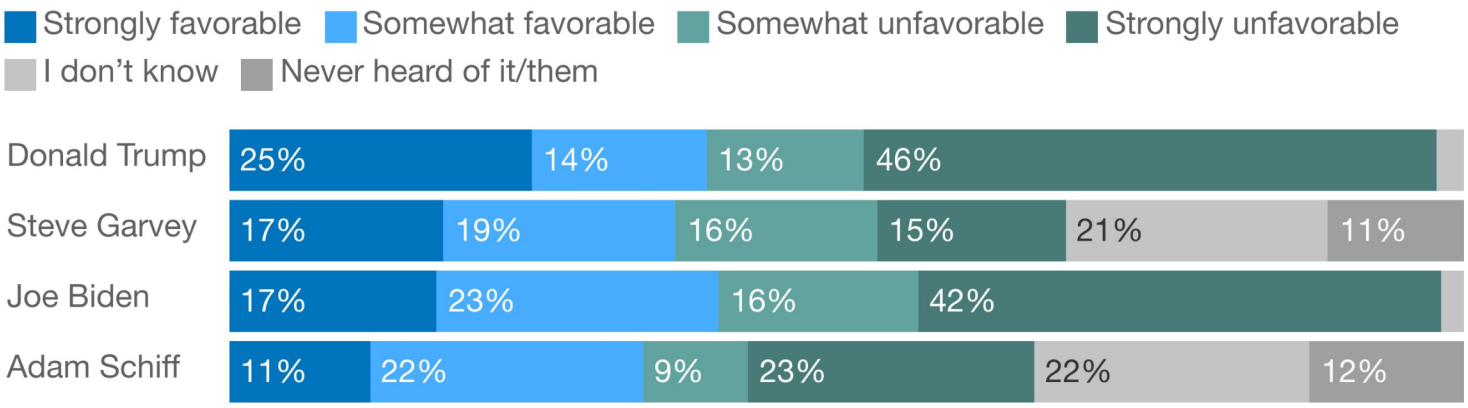
Q. For each of the following phrases, please indicate how well it describes _____. If you don't know, just say so.

Displaying % "Very well"



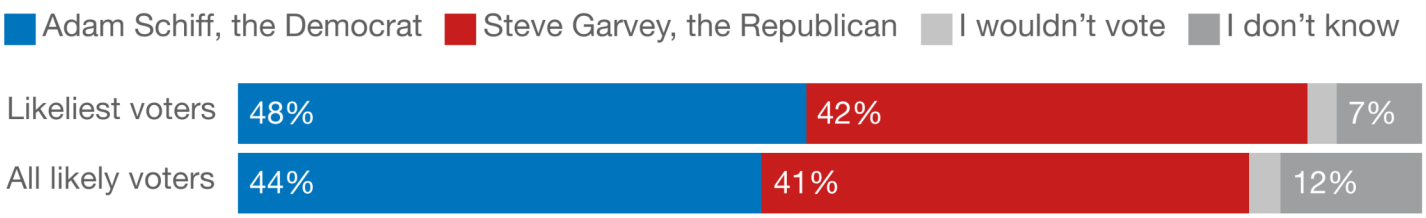
Favorability

Q. Below are various people and organizations mentioned in the news recently. For each, please indicate whether you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of them. If you don't know or haven't heard of them, just say so.



Likeliest Voters: 2024 Senate Election

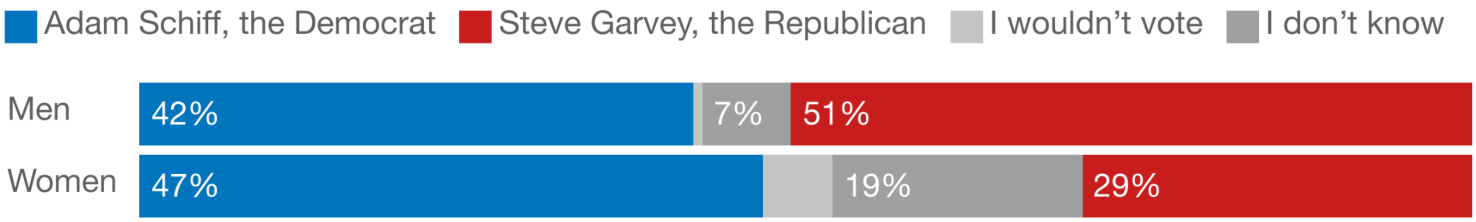
Q. If the 2024 election for U.S. Senate was held today, who would you vote for?



