

What Opinion Polls Tell Us about Americans

Americans lean left, even if they don't know it

By Peter Montague

“The American public is in the mood [for “big government.”](#) According to the distinguished political scientist James Stimson’s “[Public Policy Mood estimate](#)” — a widely respected tool for measuring shifts in ideological opinion across time — the U.S. electorate is more sympathetic to left-wing economic policy today than at anytime in the past 68 years (which is as far back as Stimson’s data goes).” (*NY Magazine*, June 2018) <https://nym.ag/33tWLbP>

Most American are liberals even if they don't cop to it

See the following polling data cited by Peter Dreier in *The American Prospect* Nov. 10, 2017: <https://bit.ly/37g1X49>

The Economy

- 82 percent of Americans think wealthy people have too much power and influence in Washington.
- 69 percent think large businesses have too much power and influence in Washington.
- 59 percent—and 72 percent of likely voters—think Wall Street has too much power and influence in Washington.
- 78 percent of likely voters support stronger rules and enforcement on the financial industry.
- 65 percent of Americans think our economic system “unfairly favors powerful interests.”
- 59 percent of Americans—and 43 percent of Republicans—think corporations make “too much profit.”

Inequality

- 82 percent of Americans think economic inequality is a “very big” (48 percent) or “moderately big” (34 percent) problem. Even 69 percent of Republicans share this view.
- 66 percent of Americans think money and wealth should be distributed more evenly.

- 72 percent of Americans say it is “extremely” or “very” important, and 23 percent say it is “somewhat important,” to reduce poverty.
- 59 percent of registered voters—and 51 percent of Republicans—favor raising the maximum amount that low-wage workers can make and still be eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, from \$14,820 to \$18,000.

Money in Politics

- 96 percent of Americans—including 96 percent of Republicans—believe money in politics is to blame for the dysfunction of the U.S. political system.
- 84 percent of Americans—including 80 percent of Republicans—believe money has too much influence in politics.
- 78 percent of Americans say we need sweeping new laws to reduce the influence of money in politics.
- 73 percent of registered voters have an unfavorable opinion of the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision.

Taxes

- 80 percent of Americans think some corporations don’t pay their fair share of taxes.
- 78 percent think some wealthy people don’t pay their fair share of taxes.
- 76 percent believe the wealthiest Americans should pay higher taxes.
- 60 percent of registered voters believe corporations pay too little in taxes.
- 87 percent of Americans say it is critical to preserve Social Security, even if it means increasing Social Security taxes paid by wealthy Americans.
- 67 percent of Americans support lifting the cap to require higher-income workers to pay Social Security taxes on all of their wages.

Minimum Wage

- 66 percent of Americans favor raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour.
- 59 percent favor raising the federal minimum wage to \$12 an hour.
- 48 percent support raising the national minimum wage to \$15 an hour. (A survey of registered voters found that 54 percent favored a \$15 minimum wage.)
- 63 percent of registered voters think the minimum wage should be adjusted each year by the rate of inflation.

Workers' Rights

- 61 percent of Americans—including 42 percent of Republicans—approve of labor unions.
- 74 percent of registered voters—including 71 percent of Republicans—support requiring employers to offer paid parental and medical leave.
- 78 percent of likely voters favor establishing a national fund that offers all workers 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave.

Health Care

- 60 percent of Americans believe “it is the federal government’s responsibility to make sure all Americans have healthcare coverage.”
- 60 percent of registered voters favor “expanding Medicare to provide health insurance to every American.”
- 58 percent of the public favors replacing Obamacare with “a federally funded healthcare program providing insurance for all Americans.”
- 64 percent of registered voters favor their state accepting the Obamacare plan for expanding Medicaid in their state.

Education

- 63 percent of registered voters—including 47 percent of Republicans—of Americans favor making four-year public colleges and universities tuition-free.
- 59 percent of Americans favor free early-childhood education.

