

WHAT THE FUTURE: DEMOCRACY

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GAME CHANGERS





Can democracy create a more perfect union?

Market researchers study the world through division.

We and our clients want to know what the masses think, sure. But we are also eager to split the masses into target markets. Some are based on broad buckets like gender, age, race and ethnicity, education, or income. Increasingly, technology and data have allowed us to slice ever smaller groups based on behaviors and attitudes.

This issue of **What the Future** is about one main division: party identification. The partisan schism feels like the lens through which you can look at everything these days.

When writing about democracy, the clichés come easy. Yet even the dichotomous words like “fragile” and “resilient” speak to a polarization of sorts. At the time of this writing, we have just witnessed an insurrection, which some found inconceivable and many others readily envisioned. In the midst of it all, our polling finds 86% of Democrats felt President Trump should be immediately removed, compared to 15% of Republicans. Having members of a conspiracy-theorizing mob physically sitting in the chair recently occupied by the Vice President of the United States in the Senate chamber wasn’t enough to break us out of our existing mindsets.

“The partisan schism feels like the lens through which you can look at everything these days.”

At Ipsos, we ensure that leaders in corporations and government hear the voice of the people in rooms where they craft products and policy. Polls show broad cross-partisan consensus on many huge issues like climate change. Continued inaction leads many to believe that leaders aren’t listening and that “the system is broken.”

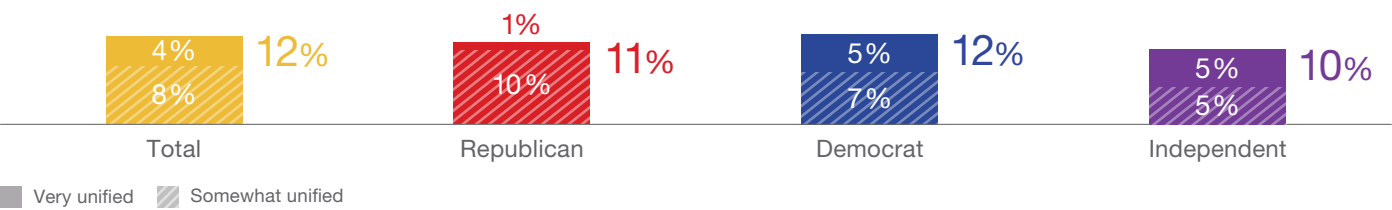
Our editorial choice here is the same as the existential crisis facing the nation itself, and it is deeply rooted in human nature: Choose hope or choose fear. Choose darkness or choose light. Choose unity or choose division. In this issue, we’re choosing the optimistic approach with a stated recognition that it’s not a given and that even this discussion itself can seem loaded at times. In our *What the Future: Truth* issue (November 2020), we showed that politicians and foreign agitators are taking advantage of the ability to microtarget citizens/voters and are working to divide us further.

So, can we keep this grand experiment going while rectifying systemic issues of equity and inclusion? In these pages you’ll find a lot of reason to believe that, with some hard work, the answer is a cautious yes. In the meantime, we will, as Neil Diamond sang, huddle close and hang on to a dream.

Matt Carmichael is editor of *What the Future* and vice president of editorial strategy at Ipsos in North America.

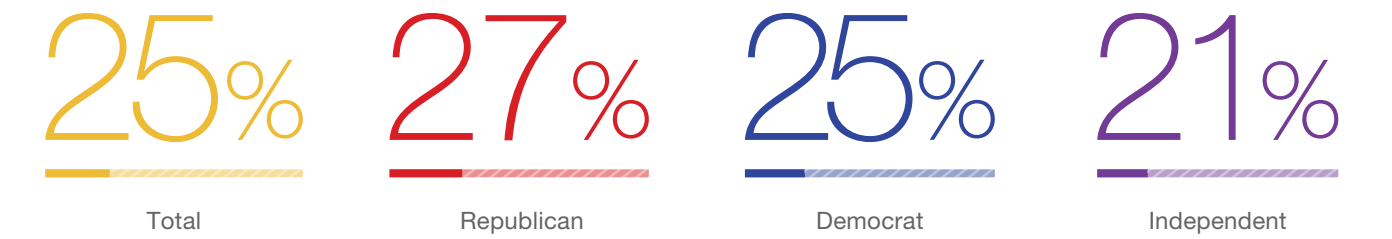
Few Americans agree that we're united...

Q. How would you describe the state of unity in the U.S. today?



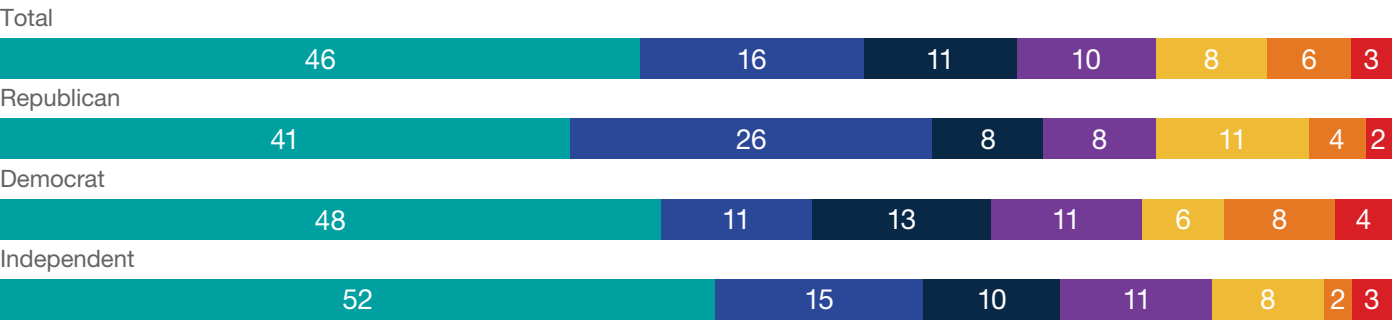
...and that our democracy is strong

Q. How would you describe the current state of our democracy? (Net strong)



Beyond individual rights, how other principles of the U.S. Constitution matter to Americans vary

Q. From the following list, please rank the top three of the seven principles of the Constitution in order of importance to your life. (Rank 1 summary)



- Individual rights (personal freedoms like speech and religion are guaranteed by the Bill of Rights)
- Limited government (everyone must obey the U.S. Constitution)
- Checks and balances (different branches can limit or check the other branches)
- Popular sovereignty (rule by the people)
- Republicanism (citizens have the right to elect their representatives)
- Separation of powers (divide legal power across different branches)
- Federalism (power shared between the federal and state governments)

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.)

The Big Question:

Can we fix democracy to work for everyone?



Question: Can we fix politics?



Katherine Gehl

**Founder, the Institute
for Political Innovation**

67%

of Americans familiar with the concept of electing the president by popular vote, rather than the Electoral College, support that proposal.

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among those who expressed familiarity with the proposals.)

Katherine Gehl, like so many, thinks politics is broken. Unlike most, she's got a plausible plan to fix it, by approaching it as an industry.