2024 Senate Race by Gender

Q. If the 2024 election for U.S. Senate was held today, who would you vote for?

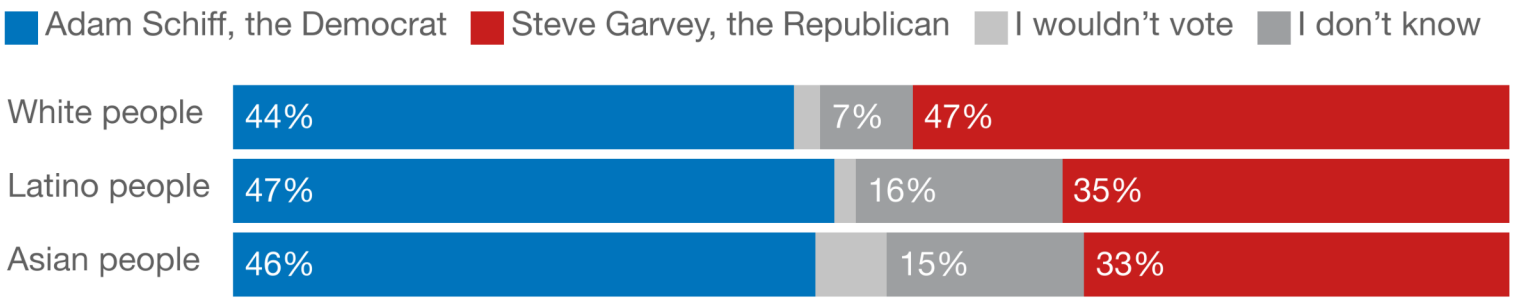
Displaying among all likely voters



2024 Senate Race by Race

Q. If the 2024 election for U.S. Senate was held today, who would you vote for?

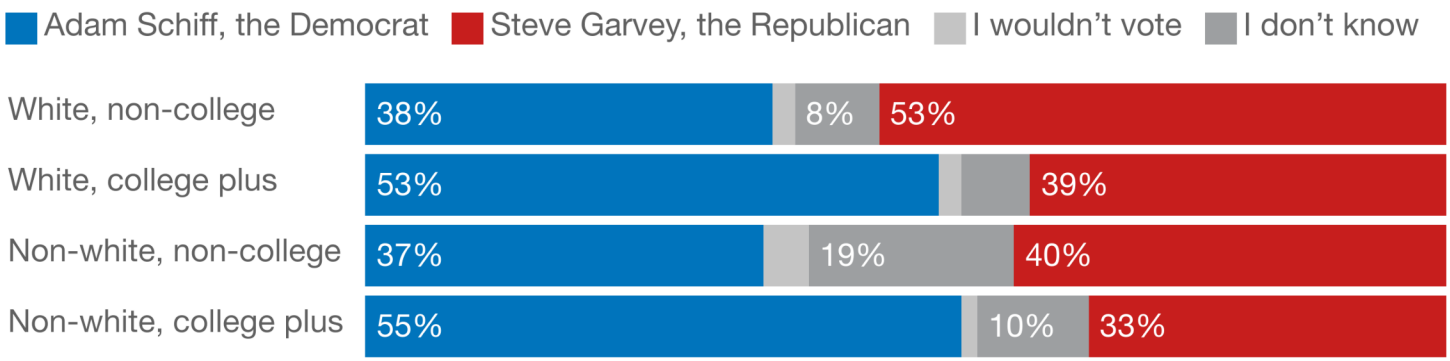
Displaying among all likely voters



2024 Senate Race by Race/Education

Q. If the 2024 election for U.S. Senate was held today, who would you vote for?

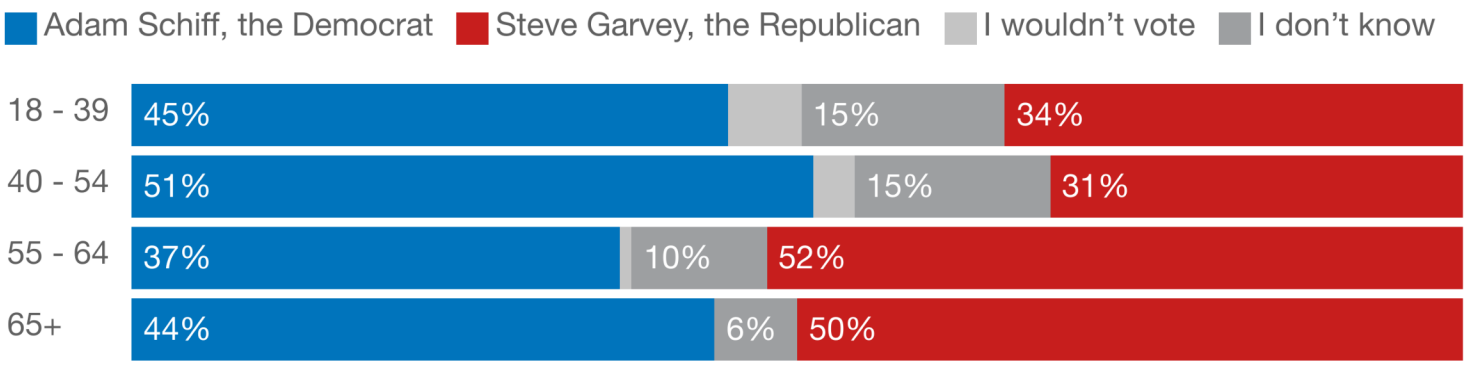
Displaying among all likely voters



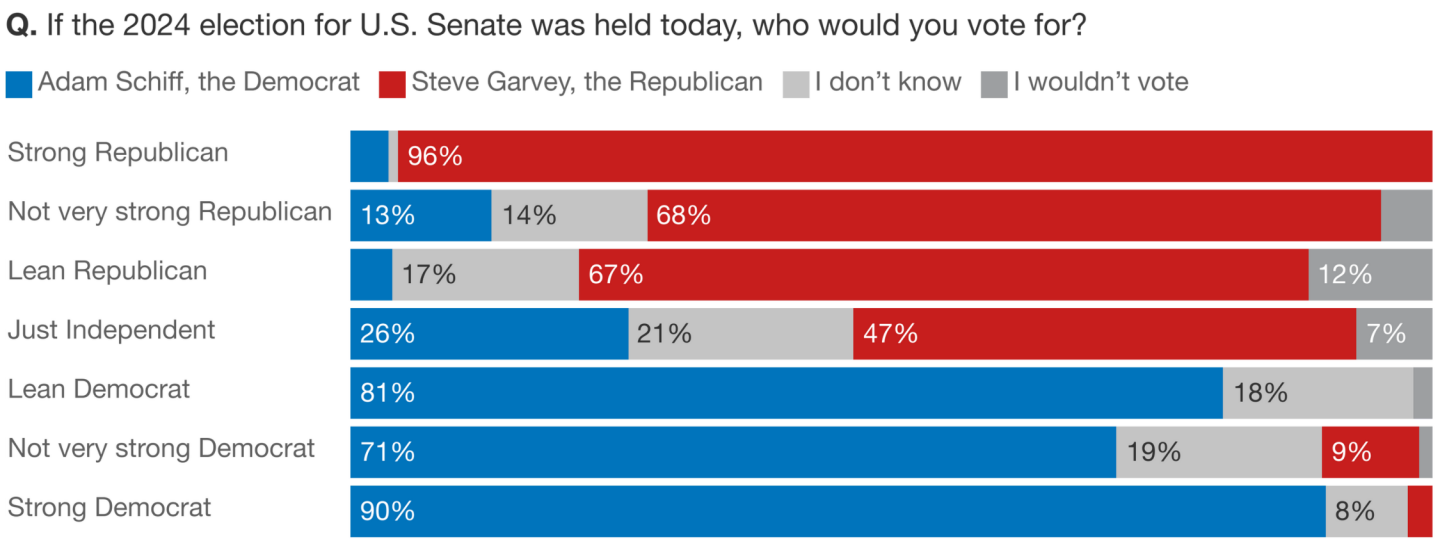
2024 Senate Race by Age

Q. If the 2024 election for U.S. Senate was held today, who would you vote for?

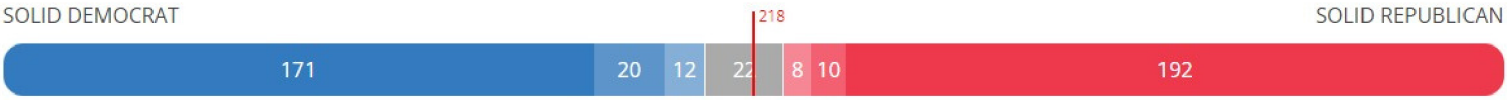
Displaying among all likely voters



2024 Senate Race by Party Groups



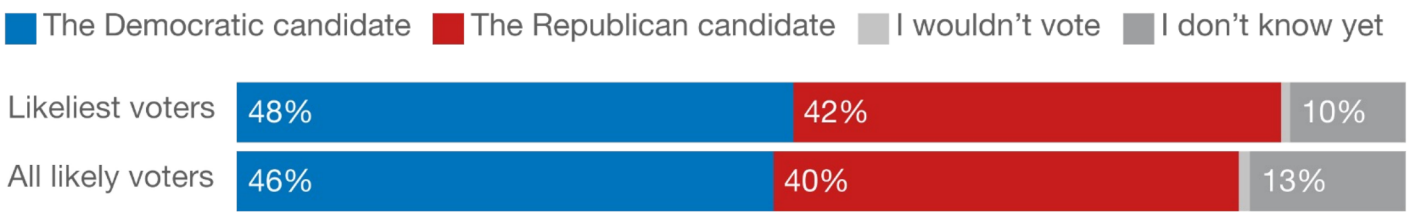
Cook Political : Race for Control of the House



Lean D (12)	D Toss-up (11)	R Toss-up (11)	Lean R (8)
AK-AL Peltola	CO-08 Caraveo	AZ-01 Schweikert	CA-45 Steel
CA-47 OPEN	ME-02 Golden	AZ-06 Ciscomani	CO-03 OPEN
CT-05 Hayes	MI-07 OPEN	CA-13 Duarte	IA-03 Nunn
IL-17 Sorenson	MI-08 OPEN	CA-22 Valadao	MI-10 James
IN-01 Mrvan	NC-01 Davis	CA-27 Garcia	NE-02 Bacon
NV-03 Lee	NM-02 Vasquez	CA-41 Calvert	PA-10 Perry
NY-18 Ryan	OH-09 Kaptur	NJ-07 Kean Jr.	VA-02 Kiggans
NY-22 Williams	OH-13 Sykes	NY-04 D'Esposito	WI-03 Van Orden
OR-06 Salinas	PA-07 Wild	NY-17 Lawler	
PA-17 Deluzio	PA-08 Cartwright	NY-19 Molinaro	
TX-34 Gonzales	WA-03 Perez	OR-05 Chaves-DeRemer	
VA-07 OPEN			

2024 House of Representatives Election

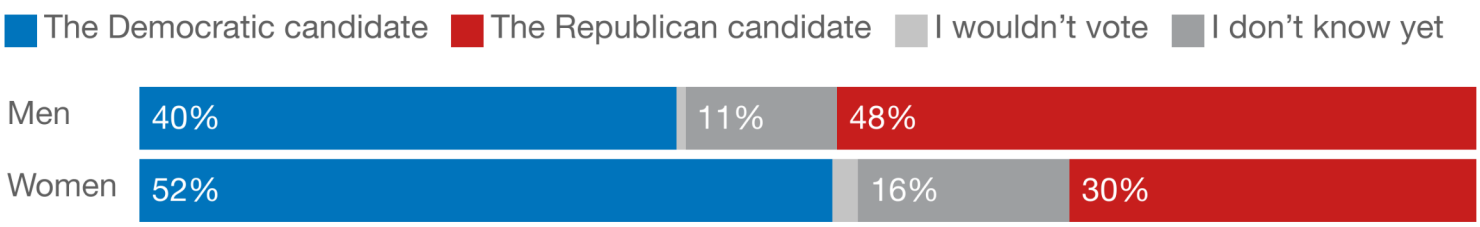
Q. If the 2024 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives in your congressional district were held today, who would you vote for?