Climate Change and the Environment

- 76 percent of voters are “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about climate change.
- 68 percent of voters think it is possible to protect the environment and protect jobs.
- 72 percent of voters think it is a “bad idea” to cut funding for scientific research on the environment and climate change.
- 59 percent of voters say more needs to be done to address climate change.

Gun Safety

- 84 percent of Americans support requiring background checks for all gun buyers.
- 77 percent of gun owners support requiring background checks for all gun buyers.

Criminal Justice

- 57 percent of Americans believe police officers generally treat blacks and other minorities differently than they treat whites.
- 60 percent of Americans believe the recent killings of black men by police are part of a broader pattern of how police treat black Americans (compared with 39 percent who believe they are isolated incidents).

Immigration

- 68 percent of Americans—including 48 percent of Republicans—believe the country’s openness to people from around the world “is essential to who we are as a nation.” Just 29 percent say that “if America is too open to people from all over the world, we risk losing our identity as a nation.”
- 65 percent of Americans—including 42 percent of Republicans—say immigrants strengthen the country “because of their hard work and talents.” Just 26 percent say immigrants are a burden “because they take our jobs, housing and health care.”
- 64 percent of Americans think an increasing number of people from different races, ethnic groups, and nationalities makes the country a better place to live. Only 5 percent say it makes the United States a worse place to live, and 29 percent say it makes no difference.
- 76 percent of registered voters—including 69 percent of Republicans—support allowing undocumented immigrants brought to the country as children (Dreamers) to stay in the country. 58 percent think Dreamers should be allowed to stay and become citizens if they meet certain requirements. Another 18 percent think they should be allowed to stay and become legal residents, but not citizens. Only 15 percent think they should be removed or deported from the country.

Abortion and Women's Health

- 58 percent of Americans believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases.
- 68 percent of Americans—including 54 percent of Republicans—support the requirement for private health insurance plans to cover the full cost of birth control.

Same-Sex Marriage

- 62 percent of Americans—including 70 percent of independents and 40 percent of Republicans—support same-sex marriage.
- 74 percent of millennials (born after 1981) support same-sex marriage.

Majority favors free college & eliminating student debt

A hefty majority (58%) favors free college and trade-school tuition, *and* elimination of student debt. <https://bit.ly/2KQsai9>

A large majority wants higher taxes on the rich

From *Forbes* July 23, 2019: In 1965, America's top 1% controlled about 10% of the nation's after-tax income. That number has now grown to over 15%. The average CEO-to-worker pay ratio has increased from 20-1 in 1965 to a whopping 312-1 in 2017. And middle-class real wage growth has been stagnant for decades. For better or worse, this trend shows no signs of slowing down. And, as the fissure grows wider, it is increasingly important to understand citizens' attitudes toward the wealth gap in America — or at least that is the claim made in [a new study](#) led by Professor Alain Cohn at the University of Michigan.

Comparing the responses of America's economic elite to the rest of the country, the researchers first found (not surprisingly) that the wealthiest 5% preferred a reduction in the top income tax rate while the bottom 95% [thought that it should be raised](#).

A Large majority favors a wealth tax

A new [Reuters/Ipsos poll](#) (Jan. 11, 2020) finds 64% of Americans strongly or somewhat agreed that “the very rich should contribute an extra share of their total wealth each year to support public programs” – the essence of a wealth tax.

Results were similar across gender, race and household income. While support among Democrats was stronger, at 77%, a majority of Republicans, 53%, also agreed with the idea. <https://bit.ly/36eiRkm>

In December 2019 a Fox News poll found that Sen. Elizabeth Warren's (D-Mass.) wealth tax got the biggest backing, with 68 percent of poll-takers saying they favored the proposal, 45 percent of them strongly. Trump's promise to build a wall along the U.S.–Mexico border meanwhile got 44 percent support, with 52 percent voicing their opposition. <https://bit.ly/2VjLW7r>

Overturing Roe v. wade is unpopular

A NY Times/Sienna poll in September 2020 found that 56% of those polled said they would be less likely to vote for Trump if his Supreme Court nominee would overturn Roe v. Wade. And 56% said they would prefer for the winner of the November election to nominate a replacement for Justice Ginsburg.