Together with famed Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter, they outlined the road map in their book, "The Politics Industry," and started the Institute for Political Innovation to help people bootstrap the ideas in their states. In the 2020 election, Alaska became the first state to implement many of these ideas. When she thinks **What the Future**, she thinks one down, 49 to go.



Americans have some awareness with national policy reforms

Q. Please indicate your level of familiarity of the following proposals on how to reform our democracy at the national level.

Elect the president by popular vote rather than the Electoral College



Limit number of terms for members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate



End the Senate filibuster



End untraceable or anonymous political donations from Super PACs



Restore the Voting Rights Act



End gerrymandering



Set automatic voter registration



Increase the number of major political parties in the U.S.



Offer ranked-choice voting, where you vote for candidates by order of preference instead of picking one



Enact "Final Five" voting, where the top five candidates, regardless of party, advance from a primary to the general election



Very familiar Somewhat familiar Not very familiar
Have heard of it, but that's about it Never heard of it

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.)

Matt Carmichael: We're starting from the premise that the system itself needs fixing, right? What makes you say that?

Katherine Gehl: From my perspective as a citizen, we're getting more and more divided and, yet we're still not making any progress in Washington, D.C. Then there's the perspective from the work that I now do. I used to be engaged in politics in a very traditional way, which is I supported candidates and I picked people that I thought could go to D.C. and make a difference. I switched my focus from hoping for certain leadership and realizing that we have a systems problem. There's no connection between Congress acting in the public interest and the likelihood that they'll get reelected. That's a crazy design in any other business.

Carmichael: You write about approaching government and politics as an industry or a business. But you also make clear in the book that we shouldn't run government like a business. Why is that?

Gehl: Government actually needs to do things that business is not suited to do. How you win in private industry is that healthy competition propels businesses to make better products, better products equals happier customers, happier customers equals success. Whereas in politics they actually don't have to make their customers happy in order to continue doing well. We need to create a system where solving problems and creating opportunities in the public interest is the best way for a political party or a politician to get ahead.

Carmichael: Clearly the system is working for those whose power it perpetuates. So there is a substantial customer base who are being well-served by the system, right?

Gehl: First of all, yes, there are customers who are being served. The current customers that matter are ideological voters in party primaries because 80% of House races are decided in the primary. So ideological party primaries matter, donors matter and special interests matter. They're the only customers whose influence has any power to determine winners and losers.

Carmichael: You strongly advocate Final-Five Voting and ranked-choice voting. What are those?

Gehl: What we have now are party primaries, where we identify one Democrat and one Republican who can advance to the general election. In top five primaries, we have a

“The only thing either side has to do to win is convince the customer they are the lesser of two evils.”

single ballot where candidates appear regardless of party. When the polls close, you add up the votes and the top five finishers advance to the general election regardless of party. When we go to the general election, voters have the opportunity to rank those candidates from most favorite all the way to least favorite. That’s ranked choice. When the polls close, we count up all the first-place votes. If nobody out of the five candidates has over 50%, ranked-choice voting enables instant runoff. You need to do these as a package, otherwise you really won’t get the benefit.

Carmichael: OK, how will that help?

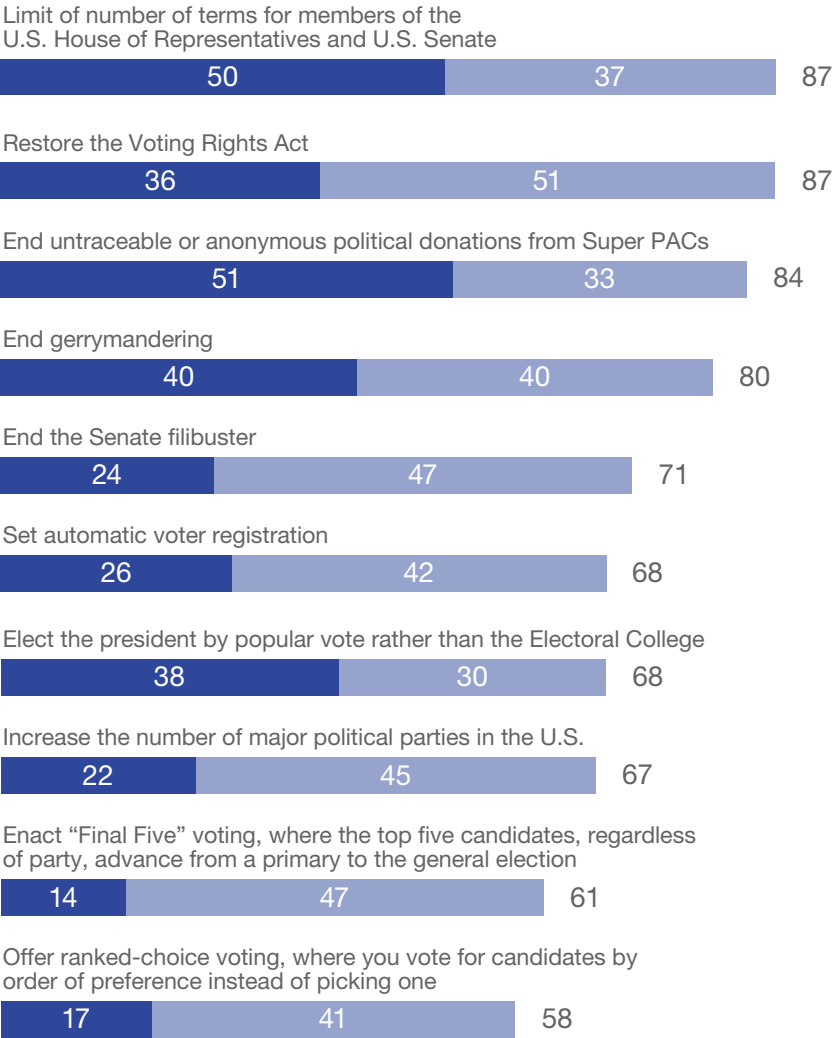
Gehl: There are two core problems in our political system. We don’t get results — think about Congress — and there’s no accountability for not getting results because the customer only has two choices. The only thing either side has to do to win is convince the customer they are the lesser of two evils. With Final-Five Voting, we address the key reason we don’t get results. The biggest bottleneck for results is party primaries that push candidates far to the left and far to the right.

Carmichael: As discussion of a second Trump impeachment grew, Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) indicated that she might be willing to break from the GOP. Is this a function of the recent passage of a Final-Four Voting plan in Alaska?

Gehl: Sen. Murkowski had already shown a propensity for cross-partisanship, and now that she is no longer constrained by unhealthy electoral competition, she is even more free to push against the hyper-partisanship and gridlock that has plagued the politics industry for decades. In doing so, she might even lead others in the Senate to act similarly.

Americans want to curb politicians’ power

Q. Now please indicate your level of support for the following. (Net support)



■ Strongly support ■ Somewhat support

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among those who expressed familiarity with the proposals between 700-1,000 respondents.)

Carmichael: What does that do to our existing power structure?

Gehl: It would alter the power structure. Those who are at the top of the existing system could definitely feel threatened, but we’re still going to have the same number of congressional jobs. You’re just going to run your ads on a different basis. You might not run your ads on division anymore. You might run your ads on actual vision and ideas. The politics industry is not going to go away.

