



Engagious



SWING VOTER PROJECT (SVP) SIX-MONTH TRENDS REPORT

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH:

Engagious has conducted focus groups each of the last six months (March through August 2020) with swing voters in Edina, Minnesota; Canton, Ohio; eastern Iowa; Erie, Pennsylvania; suburban Detroit, Michigan; and southern Wisconsin, respectively. In response to the pandemic for the safety of all parties involved, in April, we shifted from in-person focus groups to online focus groups. They have included a total of 57 respondents: 51 who voted for President Obama in 2012 and then President Trump in 2016 (Obama-Trump voters), and six who voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 and then Hillary Clinton in 2016 (Romney-Clinton voters). We have explored questions and topics surrounding the president, Joe Biden, the coronavirus, and racial issues in America.

DISCLAIMER:

The key findings in this report are based on the opinions and feedback from 57 swing voters in six locations. 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/Schlesinger).

INTRODUCTION

The Swing Voter Project, co-sponsored by Engagious and Schlesinger Group, has completed 18 monthly focus groups with swing voters from seven swing states. The first 13 monthly focus groups were held in-person and since April, we have been conducting them online via Zoom. We are supplementing these focus groups with dial testing – in-person and online – to deep dive into how these crucial voters are viewing the 2020 race: which issues they consider most important, how they feel about Donald Trump and Joe Biden, and their thinking about the top stories in the news these days, including the coronavirus situation and racial issues in America.

The pandemic has dramatically altered our lives, but it has had little impact on how our swing voters view Donald Trump and their willingness to vote for him this autumn. Criticism of President Trump's pandemic response has become a centerpiece of the Biden campaign; however, most of our swing voters don't blame the president for the negative impacts of the coronavirus. They believe this is an unprecedented situation and President Trump is doing the best he can and as well as any other president would have, following the advice of experts.

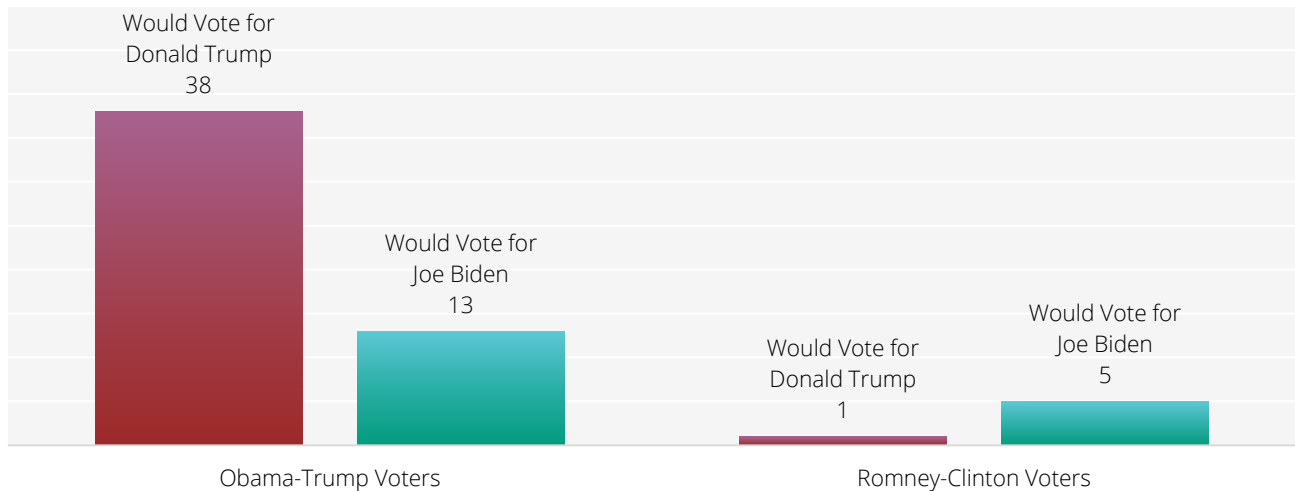
The good news for the Trump campaign — in stark contrast to swing state polling showing Biden ahead — is that swing voters credit the president for the strong economy pre-pandemic. Even with the impact of the pandemic on their lives, most say they're better off now than they were four years ago. He is like no other politician they have experienced in their lifetime and they believe he is working hard and standing up for our country.

Consistent with the last six-month trends report, this report discusses the issues that will likely determine the 2020 election.

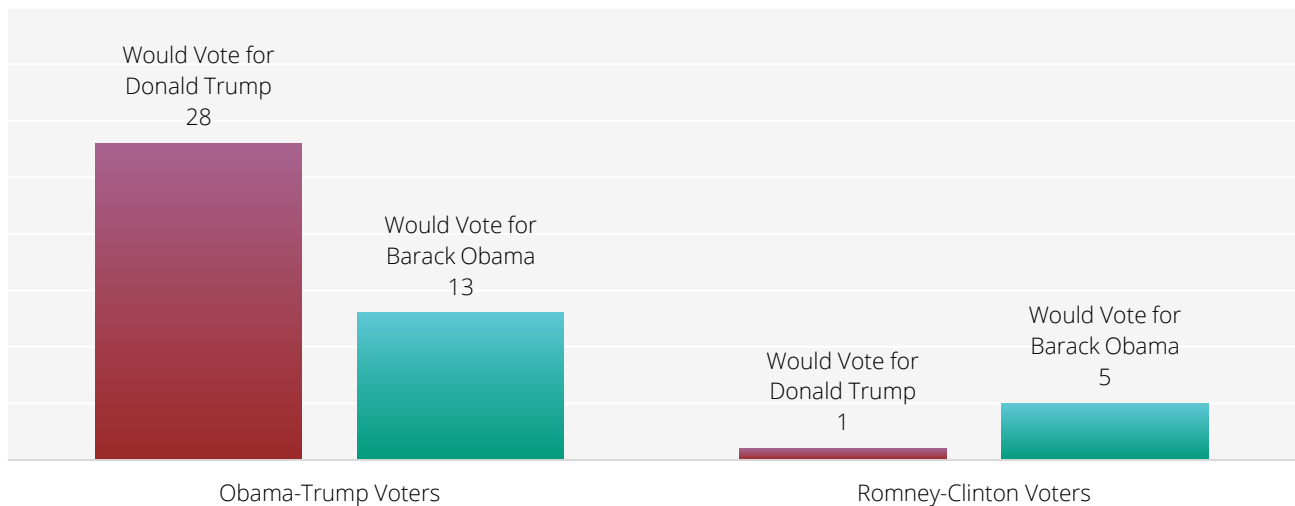
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MOST OBAMA-TRUMP VOTERS ARE STICKING WITH PRESIDENT TRUMP; THEY BELIEVE HE IS DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER PRESIDENT IN THEIR LIFETIME.

If the presidential election were held tomorrow, nearly three-quarters of all Obama-Trump voters would stick with him, while almost all Romney-Clinton voters would vote for Biden.



