



Engagious

FPG Focus Pointe
Global

SWING VOTER PROJECT (SVP)

REPORT FOR APRIL 2020

CANTON, OHIO – ONLINE FOCUS GROUP

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH:

Engagious conducted two online focus groups with a total of 10 swing voters from Canton, OH on April 21st, all of whom voted for President Obama in 2012 and then President Trump in 2016. Each group contained five respondents. We explored questions and topics surrounding the president, Joe Biden, and the coronavirus.

DISCLAIMER:

The key findings in this report are based upon the opinions and feedback from 10 swing voters in one location. They do not represent the views of all swing voters.

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Example: "30% of female respondents disagreed with the Medicare statement" (according to research conducted by Engagious/FPG).





1

CANTON SWING VOTERS LOVE THEIR GOVERNOR'S APPROACH TO HANDLING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS, AND THEY BELIEVE PRESIDENT TRUMP COULD LEARN FROM HIM.

Respondents rated how strongly they approve or disapprove of Governor DeWine's handling of the coronavirus situation, scoring it 9.5/10 (from "strongly disapprove" to "strongly approve"). They have been really impressed with how he has handled this situation, praising him for taking the problem seriously early-on, being insightful, being decisive, shutting down businesses and schools, having a good team, having patience, and being apolitical with his announcements of coronavirus updates.

These swing voters believe President Trump could learn from Governor DeWine about how to handle the coronavirus situation. They suggested President Trump:

- Listen to health experts
- Keep people at home with a nationwide stay-at-home order, rather than leaving it up to the states
- Seek to unite the country by being less political with the coronavirus because this is a time we should be coming together
- Use a filter to distinguish between his hopes and reality (e.g., his timelines for reopening the economy and getting everyone back to work)

2

DESPITE PRESIDENT TRUMP'S LACKLUSTER INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS THREAT, MOST CANTON SWING VOTERS WOULD STICK WITH HIM, EVEN IF WE'RE STILL IN RECESSION IN NOVEMBER.

Swing voters somewhat agree President Trump's initial response to the coronavirus threat made it harder to contain the virus, scoring it at 6.4/10 on a zero-to-10 scale of agreement.

Despite this, they now approve fairly strongly of his handling of the coronavirus situation, scoring it 7.2/10 (from "strongly disapprove" to "strongly approve").

In advance of the sessions, respondents viewed a 30-second ad from President Trump where he criticizes Joe Biden for his support of a "rising China," and argues that China must be stopped. This was followed by a nearly two-minute rebuttal ad from Joe Biden, where he criticizes President Trump's response to the coronavirus. These ads didn't do very much to change their view of either candidate. Their general view was they were hearing partial truths, taken out of context, and they feel they should conduct their own research from "reliable sources" to draw conclusions about what they heard, if they haven't already.

Respondents told us President Trump is listening to the experts and we are doing pretty well as a country given the "Armageddon scenario" that was initially laid out. He is doing a "good job" setting guidelines and letting governors take control and make decisions that would work best for their state. The coronavirus situation is new to him, and they generally believe he is doing the best he can.

It's notable that although they generally approve of how President Trump has handled the coronavirus situation, their confidence in his leadership has taken a hit compared to three months ago, with half saying they are "less confident" or "not confident" now:

	<u># Swing Voters</u>
You were confident in President Trump's leadership then, and you're still confident now	4
You were confident in President Trump's leadership then, but you're less confident now	3
You were not confident in President Trump's leadership then, but you're more confident now	1
You were not confident in President Trump's leadership then, and you're still not confident now	2



Those who are “less confident” or “not confident” in President Trump pointed to their belief that he didn’t take the coronavirus seriously initially, our country’s lack of preparedness (including the lack of PPE for medical personnel), his ego, his lack of clarity, and his statement about it being a “Chinese disease.”

Even so, most aren’t ready to punish him at the ballot box, at least not yet. If the presidential election were held tomorrow, seven of 10 would choose President Trump over Joe Biden.