Carmichael: So how do you make this change happen?

Gehl: It’s so unbelievably more doable than anything else that people in political reform have focused on and really more powerful as well. Political reform tends to be perceived as usually a Trojan horse for party advantage. Both parties want to reform something because changing that will actually help them, but it keeps the existing two-party structure intact. This innovation is completely nonpartisan. It is not designed to change who wins. It’s designed to change what the winners are incented to do. You get innovation, results and accountability, which is fundamentally a shared American ideal.

***Matt Carmichael** is editor of *What the Future* and vice president of editorial strategy at Ipsos in North America.*

Is Party ID the only ID?

More than 15 years ago, journalist Bill Bishop made the case that Americans are physically clustering in where they live by surrounding themselves with like-minded people.

In his book “The Big Sort,” he argued that you’re almost better off moving to a city where the residents are more on your wavelength than trying to change things within your existing community.

In a past life, What the Future Editor Matt Carmichael, applied this theory to a list for Livability.com about the best places to live if you are liberal, conservative or moderate. The ranking factored in residents’ political leanings but also the goods they buy, the media they watch and even the restaurants where they dine.

But it’s not just physical clustering. Increasingly throughout the world, but acutely in America, our ideological bubbles are enabled even more in our virtual communities. Our party identity has spilled over into non-political and even non-policy spheres.

In our ongoing “Age of Uncertainty” series, we’ve seen time and time again that party identification has had an impact on our views of everything. Sure, it’s helped drive how we’ve viewed candidates and how we’ve lined up on polarized issues like healthcare and gun rights. However, it’s also shown up in our data, from listening to NPR to owning pickup trucks.

It’s almost as if Party ID — that is, whether we are red or blue — is the new American ethos. Divided, not unified.

We advise clients to study party affiliation in their market research as a shortcut to a deeper consumer understanding. In fact, we now include party affiliation in our standard banners alongside gender, age, race, income and other traditional breakouts.

We’re reaching a point where we start to wonder if it’s possible for Americans to see beyond party affiliation and its tribal cues on any topic.

The coronavirus pandemic initially struck observers as an opportunity for Americans to come together against a common, deadly enemy, much the way we have done in wartime, or after Sept. 11. And yet everything about the response, from safety measures to belief in the death rate (see page 19) to people dismissing the virus as a “hoax,” often splits among party lines.

Coming together will require us to break out of this long-building trend and find not just common ground, but also common facts and language to talk about issues and behaviors without triggering party heuristics.

Cliff Young is president of Ipsos US Public Affairs.

How politics shapes consumer behavior

A Democrat is 2.8 times more likely to donate money to NPR than a Republican

Have donated money to NPR



Shop at Whole Foods regularly



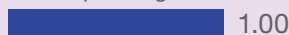
Prefer to buy organic foods when possible



Watch soccer on TV



Drink sparkling water



A Republican is 2.09 times more likely to drive a pickup truck than a Democrat

Shop at Walmart regularly



Drink bottled water



Have ever lived in a rural area



Love baseball



Learned to drive before age 15



Enjoy NASCAR



Drive a pickup truck



■ Republican ■ Democrat

(Source: Ipsos poll conducted August 17-18, 2017, among 1,021 US adults.)



Question:

Is there a role for brands in supporting democracy?



Natalie Tran

Co-founder, Civic Alliance

Natalie Tran's role as co-founder of the Civic Alliance grew from her job as executive director of the CAA Foundation.

Two years ago, she led the philanthropic arm of talent and sports agency Creative Artists Agency in creating a coalition in the entertainment industry to boost voter turnout for the midterm elections. In January, she launched Civic Alliance with Mike Ward, VP of voter engagement at civic engagement nonprofit Democracy Works. When she thinks **What the Future**, she sees a culture where everyone can vote and participate in shaping our country.

82%

of Americans support companies giving paid time off to vote or volunteer at the polls.

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.)



Americans support companies enabling employees' civic engagement more than lobbying

Q. To what extent do you support or oppose the following efforts by companies or brands?

Giving paid time off to vote or volunteer at the polls



Encouraging engagement in the political process with nonpartisan company messages



Lobby or donate to elected officials or candidates about causes or issues related to their businesses



Lobby or donate to elected officials or candidates about causes or issues that are not directly related to their business



Provide financial support to candidates or parties



■ Strongly support ■ Somewhat support
■ Somewhat oppose ■ Strongly oppose

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.)

Kate MacArthur: How does getting companies involved help improve democracy?

Natalie Tran: Studies have shown, especially in this past year, that amidst all of the media noise and things that we are getting bombarded with via social media, employers are actually one of the most trusted sources out there. So, if companies can improve their Election Day policies and give more time for employees to go out and vote, that automatically becomes good for democracy.

MacArthur: How is that similar or different from corporate social responsibility (CSR)?

Tran: It's different at every company, but this is part of being a good citizen both to your employees and to your community. This has now evolved into some companies' marketing plans, having looked at their brand partnerships and how they interact with their consumers.

This has also moved into the business side as well, as we are seeing this younger generation not only asking this of the brands that they're purchasing from, but they're almost demanding or expecting it.

MacArthur: How does this compare to lobbying?

Tran: The Civic Alliance is really focused on being nonpartisan and non-issue-based. Most of this has been about expanding Election Day policies for employees and communicating to their consumers.

MacArthur: Is there a need or process to somehow keep companies accountable for making sure that whatever policies they try to promote are actually good for democracy as opposed to just capitalism?

Tran: I don't want to speak on behalf of the Civic Alliance on that. But I do think as we've seen over these past few months, employees and consumers really do have a loud voice in this. It will be interesting to see how they respond and whether or not they choose to express or use that platform.

MacArthur: Do you see other ways for companies to support democracy beyond the electoral and Census processes?

Tran: Oh, yeah. We also want to make sure that we are expanding what the general definition of civic engagement is. And that could lead into participating in local town halls, running for a local city council, really getting involved at the local level.

MacArthur: How much influence should companies have in promoting democracy as they expand globally into countries under different government types?

Tran: I have to really tip my hat to one of our member companies, H&M, which is a Swedish retailer. They turned every single one of their stores here in the United States into a voter registration center. That could be a really interesting case study for the reverse of that, too.

If an American company wanted to participate in something locally elsewhere, I think staying nonpartisan and really making this about voter registration and voter turnout, as opposed to getting into a very specific issue or a candidate, has given brands a little bit of a safe space to come in and do that.

MacArthur: We're still seeing so much disinformation and pushback on the election results. Does Corporate America have a role in pushing back on disinformation?

Tran: We saw business leaders step up and push back against our current administration. We will continue to push for safe and trusted elections and really stand by local election officials. For the first time, so many people across the country even knew what the definition of a local election official was, or even knew their names.

This has forced a lot of Americans to understand the process a little bit more and businesses to see the value in them participating in our democracy and participating in this conversation.

MacArthur: How could companies play an active role in education of the democratic process?

Tran: That's where perhaps there are opportunities for companies' CSR programs to support or continue to

"Voter access for all doesn't necessarily mean an equitable future for all."

support civics education in schools, civics education programs or organizations in their communities.