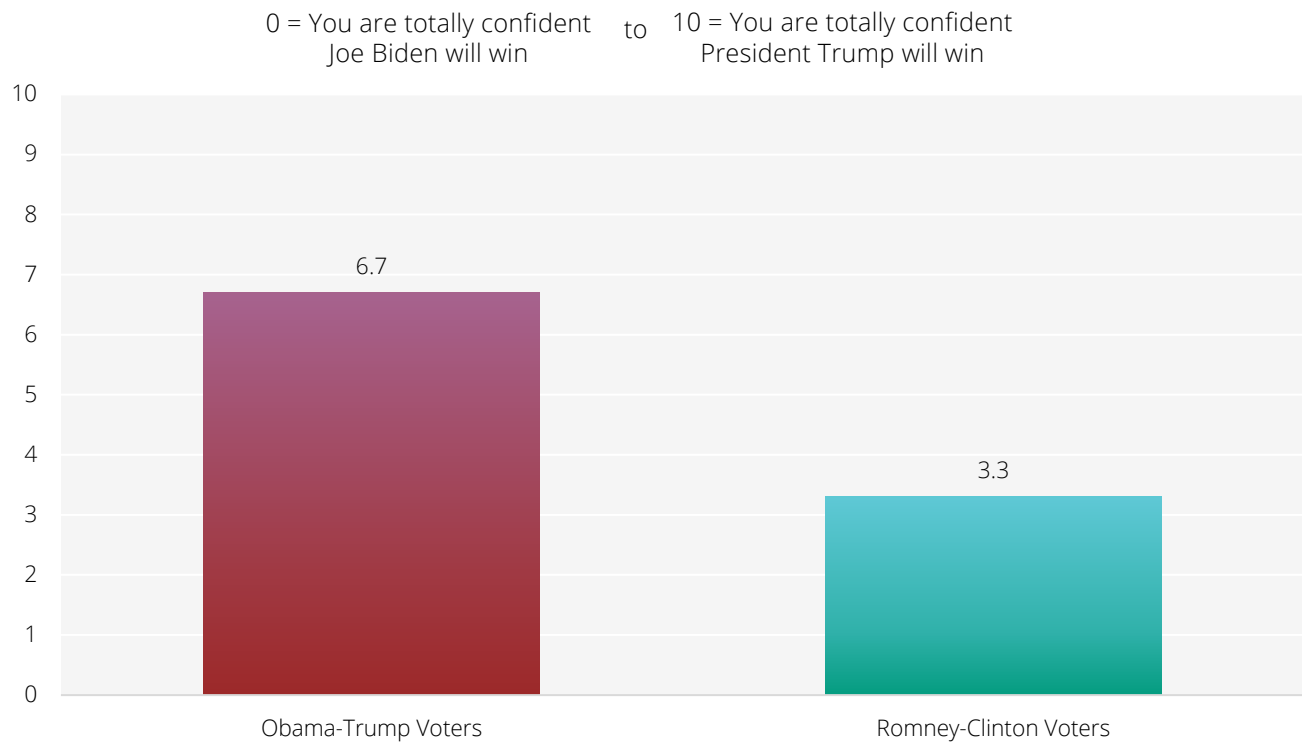
Hypothetically, if the U.S. Constitution didn't prevent presidents from serving a third term, and former President Obama became the Democratic nominee to challenge President Trump's re-election, we would see a similar, but slightly weaker result for President Trump, favored by more than a two-to-one margin¹:



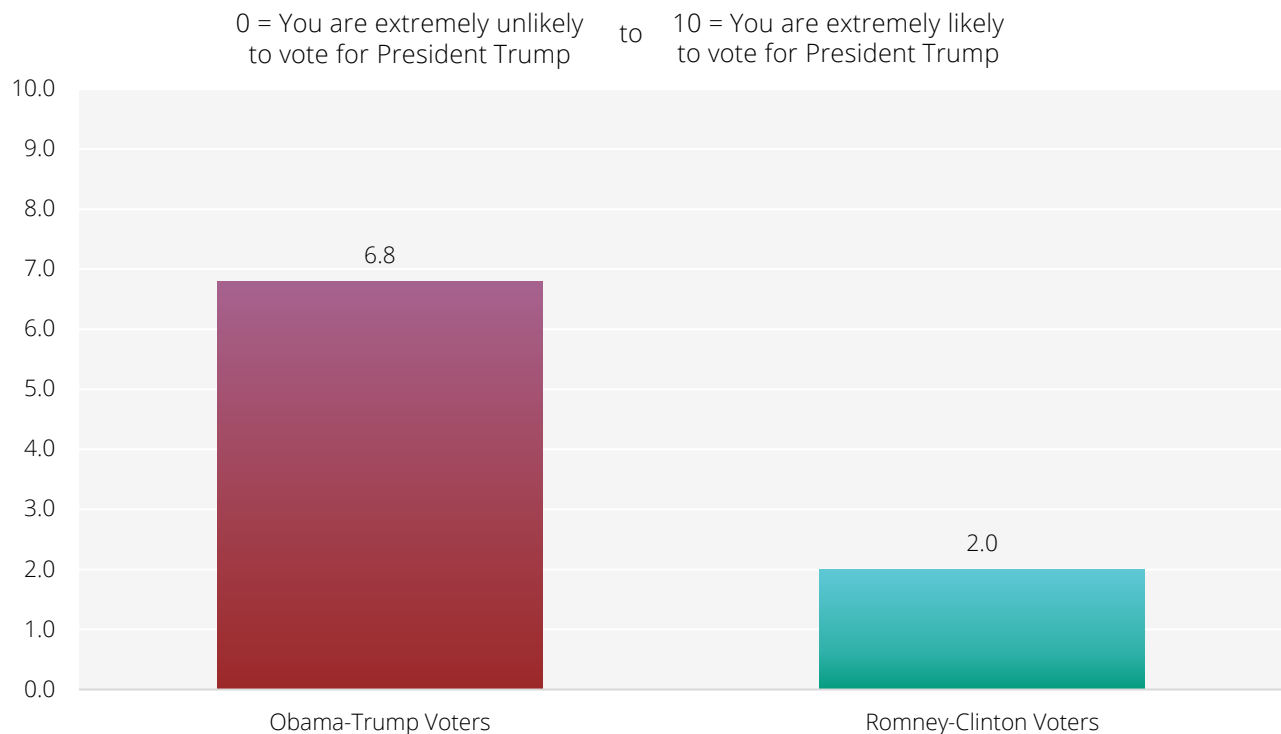
¹ We inadvertently omitted this question in our online focus group in April (with 10 Obama-Trump voters).