Those who would stick with President Trump told us:

- He has shown he’s a proven leader – he’s done everything he said he would do
- He has a business mentality and has shown his ability to negotiate
- Everyone is against what he’s doing, and he needs more time to show us he can improve the economy
- He’s not a politician – and he has no filter
- Biden is a “terrible” candidate who is “all over the place” with his beliefs (instilling no confidence in them), and he won’t be able to make decisions.
- There is concern about Biden’s age

Swing voters who would vote for Joe Biden commented:

- President Trump puts his ego first
- Biden is “no nonsense” and he has been there before as vice-president
- Biden was vice-president during the last virus outbreak and maybe he learned some things that can help our country

Overall, they are fairly confident President Trump will win. If they were placing a \$100 bet on the outcome of the election, they would say their confidence that President Trump will win is 7.3/10 (from “You are totally confident Joe Biden will win” to “You are totally confident President Trump will win”).

Despite the negative impacts they have experienced from the coronavirus, eight of our swing voters say they are better off now than they were four years ago. They cited:

- Buying a house
- Getting a better job
- Making more money
- Paying off the mortgage
- Completing a college degree
- Being better off financially
- The ability of her husband to own his business
- Paying off credit card debt
- Moving out of her parents’ home



Even if economic activity continues to stall, we're in a bad recession, and millions remain unemployed on Election Day, most wouldn't hold that against President Trump. Respondents told us his decisions are based on expert advice, and if the economy is still shutdown months from now, that's probably what needs to be happening to keep us safe and to slow the spread of the virus. President Trump has no control over the financial impact of the virus, in their view, and it's impacting many countries around the world, not just our country.

Among the three swing voters who would support Biden, only one would strongly consider voting for President Trump if the coronavirus situation were handled well and the economy and the stock market came roaring back before the election. The two who would not vote for him again told us there are reasons other than his handling of the coronavirus for their decision.

In both groups, we heard that Joe Biden should pick Michelle Obama as his vice-president, although that wouldn't really impact their voting decision. Two respondents cited Tulsi Gabbard as a good choice, citing her government experience, her insights, and her willingness to work "across the aisle." In our first group, respondents criticized Biden's commitment to choosing a female vice-president as "sexist," arguing he should just choose the most capable person.



3

THE CORONAVIRUS HAS NEGATIVELY IMPACTED CANTON SWING VOTERS' LIVES IN A NUMBER OF WAYS, BUT THERE'S NO CONSENSUS ABOUT WHETHER THEY'RE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR HEALTH OR FINANCES.

Respondents told us how their lives have changed over the past two months. They listed:

- They can't see their family members, including parents, siblings, and grandchildren
- Fear of leaving their home – they don't know where the “hidden enemy” is
- Financial strain from having work hours reduced
- Lost her job – now on unemployment
- Having to screen everything coming into their home
- They're spending less money because they can't go out to spend it

Emotions they have felt over the past week include: frustration (3), scared (2), anxious/stressed (2), depressed (1), uncertain (1), and lonely (1). They are trying to maintain some sense of normalcy by using technology to stay in touch with family and friends, including FaceTime, Zoom, the Houseparty app, Facebook Messenger, and phone calls.

They are acutely aware of what's been going on with the coronavirus, with nine of our 10 respondents watching all or part of the coronavirus-related press briefings on some or most days, while only one respondent “never” or “rarely” watches them.

They have a high level of confidence in health experts, scoring this 7.5/10 (from “no confidence” to “a lot of confidence”), and they want to hear from them. During the coronavirus-related press briefings, they most want to hear from Dr. Anthony Fauci (6) and Dr. Deborah Birx (2), with President Trump and Vice President Pence only garnering one vote each.

All 10 of our swing voters believe “the coronavirus situation has demonstrated the life-saving value of relying on scientific experts to guide public policy,” rather than, “the coronavirus situation has demonstrated the economic danger of relying on scientific experts to guide public policy.”

If health experts advised Governor DeWine to keep most businesses and all schools closed for another 30 days to help combat the coronavirus, nine of 10 of our swing voters would support that move.

Respondents were evenly split – five to five – over what worries them more over the next few months: their financial health or their physical health. Those who told us they're more worried about their financial health said they know a lot of people being laid off. Those concerned about their physical health told us they are immunocompromised or are high-risk, given their age. Also, we heard some people say they are more concerned about their personal financial health, while they are also very concerned about their family's physical health (but not their own).