MacArthur: Our polling shows that Americans feel like the country is very divided and a majority of Americans feel that our democracy is in trouble. So where do we go from here?

Tran: We saw record voter turnout this year, and people across the country are really engaged. My hope is that voter turnout only increases, that people continue to stay engaged at their local and state levels and

companies continue to push to do more, to continue to activate their employees and their audiences. I think this next generation is pushing us all to do more. So, I think we've just entered a new chapter.

MacArthur: Can companies take a more active role in promoting a multiracial democracy?

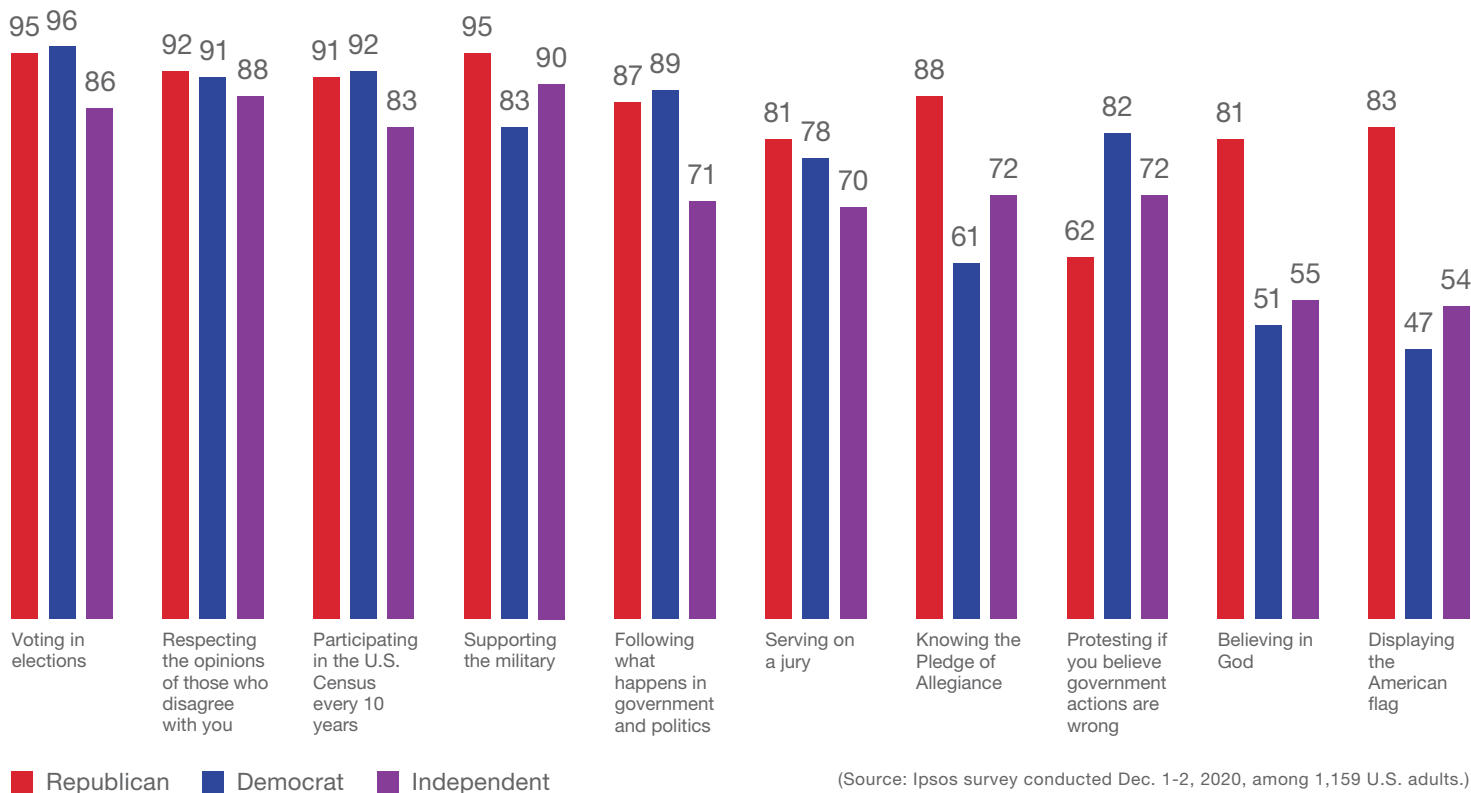
Tran: Yes. In every sense, we have seen voter suppression happening across the country. Voter access for all doesn't necessarily mean an equitable future for all. One has to really be intentional and really seek out the reasons why individuals may or may not be able to vote and start unpacking that. And that gets complicated.

This is years and years of suppression for a lot of groups that will not be undone in 10 months or over a summer of racial reckoning for many. So hopefully, companies and individuals will continue this work.

Kate MacArthur is deputy editor of What the Future and a senior writer at Ipsos in North America.

What makes a good American depends on party ID

Q. In your view, how important are each of the following to be a good American? (% Net important)



(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.)

How companies and brands can safely support democracy in action

With the 2020 U.S. presidential election behind us, the lingering question is how much damage has been done to the basic tenets of democracy in America?

The promise of every eligible vote counting in an election has been battered through unfounded claims of mass voter fraud and a stolen election. This is despite election experts, law scholars and security professionals indicating that this was one of the most secure general elections in American history.

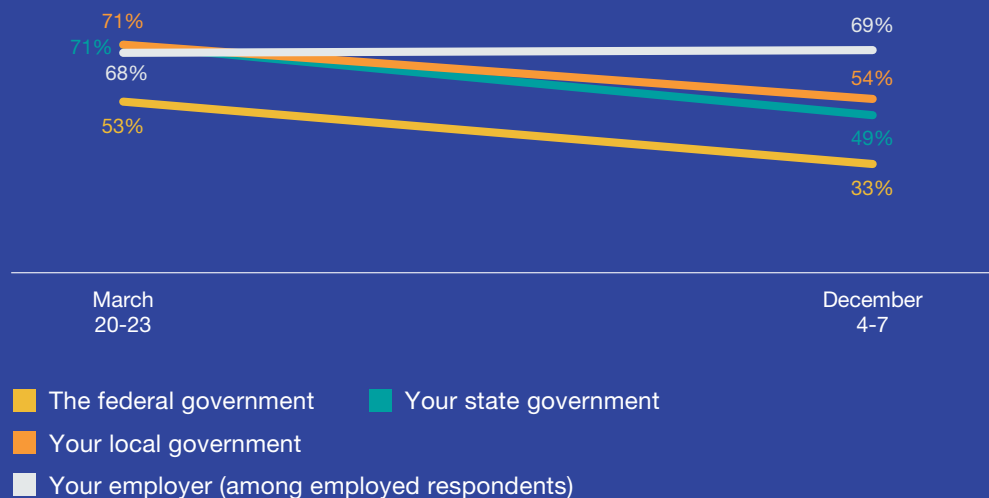
While trust in government has been low for quite some time in comparison to other institutions, the events of 2020 have led to further erosion that raises concerns for future elections. But there is one underutilized but potentially powerful source of support for preserving democracy: companies.