2024 House Race by Gender

Q. If the 2024 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives in your congressional district were held today, who would you vote for?

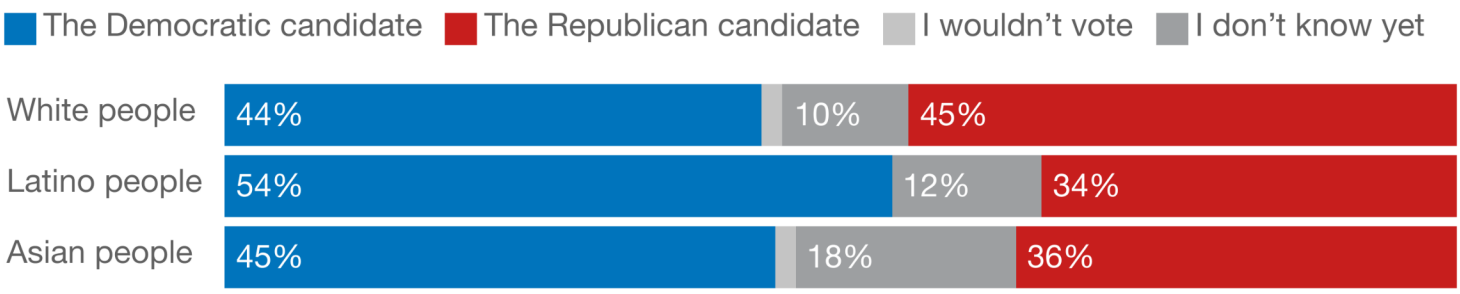
Displaying among all likely voters



2024 House Race by Race

Q. If the 2024 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives in your congressional district were held today, who would you vote for?

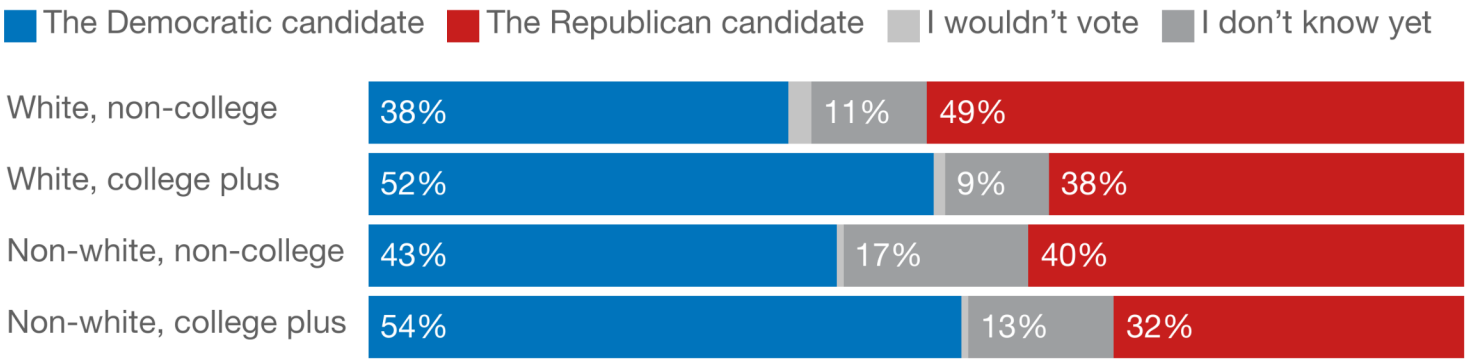
Displaying among all likely voters



2024 House Race by Race/Education

Q. If the 2024 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives in your congressional district were held today, who would you vote for?

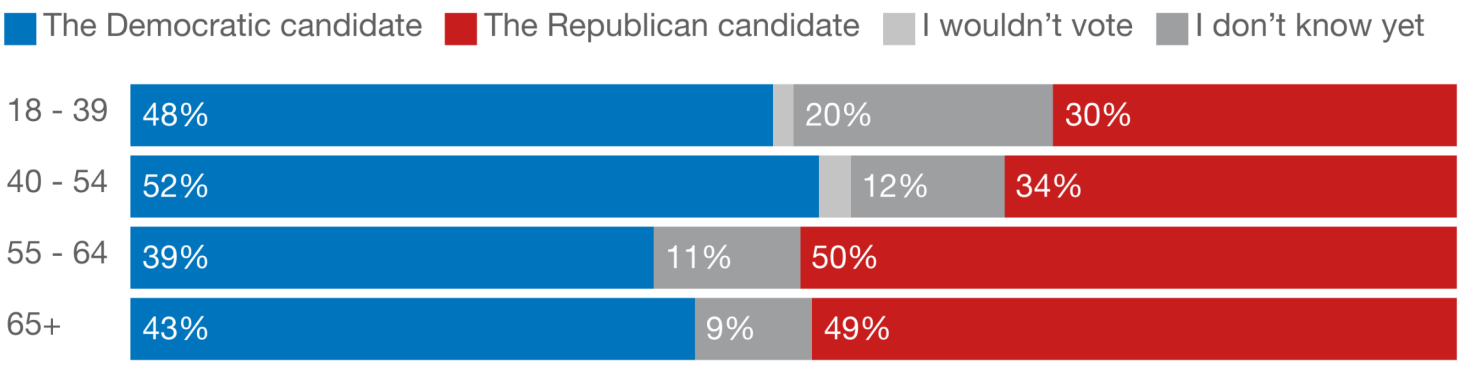
Displaying among all likely voters



2024 House Race by Age

Q. If the 2024 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives in your congressional district were held today, who would you vote for?

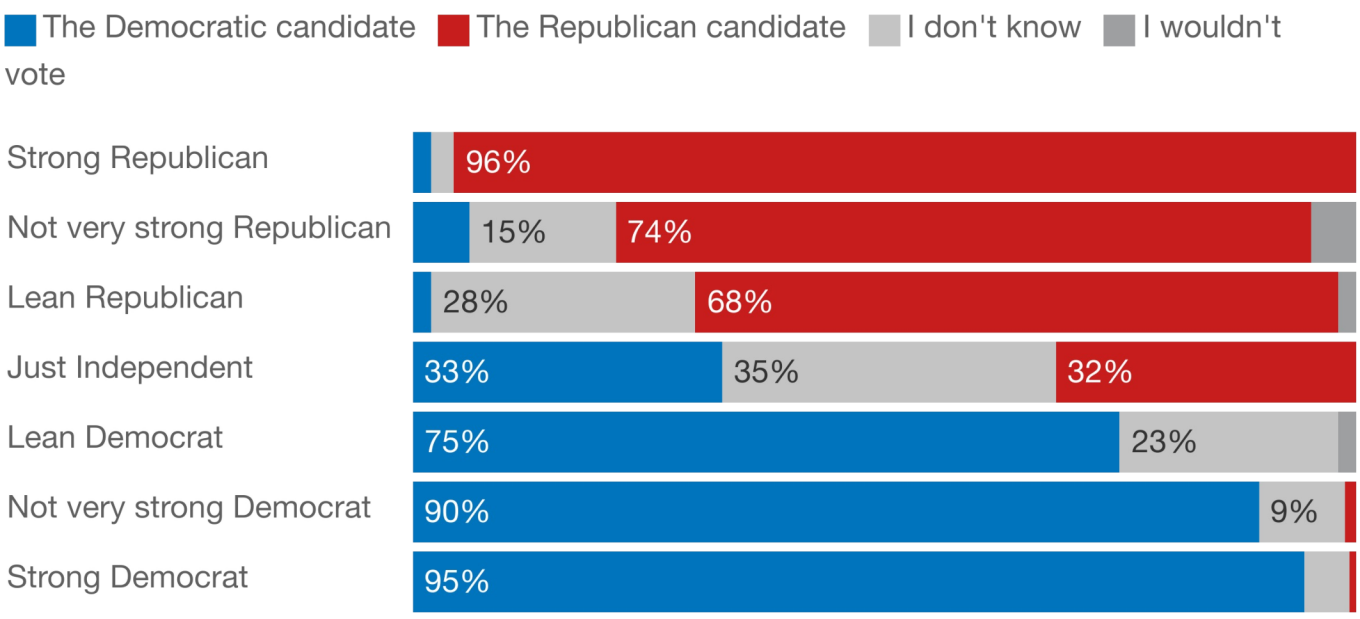
Displaying among all likely voters



2024 House Race by Party Groups

Q. If the 2024 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives in your congressional district were held today, who would you vote for?