4

CANTON SWING VOTERS EXPECT A ROLLING REOPENING OF THE ECONOMY IN THE COMING WEEKS OR MONTHS, BUT THEY PERSONALLY WON'T RUSH BACK INTO IT.

With their state government issuing orders to close schools and many businesses across Ohio, respondents realistically expect the orders on businesses to be lifted – perhaps starting with a slow rollout – as early as May 1st and as late as August 1st.¹ With the date of the focus groups being April 21st, respondents told us the date they would feel comfortable going to restaurants, bars, or movie theaters again. While some are willing to go back next month, at least half would wait until August or September to return to those venues.²

Some indicated they would want several conditions to be in place for them to feel comfortable doing those activities, including:

- Guidelines, monitoring, and training for staff so they know which safety protocols they need to follow to keep their venues clean, allowing people to become “corona-certified”
- Restrictions on the number of people who can assemble in a given venue at one time (i.e., all for social distancing)
- Government standards for sanitation and serving food properly
- Medical experts would need to give them the “green light” to do so
- COVID-19 case numbers would have to go down

These swing voters would be OK with having their temperature taken before going into a restaurant. There was also some support, but less overall, for doing a test with a swab before entering a restaurant. However, some pointed out that it sounded “unrealistic” and “invasive.” They believe it would take time – perhaps two days – to get the results back and a restaurant worker isn’t trained to conduct that type of test.

¹May (5); June (3); July (1); August (1)

²May (2); June (2); July or August (1); August (2); September (3)

5

CANTON SWING VOTERS DEEM "NECESSARY" THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS TO ADDRESS THE CORONAVIRUS, DESPITE THE REQUIRED TRILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF SPENDING.

In response to the coronavirus, the federal government has spent trillions of dollars, including \$1,200 checks to individuals below an income threshold and the Paycheck Protection Program. A handful of our swing voters have received their check for \$1,200 and several others expect to receive it soon, with one calling it a "great surprise." They also support the Paycheck Protection Program because it protects jobs and allows our country to continue providing goods and services rather than allowing those companies to "collapse." This solution is better than the alternative, which is letting these workers go and having them go on unemployment.

When they hear the federal government is spending trillions of dollars, they worry about our country going into more debt and about inflation, but they wonder what other options we have. If we weren't spending that money, we wouldn't be able to help individuals and small business owners, and right now it's "necessary," and "money well-spent."

In our second group, respondents told us House Democrats couldn't claim credit for acting to get the coronavirus stimulus bill passed, containing what the American people wanted: help for individuals and small businesses. Our swing voters criticized House Democrats for holding the help American workers need "hostage" as they demanded money for windmills, the arts, and other items to advance the Democrats' agenda, unrelated to the coronavirus. In this group, respondents viewed Republicans in Congress and President Trump as focused on getting help to the American people – and nothing else.





6

CANTON SWING VOTERS HAVEN'T HEARD JOE BIDEN SAY VERY MUCH ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS OR HOW HE WOULD HANDLE THE SITUATION DIFFERENTLY.

Respondents somewhat disapprove of what Joe Biden has communicated to the public during the coronavirus situation, scoring this 4.1/10 (from “strongly disapprove” to “strongly approve”).

They haven't heard him say very much about it lately, other than he would have closed down the country earlier, and he would have been better prepared. Most have heard him say nothing about the coronavirus over the past couple of months.

Respondents are not very familiar with Joe Biden's comments about what he would do differently from President Trump with regard to the coronavirus situation, scoring this 3.6/10 (from “not at all familiar” to “very familiar”).

When Joe Biden is addressing the public about the coronavirus, our swing voters suggested:

- Provide a detailed plan about how we will defeat the virus
- Echo what health experts are saying
- Be positive – try to make us feel better about the situation
- Focus on the future – we can't change the past
- Avoid bashing President Trump

7

CANTON SWING VOTERS GENERALLY HAVE A NEGATIVE VIEW OF THE PROTESTORS PRESSING LEADERS TO LIFT RESTRICTIONS ON BUSINESSES, BUT SOME HAVE EMPATHY FOR THEM.

Respondents described their feelings about the protestors, describing them as “morons,” “stupid,” “insane,” “disgusting,” “ignorant,” and saying they're “frustrated” with them. Others expressed empathy and say they can see both sides of the argument – reopening businesses vs. keeping them closed. Those with empathy for them remarked the government forced those businesses to close and they're just trying to make money again so they can support their family – and everyone is saying they can't do that.