KEY FINDINGS

If they were placing a \$100 bet on the outcome of the election, Obama-Trump voters would be fairly confident that President Trump will be re-elected. Romney-Clinton voters believe it's more likely that Joe Biden wins:



Since May, respondents have rated how likely they are to vote for President Trump this autumn:



Those who would stick with President Trump told us what they like about him politically and why they support his re-election:

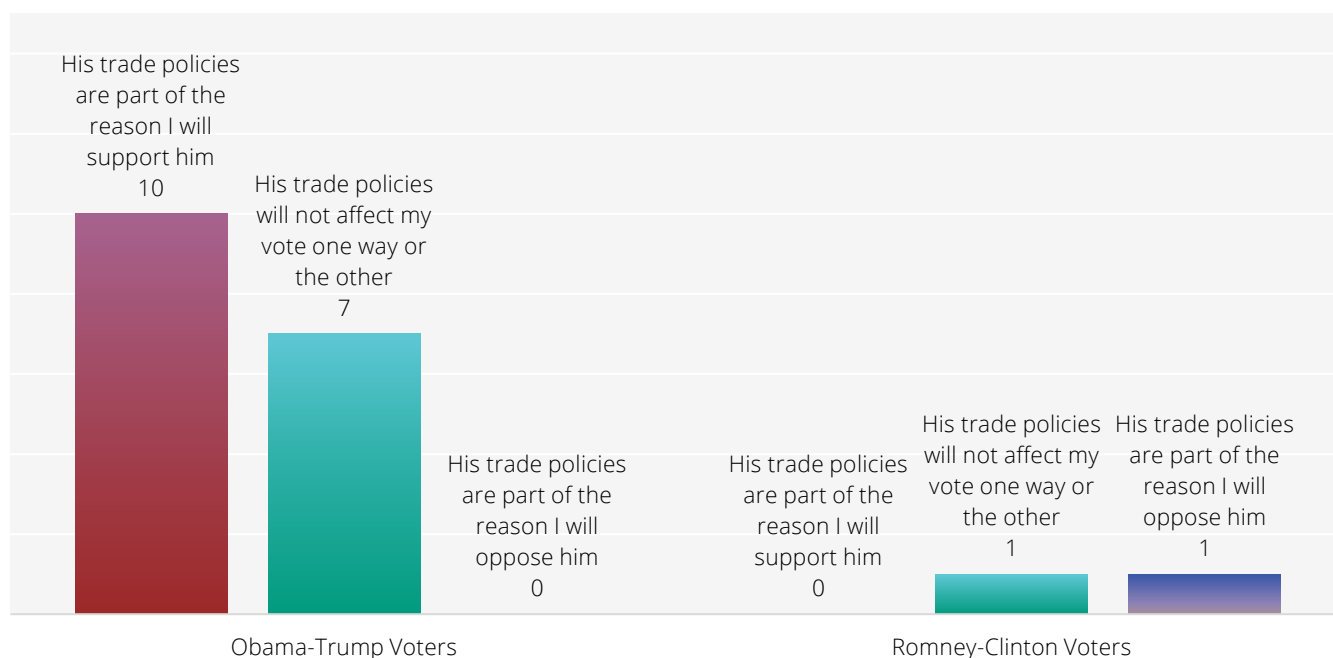
- He's a businessman, not a lifelong politician.
- He stands up for our country and wants to make it better (e.g., bringing jobs back to the U.S., improving our trade deals, getting tough on immigration).
- They trust him because he's not afraid to say what's on his mind ("Political correctness is out the window.").
- He has shown he's a proven leader. He's done everything he said he would do.
- The country was in "good shape" before the pandemic happened with low unemployment and a good stock market.
- He cannot be bought. He doesn't need the money.
- He has dealt with so much this year, including the coronavirus, and he has handled it as well as any other president would have.
- He opposes regulations that slow down our economy.

In August, we explored the idea that Donald Trump makes them feel differently than any other politician in their lifetime. Adding to what they like about him politically and why they support his re-election, they cited:

- Politicians say things to get elected, but President Trump has run on issues and delivered.
- He has the best interest of the country in mind. He makes you believe he can turn problems around and make things better.
- They feel a connection with him when he speaks to them.

Since July, respondents have indicated how important it is to them that President Trump is fighting for our country.

When it comes to the president's trade policies, how will they affect your vote?

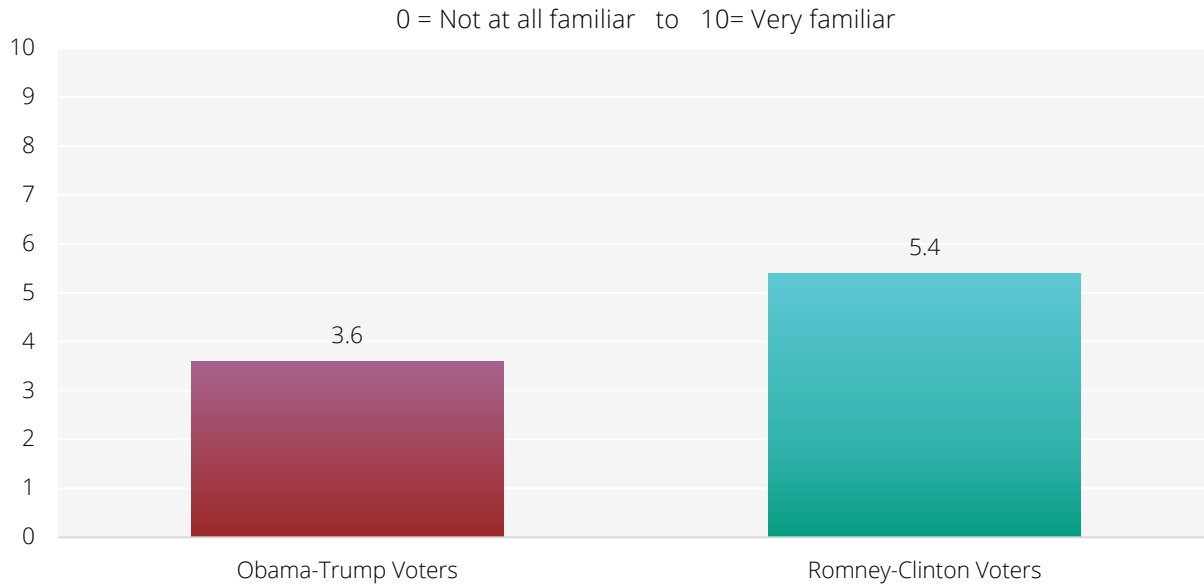


It's notable that the Obama-Trump voters that President Trump has lost and the Romney-Clinton voters he has failed to win over are turned off by his behavior and his personality, not his policies. In June, Obama-Trump voters planning to vote for Joe Biden told us if Trump wanted to win them back, he should:

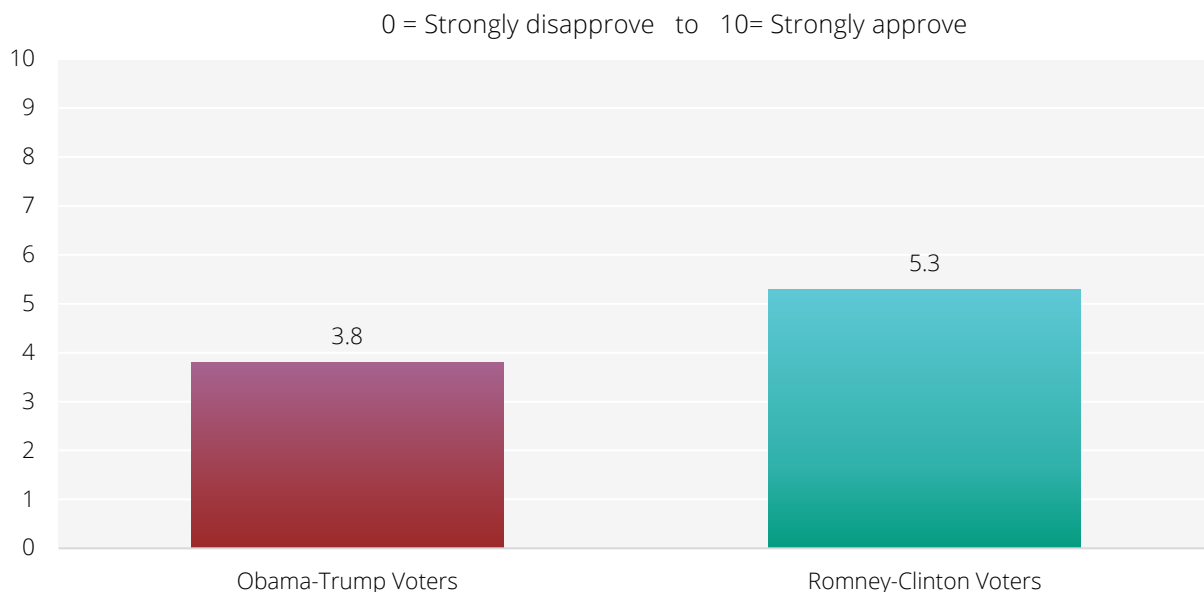
- Be a decisive leader, recognizing that it could be life and death when you're making decisions for the country
- Quit being a "jerk" – fewer snide remarks
- Get off Twitter

2 THESE SWING VOTERS DIDN'T KNOW VERY MUCH ABOUT JOE BIDEN, BUT WHAT THEY HAD HEARD WAS MOSTLY NEGATIVE.

Since April, our swing voters rated how familiar they are with Joe Biden's comments about what he would do differently from President Trump with regard to the coronavirus situation:



Also, from April through July, they rated how strongly they approve or disapprove of what former Vice President Joe Biden has communicated to the public during the coronavirus situation.



It's notable that despite the coronavirus situation being a top voting issue for many of our swing voters, they don't know very much about what Joe Biden would do differently from President Trump or what he has been communicating to the public about it.

In May and June, our swing voters listed the most important thing Joe Biden could say to them, including:

- If elected, he has a plan on how to get us through the pandemic, both economically and health-wise.
- He's going to find a way to handle the key problems our country is experiencing right now, including racial tensions, the economy, and businesses going under.
- He will create a task force for communicable diseases so if this type of situation happens again, we'll be better-prepared (e.g., ensuring medical professionals have the personal protective equipment they need).
- "We're all in this together."
- He will discuss the cost of treatment for those without health insurance.
- He will look at making healthcare changes.
- Be patient: Police reform is coming.

A red flag for the Biden campaign is that many of our swing voters know virtually nothing about Joe Biden's career or what he accomplished as a U.S. senator or vice-president. This opens the door to him being defined by headlines, online video clips capturing his worst moments, and/or President Trump.

Those planning to vote for President Trump in November listed their reasons for opposing Joe Biden:

- He's a "terrible" candidate who is "all over the place" with his beliefs (instilling no confidence in them).
- He has been in government for 30+ years and hasn't done anything for us.
- Disagreement with the Obama Administration's economic policies – and Biden was a big part of that
- He's not fit to run the country and be the leader of the free world. He seems "incoherent" most of the time and doesn't have the capacity to do the job with his apparent "dementia".
- Concern about his age
- Biden would be a "puppet" controlled by others, including the Deep State.
- His "outbursts" on the campaign trail
- His dishonesty
- His inappropriate behavior with women

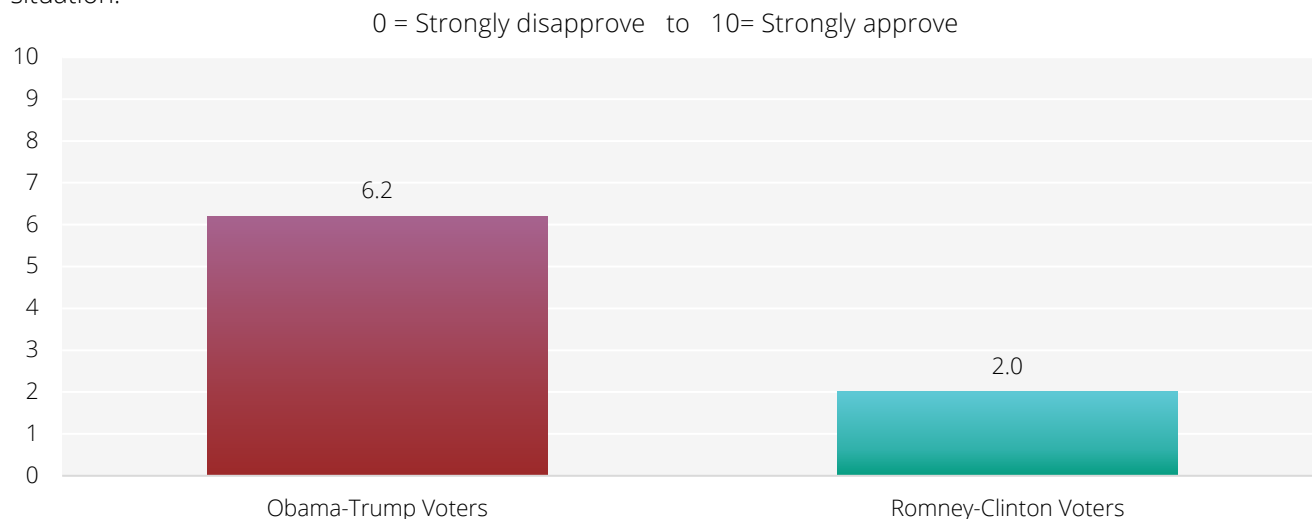
In August, half of our swing voters (five of 10) told us they believe Joe Biden is a "socialist." Their reasons included:

- His policies on taxes and redistributing wealth
- He wants to raise the federal minimum wage
- His views on unemployment compensation
- He supports free college
- His proposed mask mandate sounds like a "socialist direction" – controlling people and telling them what they have to do
- His policies don't seem very capitalistic
- They heard he's a socialist based on interactions with others

3

OBAMA-TRUMP VOTERS DO NOT BLAME PRESIDENT TRUMP FOR THE FALLOUT FROM THE CORONAVIRUS SITUATION, SLIGHTLY APPROVING OF HIS HANDLING OF IT; ROMNEY-CLINTON VOTERS DISAPPROVE.

Respondents rated how strongly they approve or disapprove of President Trump's handling of the coronavirus situation:



Our swing voters who approve of the job he's doing give him credit for trying to solve this problem, adding that no president has had to deal with this type of situation. They expect him to make some mistakes along the way, but they believe he is doing the best he can given the challenging situation. They have pointed to his successes in specific areas, including trying to help the economy, attempting to get a vaccine, preventing hospitals from overloading with cases, and giving governors the authority to make decisions that work best for their state.