Despite low trust in government, for years we've observed much higher levels of trust in brands and companies. This demonstrates an opportunity for a purpose beyond simply generating shareholder returns. This includes working to address societal issues and now, perhaps, fostering greater engagement in the democratic process.

To explore this further following the election, we asked Americans how much they support or oppose certain types of engagement from brands and companies. There is significant support in America for companies to provide paid time off for their employees to participate in elections. Respondents also support companies encouraging

Americans trust their employers more than government

Q. How much trust do you have in each of the following to look out for the best interests of you and your family? (Net trust)



(Source: Axios/Ipsos Coronavirus Index conducted Mar. 20-23, 2020, and Dec. 4-7, 2020, among 998 and 1,101 U.S. adults, respectively.)

their employees to participate in the election process, if that encouragement is nonpartisan.

Support wanes for further political involvement, including lobbying or donating to key causes or issues — whether related to the business or not — and providing financial support to candidates or parties.

Interestingly, these results don't show as wide a political divide as we may have anticipated. The majority of Democrats, Republicans and Independents agree that companies and brands should encourage employees

to engage in the political process and provide paid time off to do so. At the same time, low support for lobbying and corporate financial donations spans the political spectrum.

While the long-term impact of voter fraud claims has yet to be seen, these results demonstrate that there is ample opportunity for brands and companies to engage and support the notion of free and fair elections in the U.S. where all eligible voters are encouraged to participate.

Jason McGrath is a senior vice president in Ipsos' Corporate Reputation service line.



Question: How can we make democracy work for all Americans?



Eddie Glaude, Jr.

Professor and chair of African American Studies, Princeton University

2x

is how much more Democrats compared to Republicans ranked equal treatment and protection under the law as the most important right in their life.

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.)

Eddie Glaude is one of America's leading intellectuals on democracy, religion and race.

He released his most recent books, including "Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul," just ahead of the 2016 and 2020 elections. They examine how racism contradicts and still thwarts the promise of democracy. When he thinks **What the Future**, Glaude sees a better America through achieving a multiracial democracy.

Kate MacArthur: How would you describe the state of American democracy today?

Eddie Glaude: Fragile, on a knife's edge, on life support.

MacArthur: Have you seen any signs or deeds that will help catapult us toward a more inclusive democracy?

Glaude: Absolutely. When we look at the protests in the middle of COVID-19, see the cross-section of Americans in the streets, think about the coalition that shaped and informed this past presidential election. When we look at the data around people and how



they're thinking about race and the economy, folks are clamoring for something different. The real hard work begins now. How will we imagine a new society where everyone is affirmed?

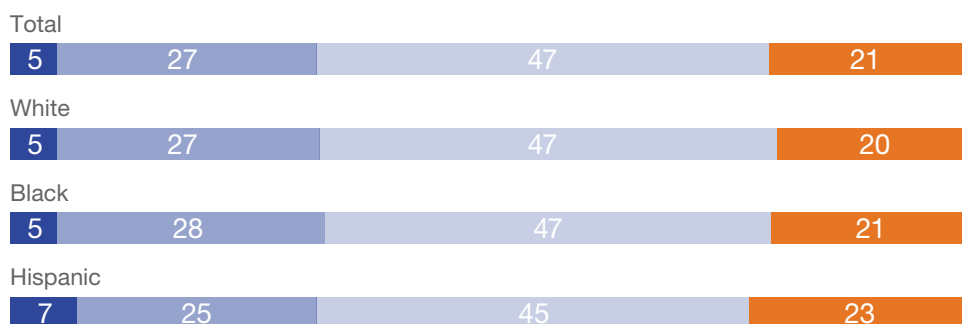
MacArthur: You've suggested a revolution of value around how we view government, how we view Black people (and ultimately the idea of white people) and what matters to us as Americans. What might that revolution look like?

Glaude: We finally have to leave behind this idea that white people ought to be valued more than others, and that's going to require us telling different stories. We saw this during the protests around George Floyd, as people attacked our public monuments, our Confederate monuments and the like.

In order to change what we value, we have to give voice to a different kind of moral and social contract. That we're not just simply about economics, where the only thing that matters is profit and material acquisition. That every American should have decent housing and a living wage, that we should all have access to quality healthcare and that moral contract actually evidences itself in how

How Americans feel represented by their elected officials

Q. In general, how many of the people in elected office today are like you?



■ A lot ■ Some ■ Only a few ■ None

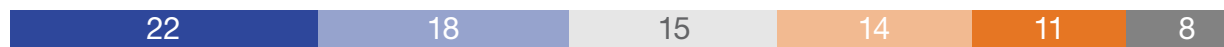
(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.)

“When we look at the data around people and how they’re thinking about race and the economy, folks are clamoring for something different. The real hard work begins now.”

Where Americans most differ on key rights

Q. From the following list, please rank the top three rights, in order of importance to your life.
(Rank 1 summary)

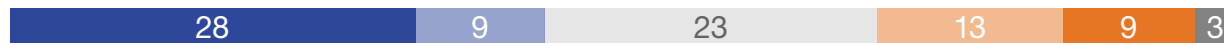
Total



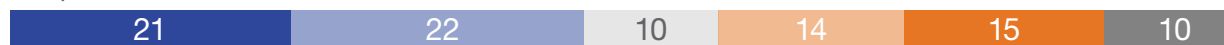
Republican



Democrat



Independent



■ To equal treatment and protection under the law ■ To practice a religion
■ To vote ■ To privacy ■ To be innocent until proven guilty ■ To own a weapon for protection

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults. Chart includes only items with an overall ranking #1 percentage above 6%.)

we budget. In other words, we budget our values, and we think about a transformational government. That's my ivory tower, utopian vision of a better America.

MacArthur: Can such a revolution be done peacefully?

Glaude: I pray that it can. It rarely has been. People tend to think of social arrangements as a zero-sum game. That if we're talking about a more just world, some people have to give up something in order for other people to live fuller lives, and folks don't want to give up anything. I'm not suggesting that it can't happen. In fact, I want to bank my all on a peaceful revolution of value. But I'm not naive.

MacArthur: Various experts have talked about needing to understand Latino and Hispanic voters more complexly. Yet some have said Black voters are easier to understand because they have a more singular racial experience in America. So how might these identity nuances shape our future?

Glaude: The short answer is this: If we root out racial bias in every aspect of our lives as best we can, then it seems to me that Black and Latinx communities, however complex they may be, will benefit immediately. And that's going to require us being honest about how white identity politics distorts our democracy.

You see how I flipped it? The problem isn't us. It's the other way around. Because when we think about how do we address the complexity of Latinx communities, how do we address the complexity of Black communities, the question I'm asking is what sort of hell are they catching and why? When we begin to dig deeper into that question, we'll see that there are reasons why advantages and disadvantages are being distributed in the way in which they are.

MacArthur: Do you think it's time for a new Constitution?

Glaude: I've never been asked that question, and honestly, my gut reaction is no. It may require a different kind of preamble. Not that we tinker with the details of governance, of the structure of government, but a preamble that states our values in a much clearer way, perhaps.

MacArthur: What would make a major difference going forward for people in that way?