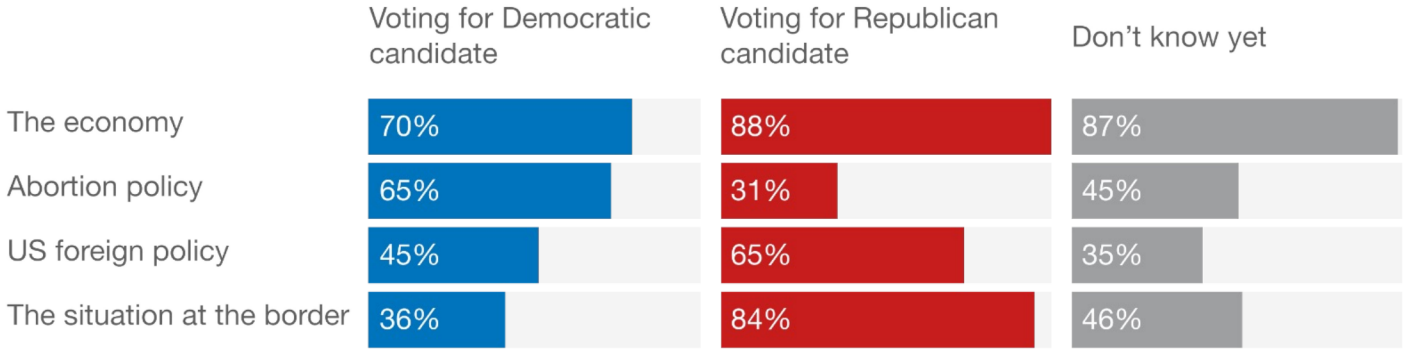
Displaying among all likely voters



Issue Importance

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?

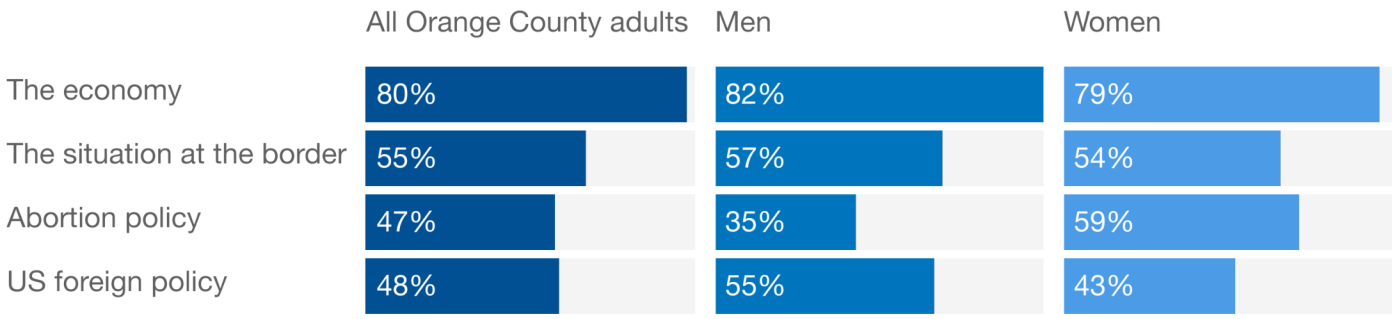
Displaying % "Very important"



Issue Importance by Gender

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?

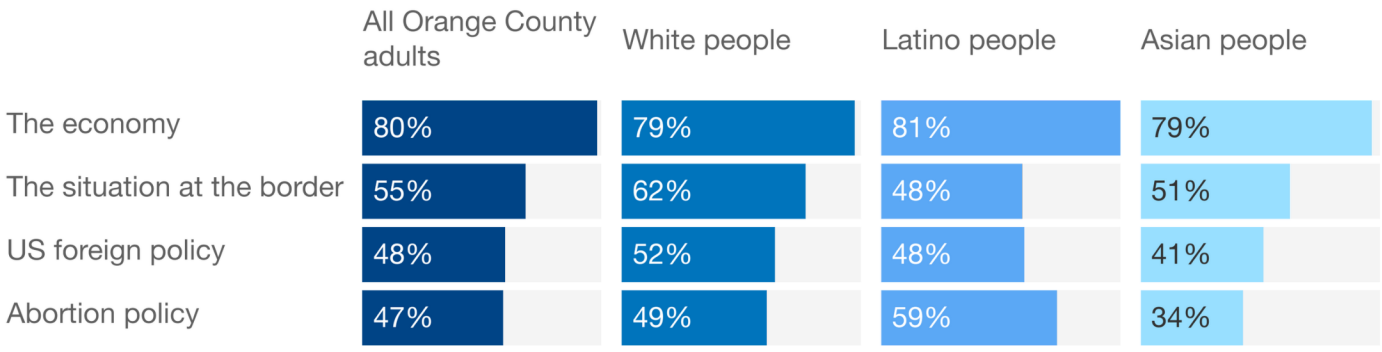
Displaying % "Very important"



Issue Importance by Race

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?

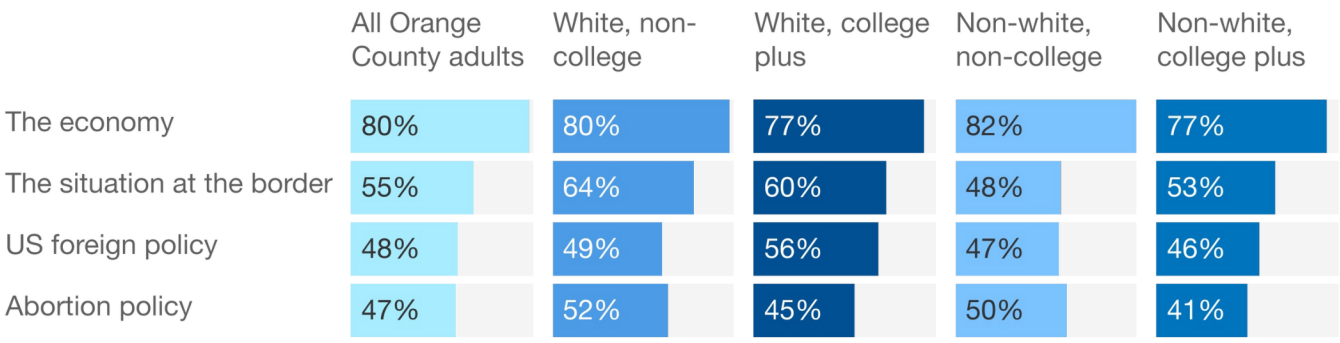
Displaying % "Very important"



Issue Importance by Race/Education

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?