Our swing voters don't really blame President Trump for what has occurred as a result of the pandemic, including more than 180,000 dead Americans and an unemployment rate above 10%². Their view is he didn't bring the virus to our country and he's not responsible for the high unemployment rate. One respondent noted that President Trump would have been criticized if he wanted to shut down the country when we only had a few cases in the early stages of the pandemic. At this point, they believe there isn't much he can do except pursue a vaccine and encourage social distancing and mask wearing. Most respondents don't blame him because he is listening to his advisors and making the best decisions he can make. One respondent described this as a "no-win situation" for President Trump because he could achieve some successes in handling the coronavirus situation, but those who are suffering, including those who have lost their job, will say he hasn't done enough.

Despite not scoring his handling of the coronavirus situation particularly high, it hasn't really impacted their willingness overall to support his re-election.

Others have been critical of his handling of the coronavirus situation, especially what they view as his lackluster initial response and failure to take it seriously. We should have been making tests and preparing for public safety measures more quickly, but we did not, and we became the epicenter for it. Some believe we should have been in contact with other countries to find out what protocols were working and which ones weren't where an outbreak had occurred. Also, many of our swing voters were troubled that President Trump did not wear a mask for several months after the coronavirus became a serious issue and that he did not encourage others to do so.

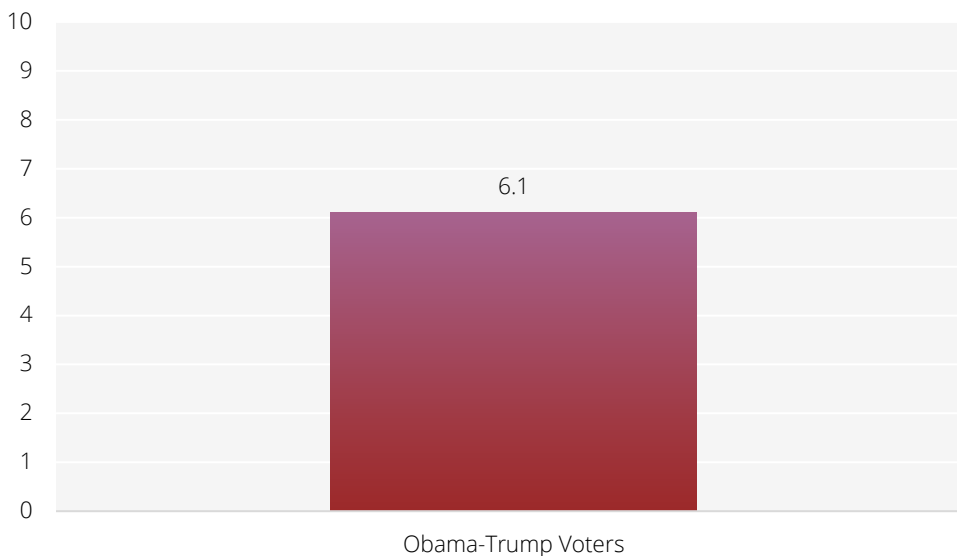
² The unemployment rate in the U.S. was above 10% for several months during this period, including when the final online focus groups took place in August 2020.

KEY FINDINGS

In April and May, our swing voters rated this statement:

"President Trump's initial response to the coronavirus threat made it harder to contain the virus in the U.S."

0 = Strongly disagree to 10= Strongly agree



Their confidence in President Trump's leadership has taken a hit since the pandemic began. Since April, our swing voters have selected the answer that best reflects how they feel about President Trump's leadership.

Compared to January, would you say...

	# of Obama-Trump Voters	# of Romney-Clinton voters
You were confident in President Trump's leadership then, and you're still confident now.	18	0
You were confident in President Trump's leadership then, but you're less confident now.	13	0
You were not confident in President Trump's leadership then, but you're more confident now.	3	2
You were not confident in President Trump's leadership then, and you're still not confident now.	7	3

Those who are “still confident now” or “more confident now” cited:

- President Trump is handling the coronavirus situation as well as he can – people are using the situation to create as much chaos as possible to undermine their country and economy to bring down Trump.
- He is showing he’s a good leader by delegating responsibilities to the states’ governors and offering to help when needed.

Those who told us they’re “less confident now” or “still not confident now” cited reasons including:

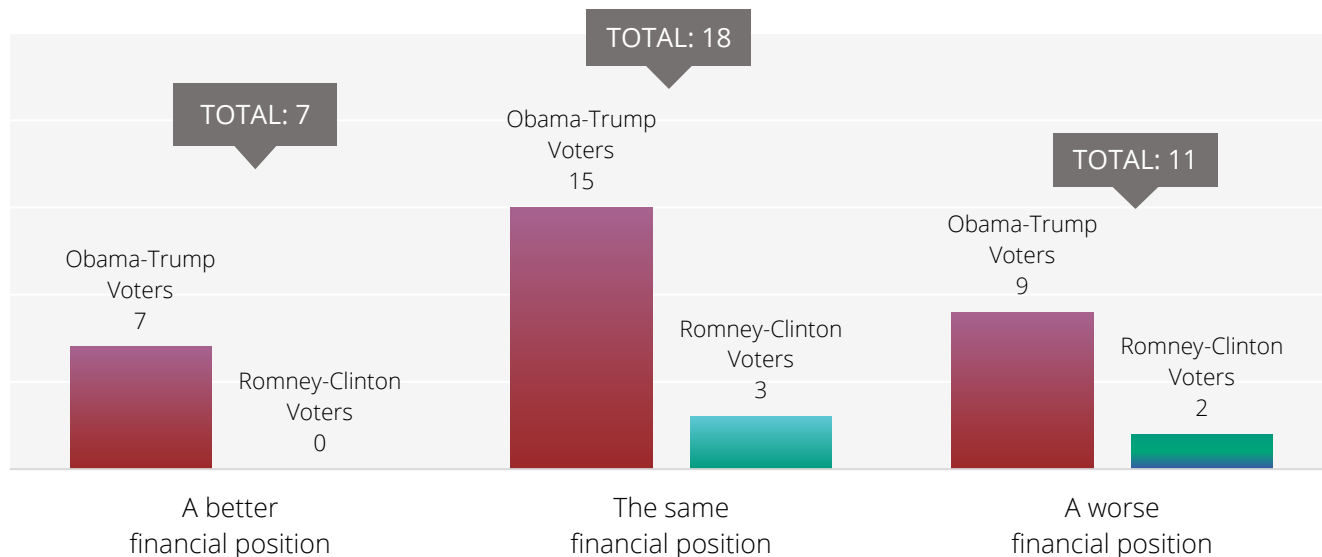
- He didn’t take the pandemic seriously enough and respond as quickly as he should have to meet the needs of our country.
- Our country’s lack of preparedness (e.g., lack of PPE for medical personnel)
- He had a “hands off” approach, allowing the states to make many of the decisions.
- He could have set an example by wearing a mask.
- He lacks empathy.
- He has been trying to address the coronavirus situation, but nothing is working. He seems to be giving up.