Glaude: The one thing I don't want to do is to presume that I have the answer to that. I'm struggling like everyone else. If we begin to really value labor in this country and really address how race continues to hold the country back and really pursue a policy agenda that will

benefit all Americans — even those 74 million-plus people who disagree with a Biden administration — then we can begin to shift the frame. We're going to have to uproot the racist assumptions driving Reaganism in some ways. What that will look like policy-wise, I'm not sure yet. But I do know we have to break the frame.

MacArthur: How does capitalism fit into the democracy that you envision?

Glaude: Look, unbridled greed poses an existential threat to democratic life, period. My view is that any economic system that presupposes the necessity of disposable people is, by definition, wrong. It doesn't mean that I don't understand the importance of markets to improve the quality of life of everyday, ordinary folks. Part of what we have to do is understand that the moral and social contract that is needed in order to fix our broken society begins with the assumption that no human being is disposable. How we build an economic system that reflects that value is at the heart of my conception of democracy. And if we want to name it a kind of benign or moral capitalism, fine, but as long as it begins with that presupposition, then I'm on its side.

Kate MacArthur is deputy editor of What the Future and a senior writer at Ipsos in North America.

What we agree on in America's path forward

Do Republicans and Democrats agree on anything these days?

Against the backdrop of a presidential election that has been described as “a battle for the soul of the nation” and a global pandemic where masks have become a political fault line, it’s understandable to wonder if democracy can survive in our hyper-partisan society.

For the past few years, Ipsos has studied the underlying trends contributing to this uncertainty, including the role of increased tribalism. More recently, however, we have begun to look for areas of agreement among the American public.

Our inaugural Public Agenda/USA Today/Ipsos Hidden Common Ground survey found that nearly three-quarters of Americans believe there is more common ground among the American people than the news media and political leaders portray. While the desire for common ground is there in theory, are there concrete policies where Americans align?

In a word, yes. Subsequent Hidden Common Ground surveys have found that when it comes to policy proposals on everything from economic opportunity to healthcare to climate change, there is significant cross-partisan support. As the example in the chart shows, we see common ground when policies are stripped of partisan rhetoric or messengers.

Take messaging around healthcare. Asking about “Medicare for All” elicits a highly partisan response; most Democrats support it, while a majority of Republicans oppose it. The same thing is true — in reverse — for calls to “repeal and replace” the Affordable Care Act. Yet, when asked about the principles behind healthcare reform — making sure all Americans have coverage, that people with pre-existing conditions can get affordable insurance and that lower-income people have the same quality of basic care — a strong majority of Democrats and Republicans view these concepts as important. While there are often partisan differences in the solutions, we can’t solve important issues if we get derailed on the highly charged rhetoric.

Therefore, for those looking to build lasting social cohesion, there is a clear path forward: Focus on the principles or policies themselves, not the buzzwords.

Mallory Newall is a research director in Ipsos’ Public Affairs service line.

Consensus on specific policies shows areas for common ground

Q. Would you support or not support the following federal and state actions aimed at creating more good quality jobs in the United States? (Total support summary)

Creating incentives that encourage American businesses to bring good quality jobs that they moved overseas back to the United States



Creating retraining programs through community colleges and trade schools that give adults skills to compete for quality jobs in emerging industries



Providing tax breaks to businesses that create good quality jobs in American communities that need them



Upgrading public infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, to create good jobs and make the economy more productive



Making affordable, high-quality childcare available to all families



Funding research in industries like technology, science, and green energy to create good quality jobs



Raising the minimum wage so that every full-time job provides enough income to keep people above the poverty line

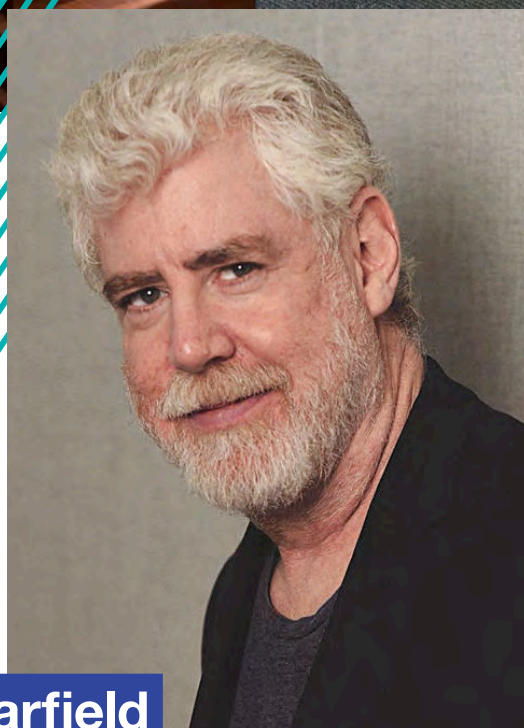


■ Republican ■ Democrat

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted between Aug. 28-31, 2020, on behalf of Public Agenda and USA Today, among 1,114 U.S. adults.)



Question: Can media still cover politics without being political?



Bob Garfield

Host, “On the Media,” NPR

Bob Garfield’s career contains multitudes.

He’s written books, he hosts NPR’s “On the Media,” he’s been an advertising critic (disclosure: I worked with him at Ad Age), he’s a playwright and now he’s written a manifesto: “American Manifesto: Saving Democracy from Villains, Vandals, and Ourselves.” When he thinks **What the Future**, he’s looking to get people re-engaged with democracy.

90%

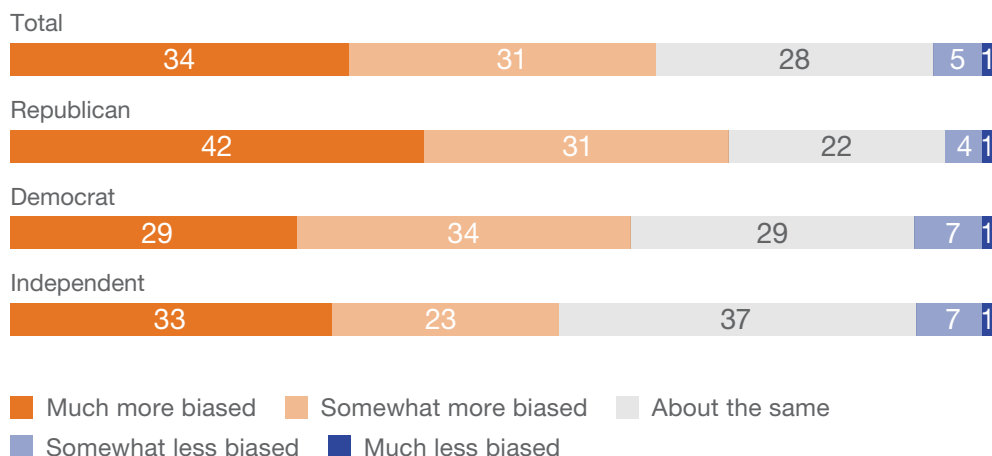
of Americans say that a democracy is a good way of governing the country.

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.)



Most Americans say government institutions are more biased today

Q. Do you feel that government institutions (such as the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Postal Service and the Centers for Disease Control) are more or less politically biased than they were 10 years ago?