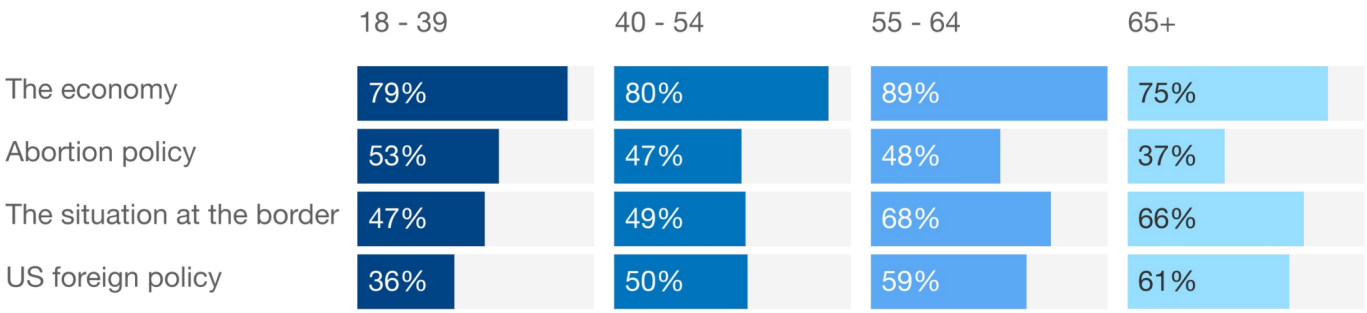
Displaying % "Very important"



Issue Importance by Age

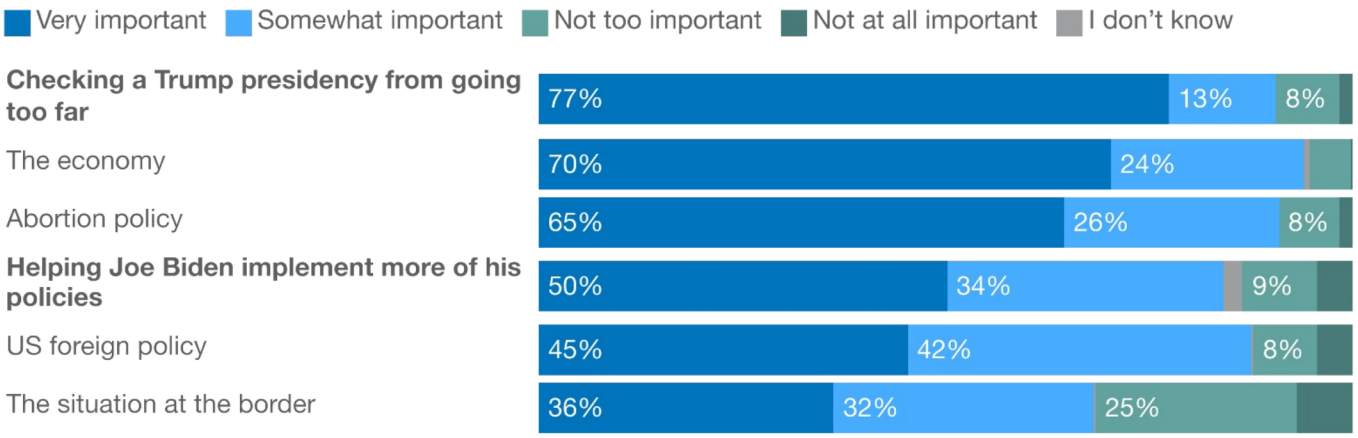
Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?

Displaying % "Very important"



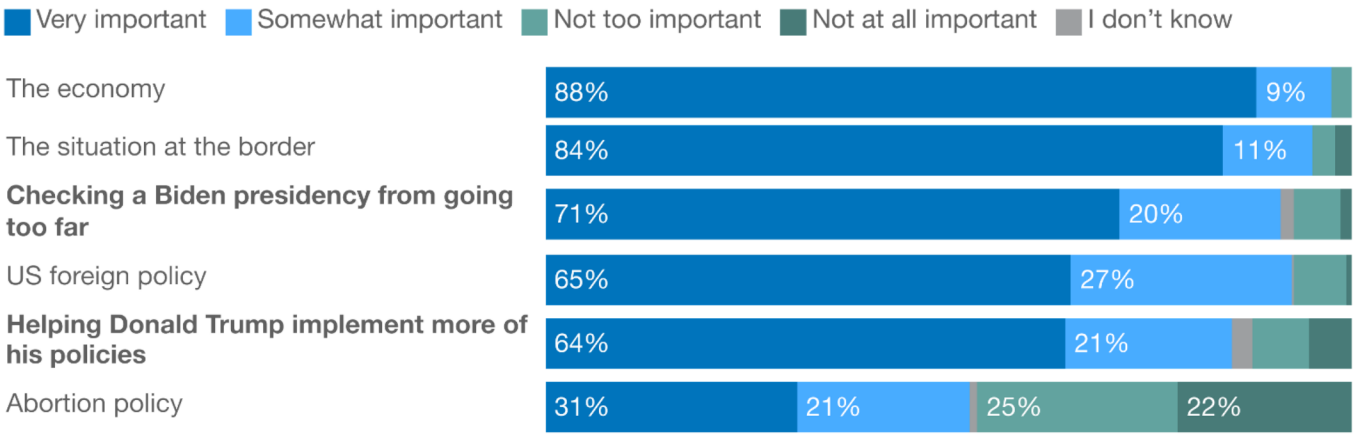
Issue Importance among Democratic Voters

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to your decision to vote for the Democratic candidate?



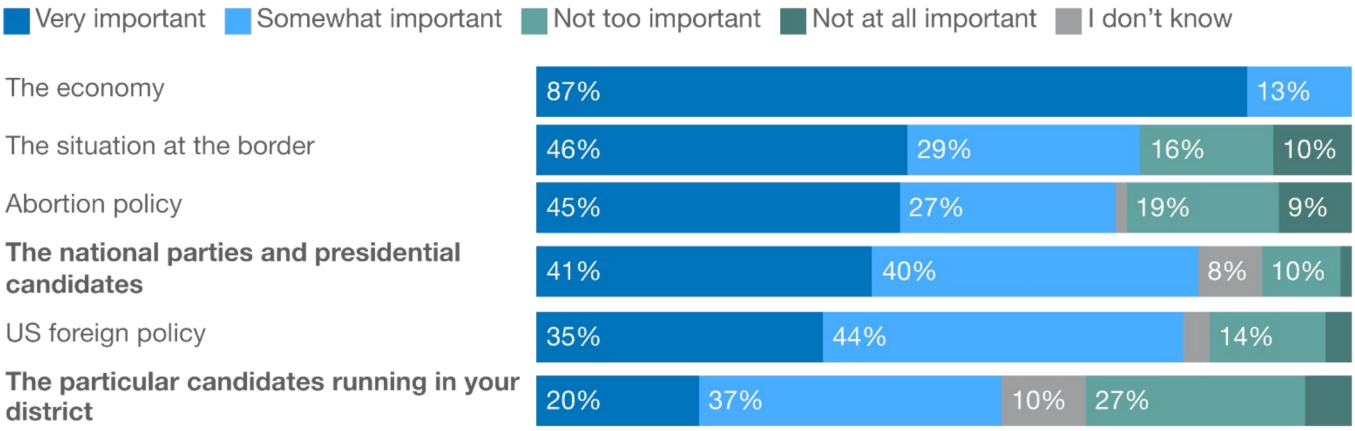
Issue Importance among Republican Voters

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to your decision to vote for the Republican candidate?



Issue Importance among Undecided Voters

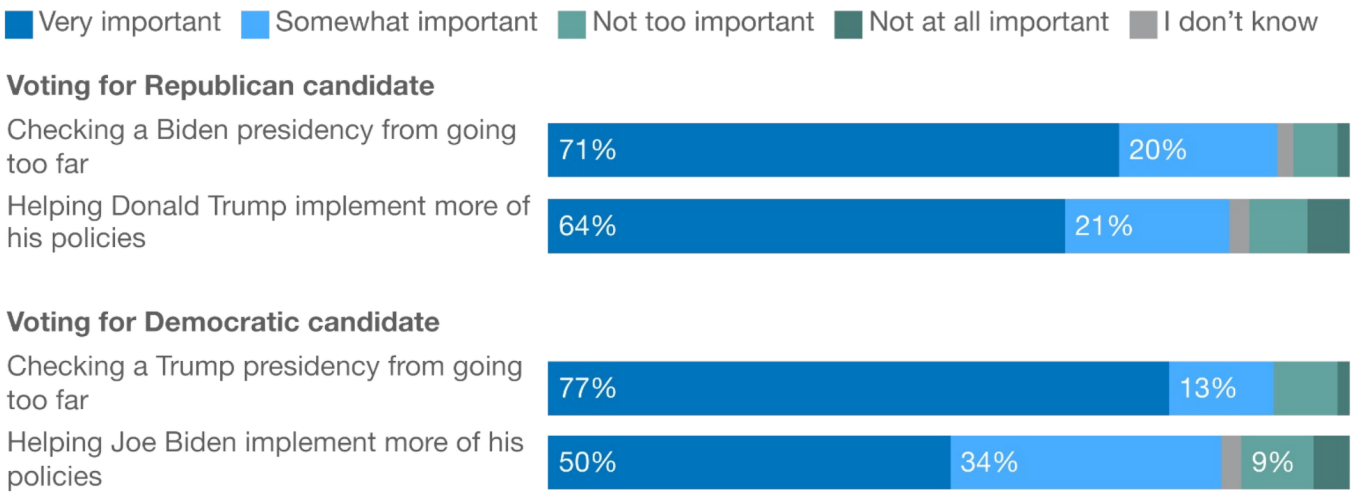
Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to the decision you will make about how to vote?