It’s notable that despite nearly half of our Obama-Trump voters being “less confident now” or “still not confident now,” many of them are planning to vote for President Trump anyway. They generally believe he is working hard to solve the problem and the coronavirus situation isn’t his fault. They believe our country was doing well before the pandemic.

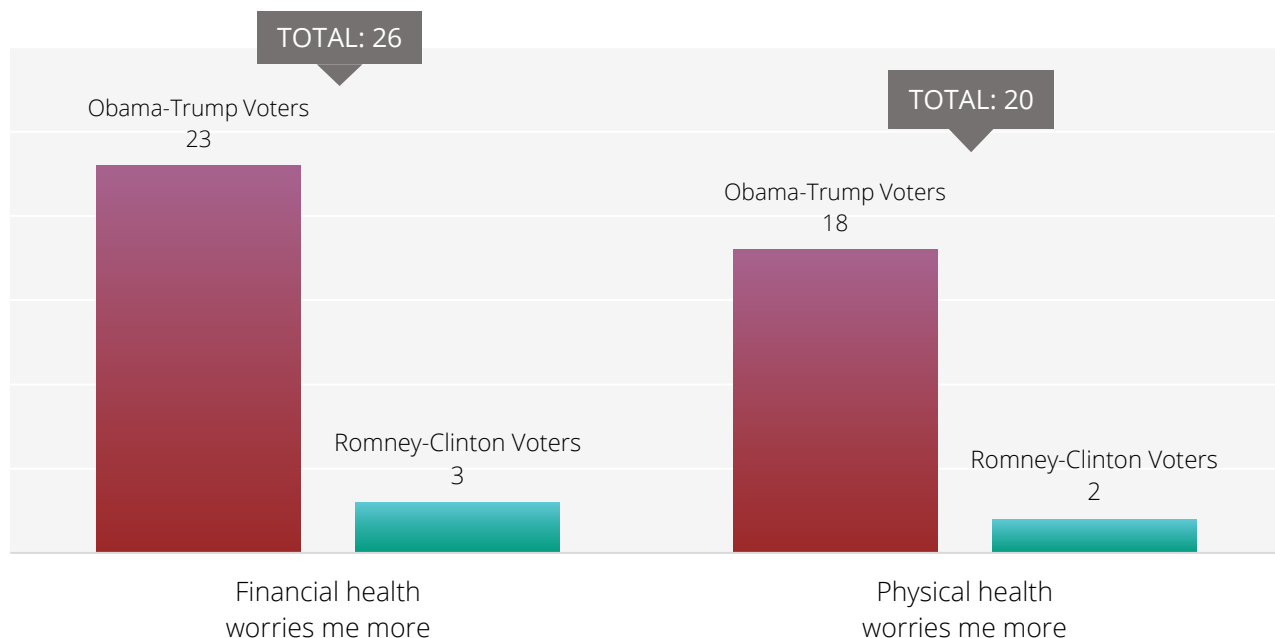
4

DESPITE THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS ON OUR NATION'S ECONOMY, FEWER THAN ONE-THIRD BELIEVE THEY'RE WORSE OFF FINANCIALLY NOW COMPARED TO JANUARY.

Since May, our swing voters have rated how they feel about their financial position compared to January:



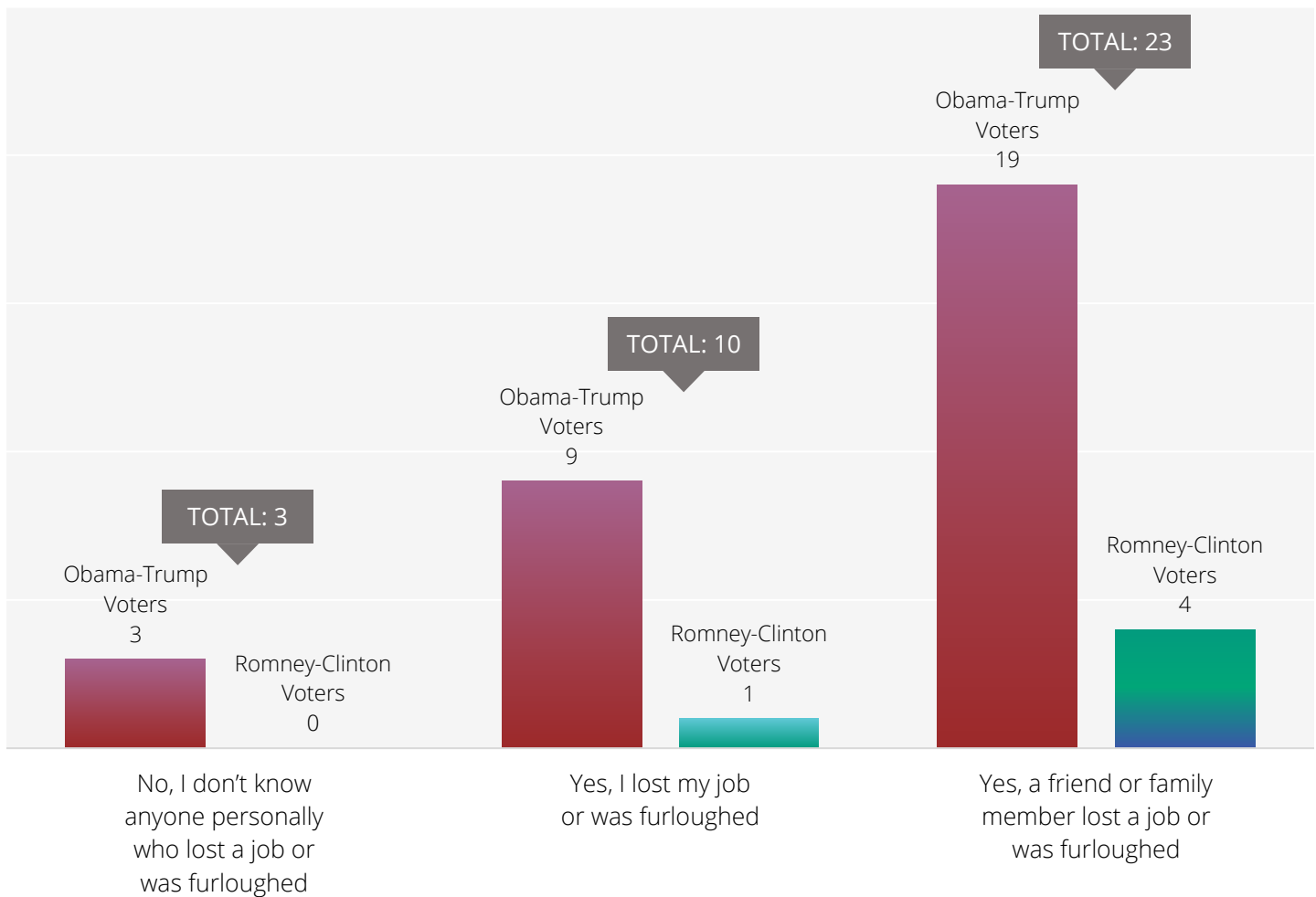
Also, since April, our swing voters have indicated what worries them more over the next few months – their financial health or their physical health:



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 immuno-compromised 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).