(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.)

Matt Carmichael: Your manifesto came out in early 2020. Do you feel more or less hopeful than you did when you wrote this?

Bob Garfield: Well, we're having this conversation either two weeks after Trump lost the presidency or the same day depending on when you consider the matter settled. In the sense that a depraved sociopath who has done irreparable damage to American democracy and the nation's psyche lost, I guess we're better off in America than we were on November 1st. But it's not like he's going away. It's not like Trumpism is going away. It's not like conspiracy obsession is going away. I would say I am marginally less desperate than I was two weeks ago, but you'd need a magnifying glass to see the margins.

Carmichael: You're in the media. When you say things, how do you avoid accusations of bias?

Garfield: People will say, "Listen to him, he's biased." If you're covering a baseball game and the slugger strikes out five times with the bases loaded and you report that, that is not evidence of your anti-slugger bias, it is an objective reporting of failure. I'm going to say this as plainly as I can.

I am not a member of the Democratic Party and I haven't been for more than 40 years. I'm not a big fan of the Democratic Party, but I believe that the Republican Party has mutated into something genuinely malignant and it has not happened by accident and it has not happened suddenly, and it has not happened in response to an equal and opposite depravity on the political left.

Carmichael: You write that the values of journalism and the values of liberalism overlap. What did you mean by that?

Garfield: What are the values of journalism? Speaking truth to power; shining the light into the dark crevices of government; afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted; watch-dogging the people who are supposedly the stewards of our democracy and of our money; generally documenting the conduct of our leaders and holding them accountable. These are the fundamental aspects of liberalism or progressivism. It's not an ideology, it's a mindset. It's absolutely not political. It is simply about accountability and curiosity, and responsibility to be a proxy for the public.

It's one thing to spout doctrine or ideology. And it's another thing to document statements, history, empirical evidence and data and to do so from a critical distance. And if that data, if the testimony of experts and eyewitnesses, if the empirical evidence, if the actual conduct of our leaders is indicting, that is not evidence of journalistic bias, it's evidence that someone struck out five times with the bases loaded.

Carmichael: Do you think if we still had just three TV networks, two local daily papers, plus, say, Time, Newsweek and the Wall Street Journal as our media landscape, that we would be where we are today?

Garfield: The internet was supposed to cure us of all of that media hegemony. It was supposed to broaden the very narrow perspective which we were permitted to hear and consider. We did not get all of the bandwidth that we would have absent these very minimum number of gatekeepers. But as it turned out, social media took the problem of information hegemony and made it much, much, much, much worse. People are exposed to much, much, much, much less variety of content and ideas than they used to be when we had mere media concentration.

Carmichael: There's been a pretty broad attack on the very bedrock institutions of our democracy, not just the media, but even in terms of casting doubt on the integrity of our entire election process. Does that trouble you?

Garfield: Well, in the sense of breaking my heart and terrifying me and infuriating me, yes. In any event, what Trump and Trumpism have laid bare is that we, as a society, are not exceptional. It can happen here, and we are as vulnerable to nationalism and racism and anti-intellectual realism and stupidity and mindless cultural war as any society. It's time to stop being self-congratulatory about the American way, because lo and behold, the American way is a mess.

Carmichael: As we see in our data and where one of our research partners focuses, there is much “hidden common ground,” (see page 15) but sometimes it feels awfully hidden. Do you think we're truly as divided as we seem?

Garfield: I do. Yeah. I mean, look, there's hidden common ground. I would argue that it's really not hidden because the common ground resides mostly in the signage along commercial highways. We all go to McDonald's. We all go to Muffler King. We all follow the same general pool of pop culture. Ninety-plus percent of us are in the same top four religions. And so as a cultural entity, we have a great deal in common. Unfortunately, that defines us more than core values at this stage. One of the big problems we had when we set about on the Purple Project [a nonpartisan group he founded focused on engagement in the democratic process] was to re-inspire Americans to lean into our core values, the bedrock principles that are the fundamentals of American democracy. We discovered that they weren't so bedrock after all, that there was a lot of shifting sand.

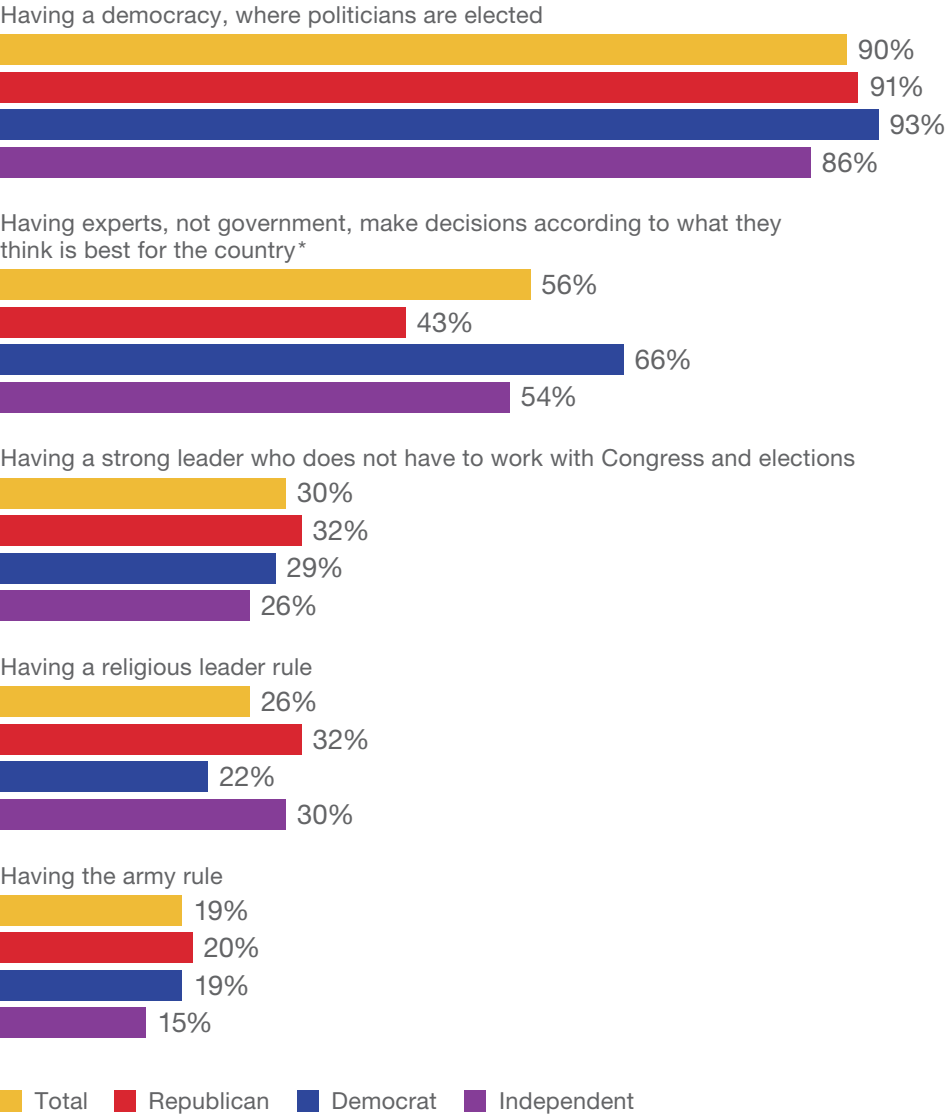
Carmichael: Such as?