8

CANTON SWING VOTERS UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORT
PRESIDENT TRUMP TEMPORARILY SUSPENDING
IMMIGRATION INTO THE US DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS.

Late Monday evening, President Trump tweeted:

In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens, I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States!

All 10 of our swing voters support this idea. Their reasons included:

- Many Americans have lost their job, and we need to take care of our own
- Immigrants coming into the United States may be infected and could make the virus even more widespread
- We have so many infected people right now that immigrants may not want to come to the United States – and we don't want to get them infected
- We don't know enough about what's going on in our country right now with the coronavirus to bring in more immigrants



9

CANTON SWING VOTERS BELIEVE A NUMBER OF ITEMS SHOULD BE MANUFACTURED IN THE U.S. FOR NATIONAL SECURITY OR ECONOMIC SECURITY REASONS, BUT THEY'RE DIVIDED OVER WHETHER THAT SHOULD INCLUDE PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS.

Respondents indicated the following products should be manufactured in the U.S.:

- Any kind of electronic device, including cell phones and tablets
- Healthcare products, including prescription medications, testing kits, ventilators, personal protective equipment, IV bags, etc.

There was no consensus among our swing voters whether our prescription medications should be manufactured in the U.S. for national security or economic security reasons, with six saying yes and four saying no.

Those who say yes indicated they would trust our prescription medications more if they were made in the U.S. We wouldn't have to worry about contamination, and we wouldn't be vulnerable to shutdowns of imports and exports, which could prevent us from obtaining life-saving medication. After dealing with the coronavirus, our economy needs to be U.S.-based.

Those who disagree told us some countries are trustworthy, and we should be able to work with them. Some countries have the quantities to make these prescription medications that we don't have.

10

CORPORATE AMERICA ISN'T SUFFERING A BACKLASH AS THE RESULT OF THE CORONAVIRUS. IN FACT, CANTON SWING VOTERS NOW VIEW SOME INDUSTRIES MORE FAVORABLY.

During our focus groups, respondents identified which industries they now view more favorably, compared to two months ago:

- Trucking – getting food and other necessities to stores
- Supermarkets – grocery clerks and stockers are working and putting their families at risk for low wages, so we can buy food and other necessities
- Transportation, in general, including the postal service
- Healthcare

For most of our swing voters, no industry came to mind that they now view less favorably than when the coronavirus situation began. One respondent cited the healthcare industry as the one she now views less favorably, pointing out their workers do not have the personal protective equipment (PPE) they need, which “sickens” her.

11

CANTON SWING VOTERS BELIEVE THE U.S. MILITARY SHOULD PLAY A ROLE IN PREPARING FOR AND RESPONDING TO FUTURE PANDEMICS.

To prepare for future pandemics, these swing voters believe the U.S. military should conduct research and testing in labs, be prepared to send military nurses to large hospitals in need to help out, and acquire the medical equipment we are going to need – and stop relying on other countries for it.

Responding to future pandemics, the U.S. military should be available to enforce a military lockdown in cities and towns (similar to martial law), enforce restrictions on travel (including in and out of the U.S.), provide assistance at food banks and distribution centers, and assist with the delivery of personal protective equipment to ensure it gets to where it’s needed.

Based on this feedback, our swing voters believe the U.S. military’s role should be more reactive than proactive.



12

IN THE TRUMP ERA, CANTON SWING VOTERS BELIEVE THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAS GOTTEN WORSE, WHILE THEY HAVE SEEN IMPROVEMENTS IN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.

Our swing voters reflected on how the two parties have changed in the Trump era.

They believe the Democratic Party has gotten worse. They cited:

- They don't talk about their goals for the future or what they would do to make this country better – voters want to be hopeful and see results
- Their focus is on opposing President Trump – if he is for something, they are against it no matter what
- Their 2020 presidential candidates were “mediocre”

Meanwhile, they have seen improvements in the Republican Party in the Trump era, including:

- Democrats used to represent people and families, while Republicans represented business interests, but the Republicans have been garnering the support of more blue collar workers
- They're a stronger, more united party as they face attacks from Democrats