These undecided voters are more likely to be **Independent**, **aged 18-39**, and **non-college educated**.

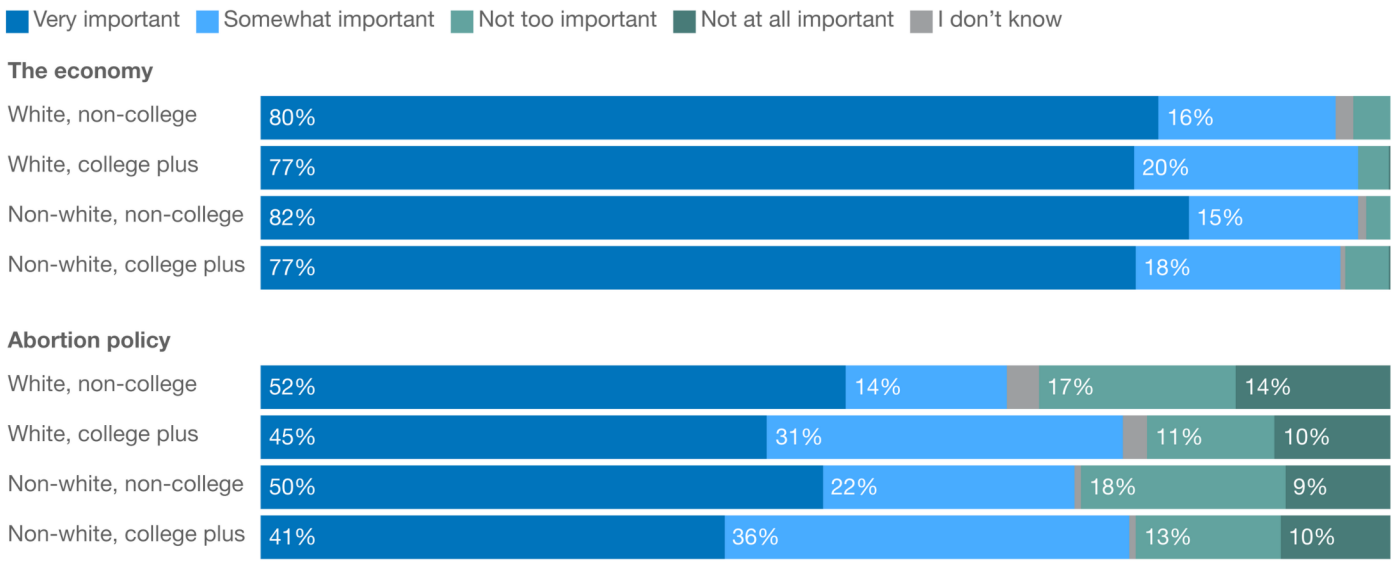
Issue Importance: Republicans v. Democrats

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?



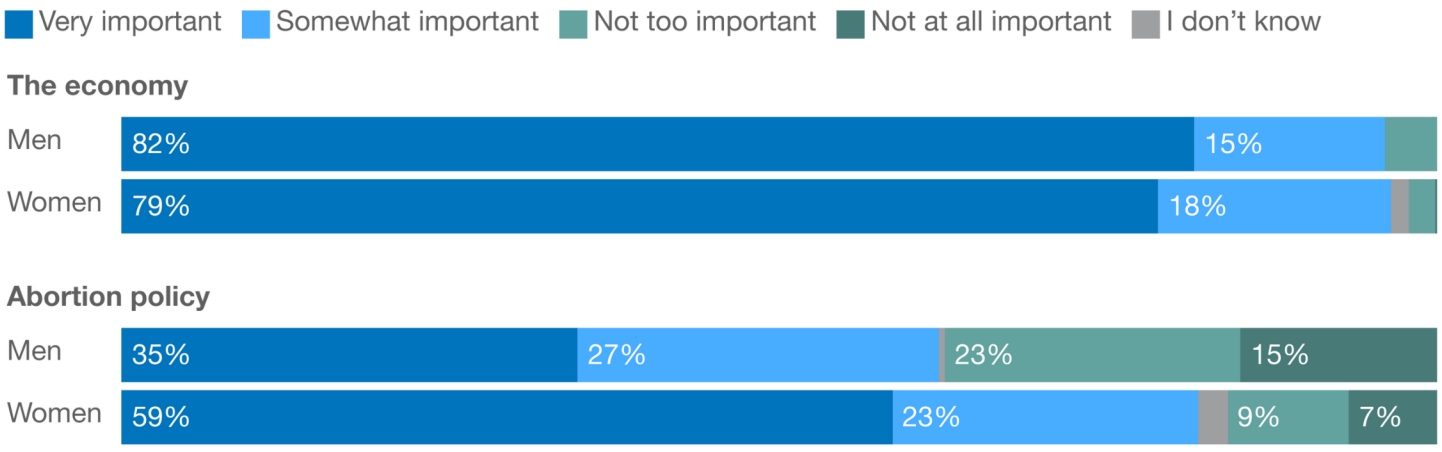
The Economy vs Abortion by Race/Education

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?



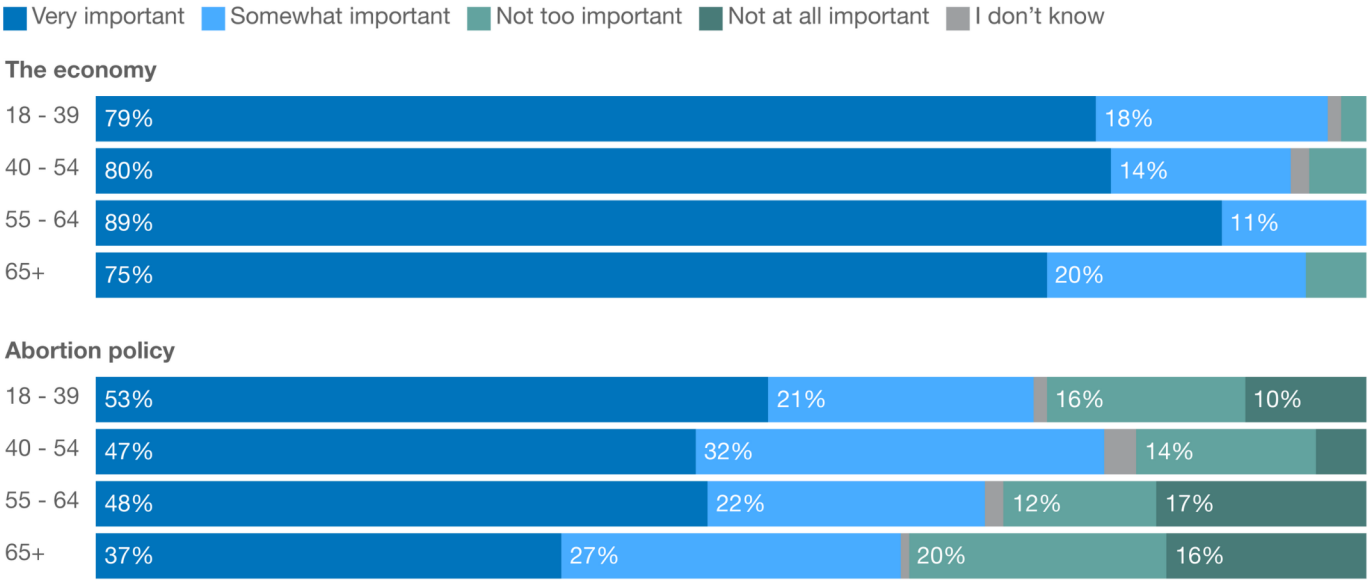
The Economy vs Abortion by Gender

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?