Garfield: For example, we thought that the Statue of Liberty was an uncontroversial symbol for everything we stand for. Nope. We thought voting — the fundamental expression of our democratic system — was non-negotiable and that everybody agreed that we want all Americans to vote. Nope, absolutely not. If we can't even agree on the vote and on the Statue of Liberty, tell me again where all that hidden common ground is.

Matt Carmichael is editor of What the Future and vice president of editorial strategy at Ipsos in North America.

Americans overwhelmingly prefer democracy, but some see promise in other governing forms

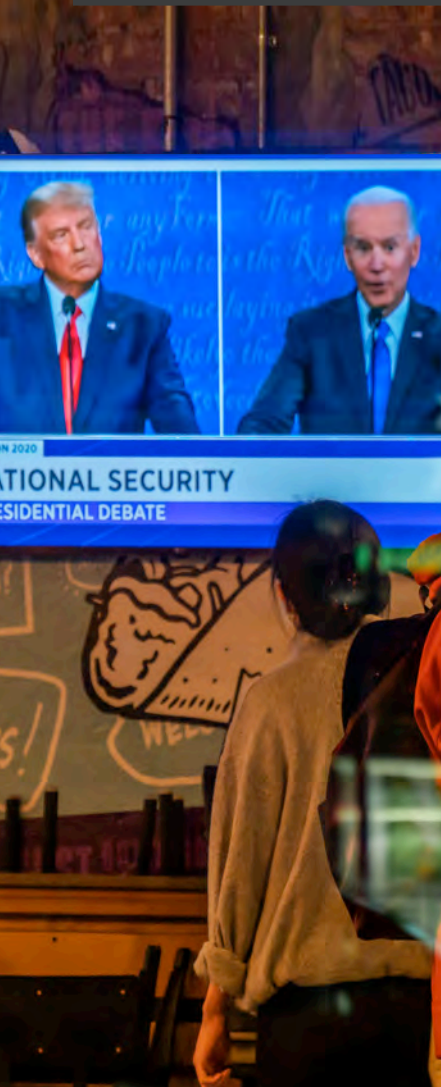
Q. For each of the various types of political systems below, please indicate how you feel about each as a way of governing this country. (Net good way of governing the country)



(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Dec. 1-2, 2020, among 1,159 U.S. adults.
*Corrects a typographical error that was made in the questionnaire.)

“If you’re covering a baseball game and the slugger strikes out five times with the bases loaded and you report that, that is not evidence of your anti-slugger bias, it is an objective reporting of failure.”

We can't fix democracy if we can't even agree what's broken



With the election of Joe Biden and the failure of President Trump's efforts to overturn the results, many observers are saying America's democracy is saved.

However, many of the ills that led to this moment of crisis are still with us. Deep partisan polarization has certainly not disappeared. No, American democracy is not saved. It's just on life support. And the increasingly alternate realities occupied by some citizens is the central malady suffered by the body politic.

Indeed, the push and pull of ideology and policy is healthy for a pluralistic society looking for solutions to complex problems. But increasingly, partisans differ on their beliefs about basic facts. With no shared understanding of reality, it is increasingly difficult to get Americans to agree on anything.

Willingness to believe "alternative facts" exists to some degree along the political spectrum. And an increasingly polarized news media, especially on cable TV, radio and the internet, is not helping matters.

For instance, in mid-November, our Reuters/Ipsos poll found that over half of Republicans still believed that Donald Trump rightfully won the election. Among Republicans who mainly get their news from Fox News or other conservative outlets, that number climbs to almost two-thirds. Only a third of Republicans who get their news from other broadcast outlets believe Trump rightfully won.

Similar numbers believed that Biden only won through massive fraud and illegal voting.

And beyond politics, these alternate realities have played havoc during the coronavirus pandemic. In September, during the heat of the campaign, two-thirds of Republicans and three-quarters of Fox News-watching Republicans believed official coronavirus death statistics inflated the actual toll of the pandemic.

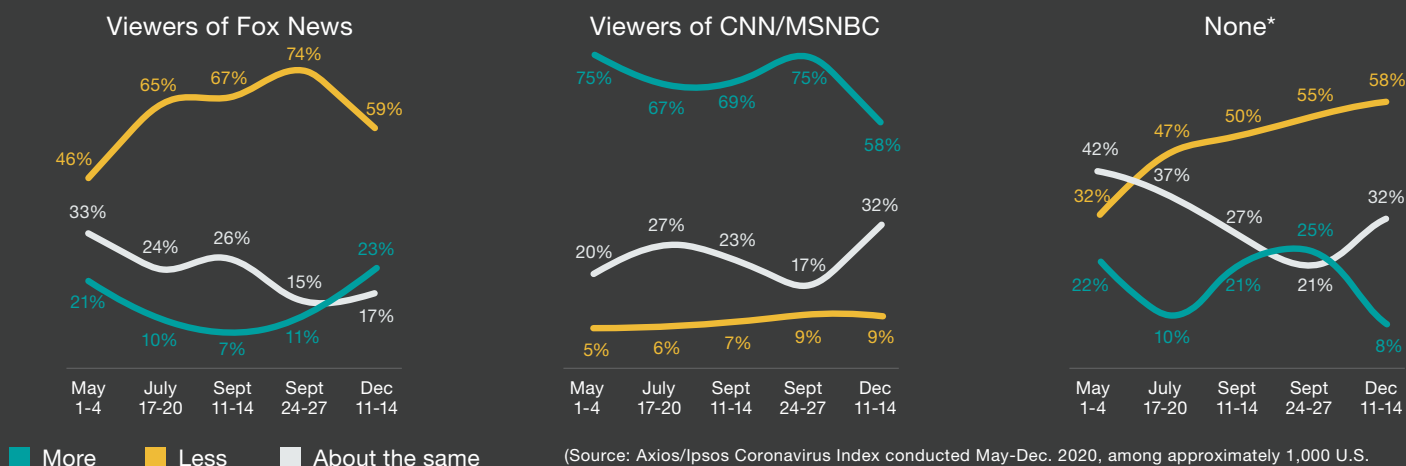
These alternate realities have real-world implications. People who believe the death statistics are inflated are less likely to wear a mask and more likely to spend time with other people, potentially spreading the coronavirus.

One positive trend is that as Trump focused on the election and stopped talking about the pandemic, the number of Republicans who believed the official statistics are inflated fell from two-thirds to just over half. This suggests that without the constant reinforcing of these alternate realities, they may start to deflate over time. However, that still leaves America profoundly divided with no clear shared path forward.

Chris Jackson is a senior vice president in Ipsos' Public Affairs service line.

Evolving conceptions about reality of COVID-19 death toll, by primary source of news

Q. Do you believe the actual number of Americans dying from the coronavirus is more, less, or about the same as the number of deaths that have been reported?



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GAME CHANGERS