<https://nyti.ms/33t2fDI>

As of 2019, [public support for legal abortion](#) remains as high as it has been in two decades of polling. Currently, 61% say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 38% say it should be illegal in all or most cases.

<https://pewrsr.ch/37i75EH>

Americans favor mandatory mask-wearing

74% of 2,200 Americans say they “always” wear a mask when leaving home, according to an Oct. 5 2020 poll by National Geographic. (Up from 60% who gave the same answer in July.) <https://bit.ly/3o32nl5>

In July, 2020 an AP-NORC poll of 1,057 adults found that 75% favor requiring masks for anyone leaving home. <https://bit.ly/2KSjasZ>

Confidence in police varies based on race

In August, a Gallup survey of 1228 adults found that only 48% of adults express confidence in the police, though Republicans' confidence in the police was 82 percent. Democrats' faith in law enforcement dropped six points, to 28 percent. express confidence in the criminal justice system," Mr. Younis said. "One of the starkest metrics in this year's poll is that 11 percent of Black Americans express confidence in the criminal justice system," Mr. Younis said. "That means nine out of 10 Black Americans in this country do not have confidence in a process built on the theory that all citizens are equal before the law."

The survey found that 56 percent of white adults said they were confident in the police, whereas only 19 percent of Black adults said the same. That 37-point gap is larger than it has been historically, according to Gallup, which also found a divide in Americans' trust in the criminal justice system. <https://nyti.ms/2ValEM6>

Strong support for Black Lives Matter

In June, Pew Research found that the Black Lives Matter movement, [which is back in the headlines amid the nationwide protests](#), receives wide support. Two-thirds of U.S. adults say they support the movement, with 38% saying they strongly support it. This sentiment is particularly strong among black Americans, although majorities of white (60%), Hispanic (77%) and Asian (75%) Americans express at least some support.

A majority of Americans (55%) see protests and rallies as a very or somewhat effective tactic for groups and organizations that work to help black people achieve equality, but just 19% say this is a very effective tool. More say working directly with black people to solve problems in their local communities (82%), bringing people of different racial backgrounds together to talk about race (74%), and working to get more black people elected to office (68%) would be at least somewhat effective tactics. <https://pewrsr.ch/39svRon>

Strong support for reducing drug prices

Mar, 2018: The March Kaiser Health Tracking Poll finds that more than a year into President Trump's presidency, half of the public (52 percent) say passing legislation to bring down the price of prescription drugs should be a "top priority" for President Trump and Congress.

Wall Street has too much power in Washington

Pharmaceutical companies rank among the top organizations that the public – including majorities of Democrats, independents, and Republicans – say has “too much influence” in Washington. Seven in ten (72 percent) say pharmaceutical companies have “too much influence,” which is similar to other entities like large businesses and Wall Street, but much higher than the shares of the public who say the National Rifle Association (NRA), hospital groups, or doctors groups have “too much influence” (52 percent, 36 percent, 30 percent, respectively).

Large majority favors Medicare for All

This month’s Kaiser Health Tracking Poll finds six in ten (59 percent) favor a national health plan, or Medicare-for-all, in which all Americans would get their insurance from a single government plan – including a majority of both Democrats and independents and about one-third of Republicans. Support for such a proposal increases among the overall public (75 percent) and among partisans (87 percent of Democrats, 74 percent of independents, and 64 percent of Republicans) when framed as an option for anyone who wants it, but people who currently have other forms of coverage can keep the coverage they already have. It is unclear how support would fare if these proposals became part of the larger public debate as previous KFF polling has found the public’s attitudes can be quite malleable.

<https://bit.ly/39pRpSr>

Biden Beats Bernie Among Blacks

A new [Washington Post/IPSOS poll](#) (in January 2020) gives Biden a seemingly unassailable lead with black voters, 48% to 20% for Sanders. No other candidate, including Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren (9%), former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg and New Jersey senator Cory Booker (both 4%), returned better than single-digit support.