The Economy vs Abortion by Age

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?



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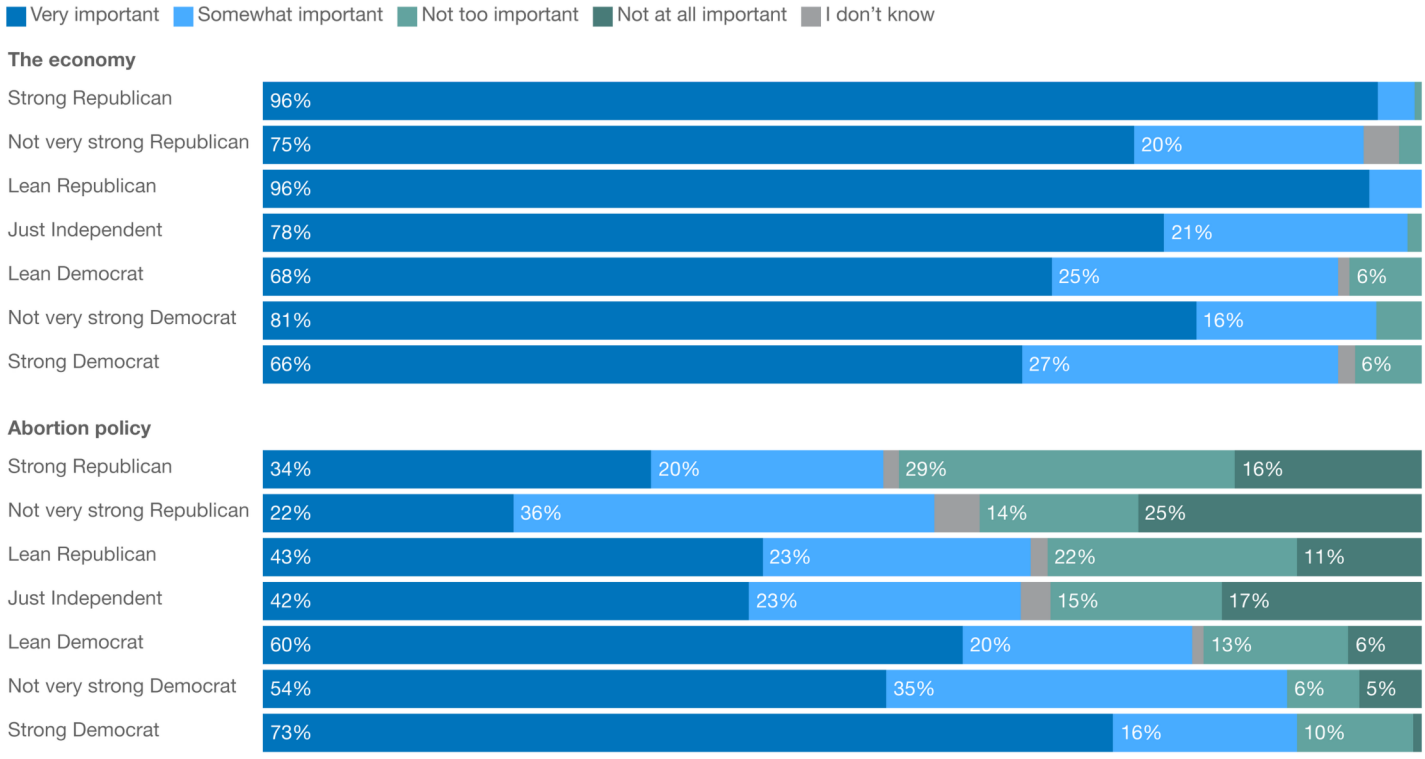
ALL IN FOR ALL

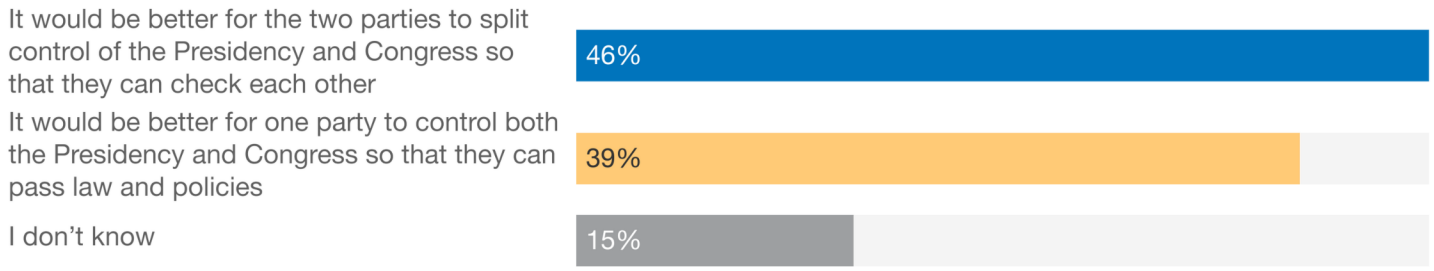
The Economy v Abortion by Party Groups

Q. Thinking about your decision about whether to vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate in your congressional district's US House election… How important are each of the following to ____?



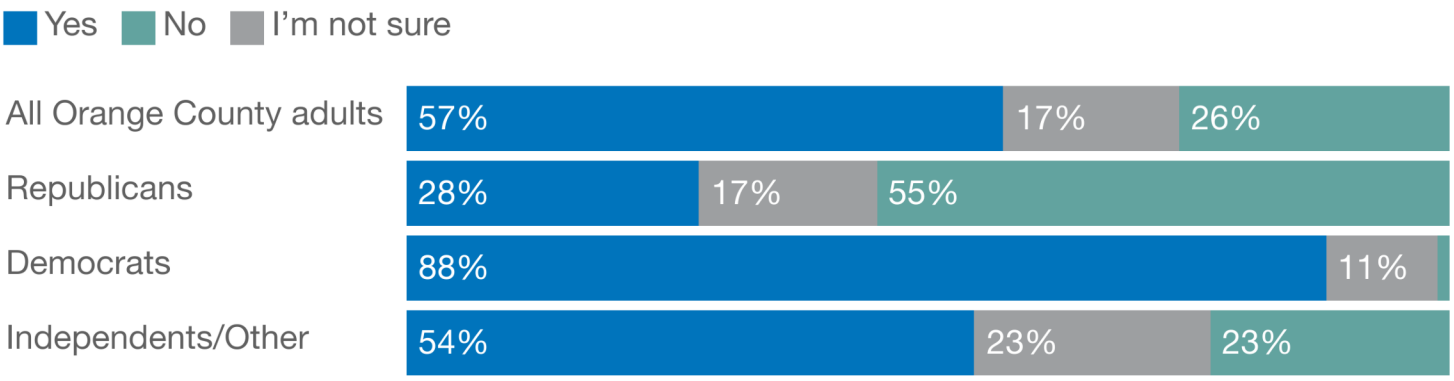
Control of the Presidency and Congress

Q. November's election will decide control of both the Presidency and the U.S. Congress. Which of the following two statements about this best describes your views?



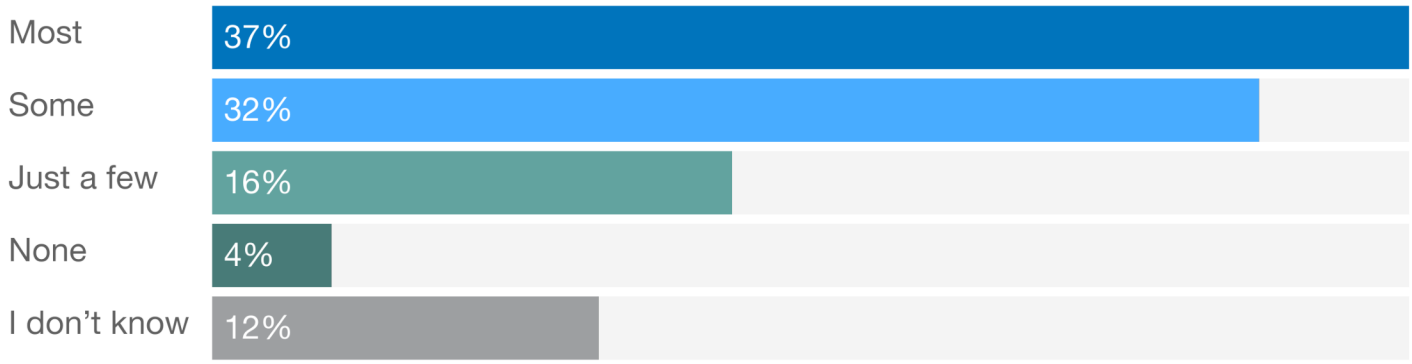
2020 Election Skepticism

Q. Thinking about the results of the 2020 presidential election, do you think Joe Biden legitimately won the presidency, or not?



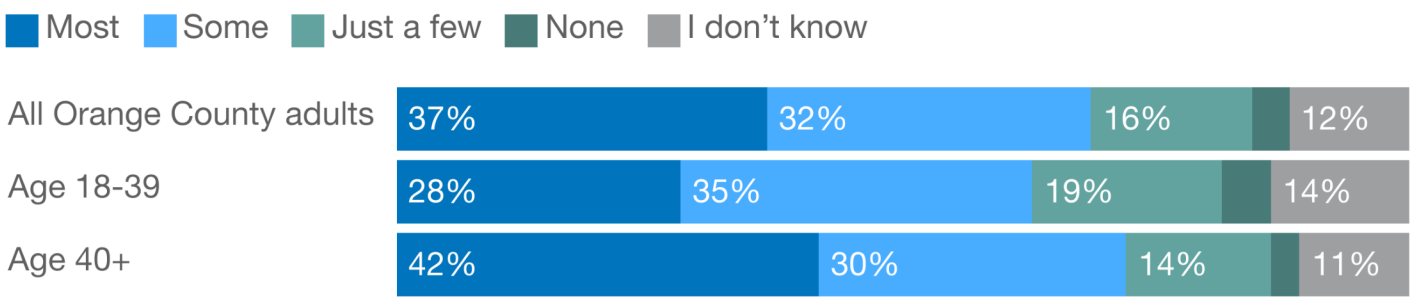
Friendships with Shared Political Views

Q. How many of your close friends have the same political views as you?



Friendships with Shared Political Views by Age

Q. How many of your close friends have the same political views as you?

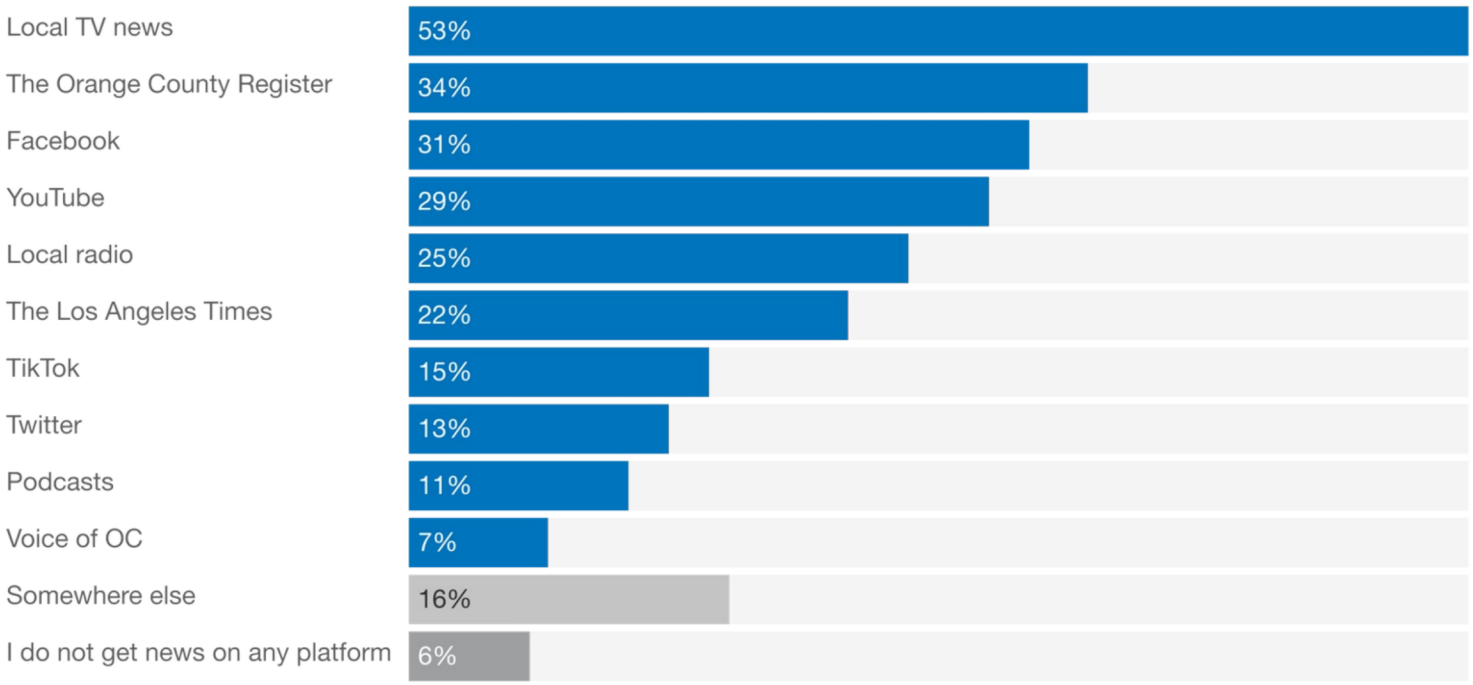


Ending Friendships over Politics

Q. Have you ever ended a friendship over a political disagreement?

Sources of News and Information

Q. Which of the following sources do you use to get news and information about local issues in Orange County?

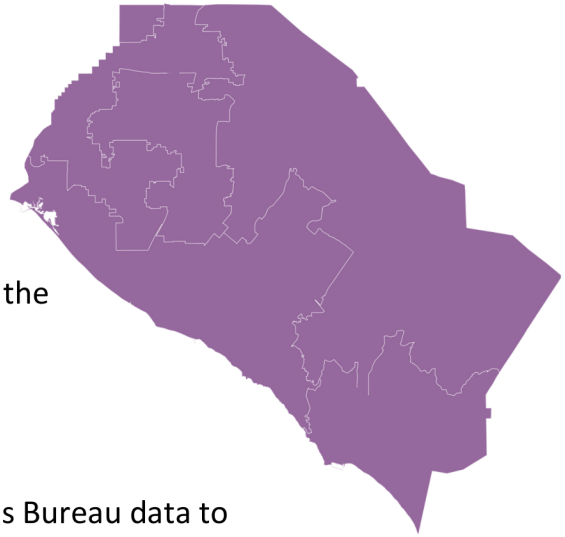


Methodology

AAU fielded a study in March 2024 on UC Irvine's behalf.

Orange County Study:

- Fielded March 20-27, 2024
- N = 804 Orange County adults
- Blended methodology, calibrating sample from an online non-probability panel provided by Dynata Research with a probability phone sample from the Orange County voter file
- 599 web panel
- 205 text-to-web



Weighting: The sample was weighted to Census Bureau data to match the demographic makeup of the adult population of the county by gender, age, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment. Calibrations to party identification and voter registration from the Orange County Registrar of Voters were also implemented.

Demographics

Demographic	Group	Percentage
Gender	Men	48.8%
	Women	51.2%
Education, Age 25+	High school or less	28.0%
	Some college, no	17.5%
	degree Associate's	6.8%
	degree Bachelor's	23.1%
	degree Postgraduate	13.3%
Age	degree 18-24	11.2%
	25-39	26.3%
	40-54	24.6%
	55-64	16.5%
	65+	21.3%
Race/Ethnicity	White	39.6%
	Hispanic or Latino	30.2%
	Asian or Asian American	24.2%
	All other races	6.1%

The School of Social Ecology conducted this poll in collaboration with Dr. Ken Goldstein and his team at the American Association of Universities.

sites.uci.edu/ocpoll

socialecology.uci.edu

Media contact
Mimi Ko Cruz
mkcruz@uci.edu
949-824-1278

Sponsorship contact
Stacy Skwarlo
sskwarlo@uci.edu
949-824-0383

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