The poll showed that Sanders was most popular with black voters under 35, with 42% to Biden’s 30%, mirroring the Vermont senator’s standing with young white voters in other recent nationwide polling.

But Biden regains a sharp advantage in the 35-to-49 age group (41%-16%), and among voters older than 65 there is no contest: Biden enjoys 68% popularity, with second-placed Sanders floundering at 8%. <https://bit.ly/36fpH8Z>

Large majority see “too much inequality” in U.S.

A majority of American adults — 61%— said there was "too much" income inequality in the United States, according to Pew (in January 2020)

<https://bit.ly/3mhwrZN>

Large majority would require solar panels on new housing

Late last year, California became the first state in the U.S. to introduce a policy requiring [rooftop solar](#) to be installed on all new homes. The mandate will go into effect next year.

In a nationally representative poll of 2,000 people, 70% said that they would support a version of California's rooftop solar policy being mandated nationwide.

<https://bit.ly/39pS5aC>

David Leonhardt in NY Times: They [the Democrats] need a candidate who will organize the 2020 campaign around fighting for the little guy and gal. (And most of the potential Democratic nominees could do so.) It would be a campaign about Republican politicians and corporate lobbyists who are rigging the game, a campaign that promised good jobs, rising wages, decent health care, affordable education and an end to Trumpian corruption.

The country doesn't only [need this agenda](#). It wants this agenda. A mountain of evidence shows that populism — the real kind, not the faux Trump version — is the Democrats' most effective political strategy. Yet that evidence often gets obscured by less important issues, like a candidate's race, sex or precise spot on a traditional liberal-conservative spectrum. <https://nyti.ms/2VfeKOK>

Very large majority says not enough has been done for Blacks

Pew Research, October, 2020: Among Democrats and Democratic leaners, 78% say the country hasn't gone far enough when it comes to Black people having equal rights with White people, up from 66% in 2019. In contrast, just 17% of Republicans and those who lean to the GOP say this, similar to the share that did so last year (18%). <https://pewrsr.ch/2KQ1YEj>

Six out of 10 women see themselves as feminists

Pew Research July 7, 2020: 61% of U.S. women say 'feminist' describes them well; many see feminism as empowering, polarizing <https://pewrsr.ch/2Jl09P8>

Majority says U.S. Democracy Needs Fixing

Pew Research April 26, 2018: The perceived shortcomings encompass some of the core elements of American democracy. An overwhelming share of the public (84%) says it is very important that “the rights and freedoms of all people are respected.” Yet just 47% say this describes the country very or somewhat well; slightly more (53%) say it does not.

In general, however, there is a striking mismatch between the public’s goals for American democracy and its views of whether they are being fulfilled. On 23 specific measures assessing democracy, the political system and elections in the United States – each widely regarded by the public as very important – there are only eight on which majorities say the country is doing even somewhat well.

Huge majority supports controls on money-in-politics

Cynicism about money and politics. Most Americans think that those who donate a lot of money to elected officials have more political influence than others. An overwhelming majority (77%) supports limits on the amount of money individuals and organizations can spend on political campaigns and issues. And nearly two-thirds of Americans (65%) say new laws could be effective in reducing the role of money in politics.

No more than about a third in either party say elected officials who engage in misconduct face serious consequences or that government “conducts its work openly and transparently.” Comparably small shares in both parties (28% of Republicans, 25% of Democrats) say the following sentence describes the country well: “People who give a lot of money to elected officials do not have more political influence than other people.”

Huge majority favors affordable housing for everyone

Washington, DC – Today, the *Opportunity Starts at Home* campaign released the results of a national public opinion poll that it recently commissioned through Hart Research Associates. The vast majority of the public (85%) believes that ensuring everyone has a safe, decent, affordable place to live should be a “top national priority.” This view is strong across the political spectrum – from 95% of Democrats agreeing it should be a top national priority to 87% of independents to 73% of Republicans. Eight in ten also say that both the president and Congress should “take major action” to make housing more affordable for low-income households. <https://bit.ly/3lj7TOS>