KEY FINDINGS

Since May, our swing voters have told us whether they or someone they know personally has lost a job or been furloughed since the pandemic:



Despite the negative impacts they have experienced from the coronavirus, 27 of our 35 swing voters from April through July told us they're better off now than they were four years ago. Some of their reasons included:

- I have a better job (e.g., contract work turned into a stable, full-time job).
- I'm earning more money, which allows me to save and invest more.
- My financial investments have done well.
- Steady work – opportunities for overtime work and no furloughs.
- I'm able to buy a new home.
- I'm able to pay off my credit card debt.
- My business is doing better – “times are good”.
- I paid off my mortgage.
- I'm more financially stable, working full-time in the field I went to college for.
- I moved out of my parents' home.

5

THESE SWING VOTERS THINK THE REPUBLICAN PARTY BETTER REPRESENTS THEIR VALUES, BELIEVING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAS GOTTEN WORSE IN THE TRUMP ERA.

Over the past six months, this theme has come up repeatedly among our swing voters.

In April, our swing voters reflected on how the two parties have changed in the Trump era. They thought the Democratic Party has gotten worse, citing:

- 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 during 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 unified party as they face attacks from Democrats.

In May, our swing voters indicated they believe the Democratic Party has changed for the worse in the Trump era, citing:

- It's more “left-wing” and “openly socialist” – it's concerning to some that Bernie Sanders did as well as he did in the Democratic primary.
- They're appealing to voters who feel “entitled to everything” – with policy proposals including free education, getting money without having to work, etc.
- They're more calculated with who they put up as their 2020 presidential nominee – this primary was a “circus” with “lots of pandering” where a lot of time and energy was spent for nothing because Biden was going to be the nominee.

In August, our swing voters told us why they believe the Republican Party better reflects their values:

- Economic issues – people shouldn't make more money on unemployment than working; we shouldn't raise the federal minimum wage.
- Personal responsibility – people should work for what they have in life (no handouts unless they need them).
- Democrats have become too far left – and it's hard to back that.
- They want a smaller government – it's “not capable of efficiency”.
- Their personal views are more conservative.
- Republicans are supportive of capitalism, while Democrats are aligning with socialist rhetoric.
- The pro-life position of the party
- President Trump wants to help with racial issues.

They provided reasons why they are confident they know which party better represents them, including:

- Democrats and Republicans publish their platforms – and some read them.
- They listen to public opinions, read about the issues on the internet (especially Facebook), and discuss them with family and friends.
- They have watched news clips about what members of each party say.
- They're aware of their “broken promises” (e.g., President Obama promised to reduce healthcare costs with reform, but costs have “skyrocketed”).
- Noting the “tells” (things that give away the truth) – Senator Kamala Harris is from “very liberal” California, and Joe Biden selected her as his running-mate.

6

A SLIGHT MAJORITY OF THESE SWING VOTERS BELIEVE JOE BIDEN SUPPORTS DEFUNDING THE POLICE, WHICH HAS VIRTUALLY NO SUPPORT AMONG OUR SWING VOTERS.

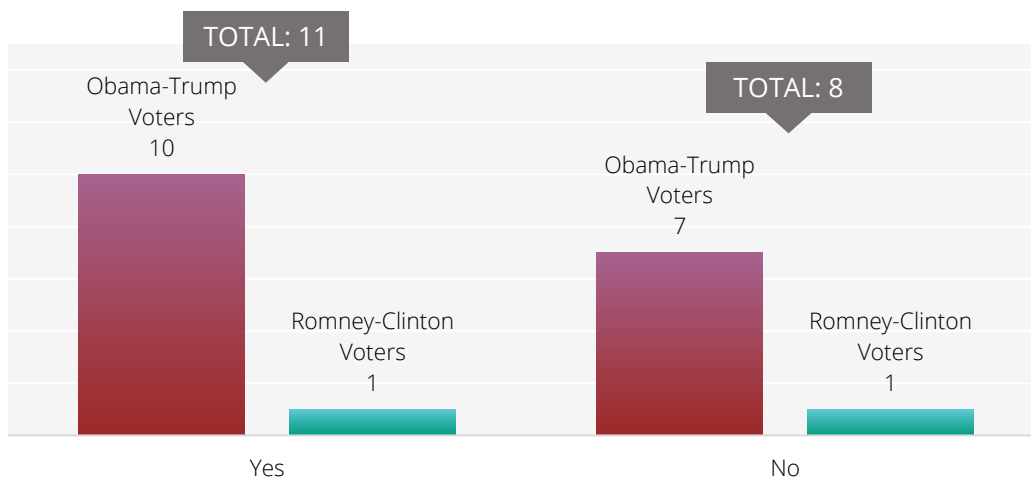
In July, our swing voters rated how strongly they support or oppose the idea of “defunding the police,” scoring this 0.1/10 (from “strongly oppose” to “strongly support”).

Our swing voters are very troubled by the idea that we could “defund the police,” which they view as an excessive demand from social justice advocates. They wonder if the people who support this idea are “out of their minds” because of how important the police are to the structure of our government. One respondent remarked:

“[If you defund the police,] who’s going to come protect you? I don’t see where anybody is going to come to save my butt if God forbid something happens. When they were rioting – I live five houses down from a major road, and when the rioting was occurring, they had a protest go down Van Dyke (a nearby road). I’m right off of Van Dyke. The night that they were marching in Warren – I’m in Warren, [MI] – I told my husband, ‘Get your 45 [gun] out.’ I put myself and my family in the house and I said, ‘[If] they come in the door, you shoot first and ask questions later,’ because I wasn’t playing. That’s what you do now. I’m not going to wait to let the person come here and shoot me first. If they come in, I would rather not have to deal with that. And that’s what’s going to happen if you defund the police. Who’s going to come rescue you?”

– Angel, Obama-Trump voter

In July and August, our swing voters told us whether they believe Joe Biden wants to “defund the police”:



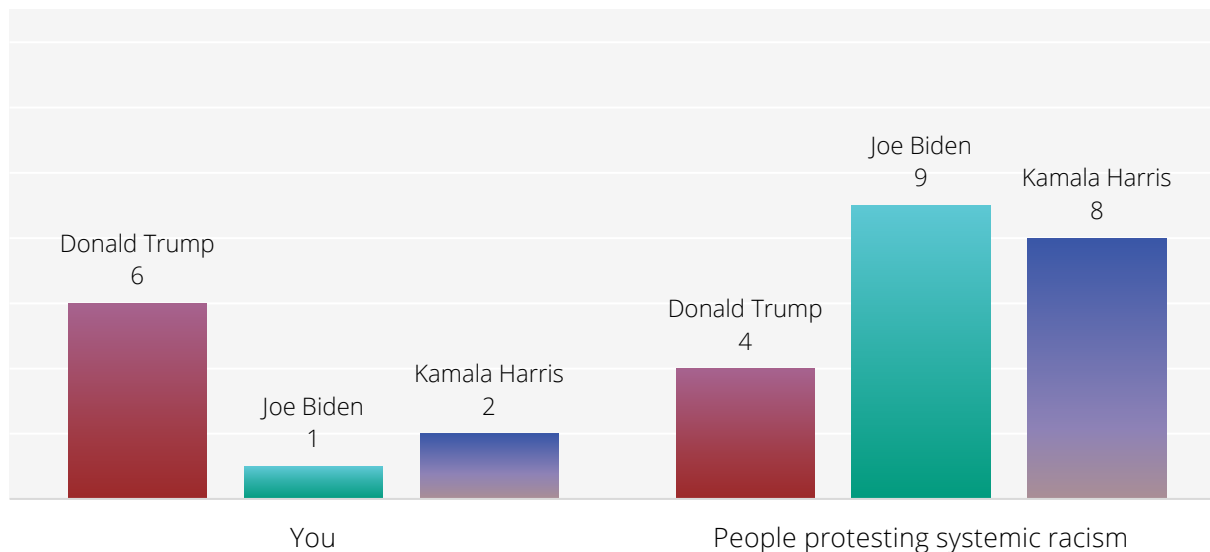
In August, those who thought Joe Biden wants to “defund the police” explained their reasoning:

- I have seen him say it in political ads
- It’s the feeling I get based on the rhetoric I have heard
- I believe he said he will do that

Ongoing calls to “defund the police” could become very detrimental to the Biden campaign. It’s a very unpopular idea and one of our respondents planning to vote for Biden told us she doesn’t believe he supports the effort, but he would lose her vote “for sure” if he were to embrace it. Also, our swing voters are getting a sense that Donald Trump cares more about people like them while Joe Biden and Kamala Harris care more about the people protesting systemic racism.

Respondents reacted to this question:

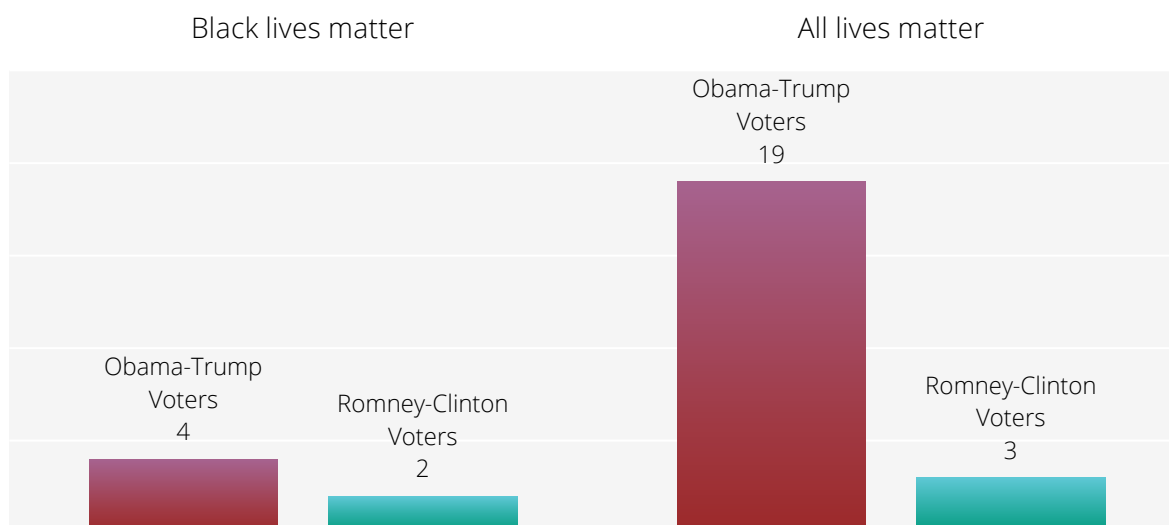
Do you think _____ cares more about you, or about people who are protesting systemic racism?



These are the reasons why they believe Biden cares more about those protesting systemic racism than them:

- He wants people to believe in “systemic racism” so they will vote for him – did he do anything about “systemic racism” when he was vice president for eight years?
- He’s trying to divide the nation and support more of the protests and the rioters rather than the hard-working American people.
- His policies are too far left; they don’t reflect the views of the majority of Americans.
- He aligns more with those who want to throw “adult temper tantrums”.
- He’s a Democrat, and Democrats across the country are allowing these “protests” to continue instead of stopping them.
- He’s a career politician who has many people influencing him; he doesn’t see the big picture anymore.

Since June, our swing voters have indicated which perspective is closest to theirs:

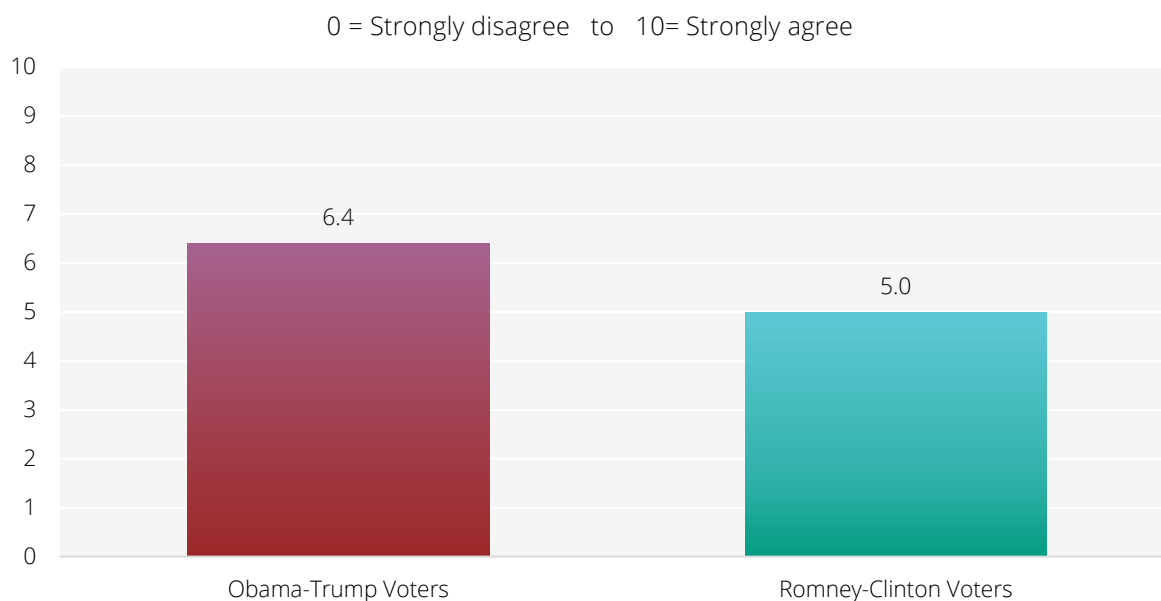


7

THESE SWING VOTERS SOMEWHAT AGREE THAT HAVING TENS OF MILLIONS OF AMERICANS VOTE BY MAIL IN THIS ELECTION WILL CALL THE RESULTS INTO QUESTION.

Since July, respondents have reacted to this statement:

"Having tens of millions of Americans vote by mail this autumn means we will NOT be able to trust the election results."

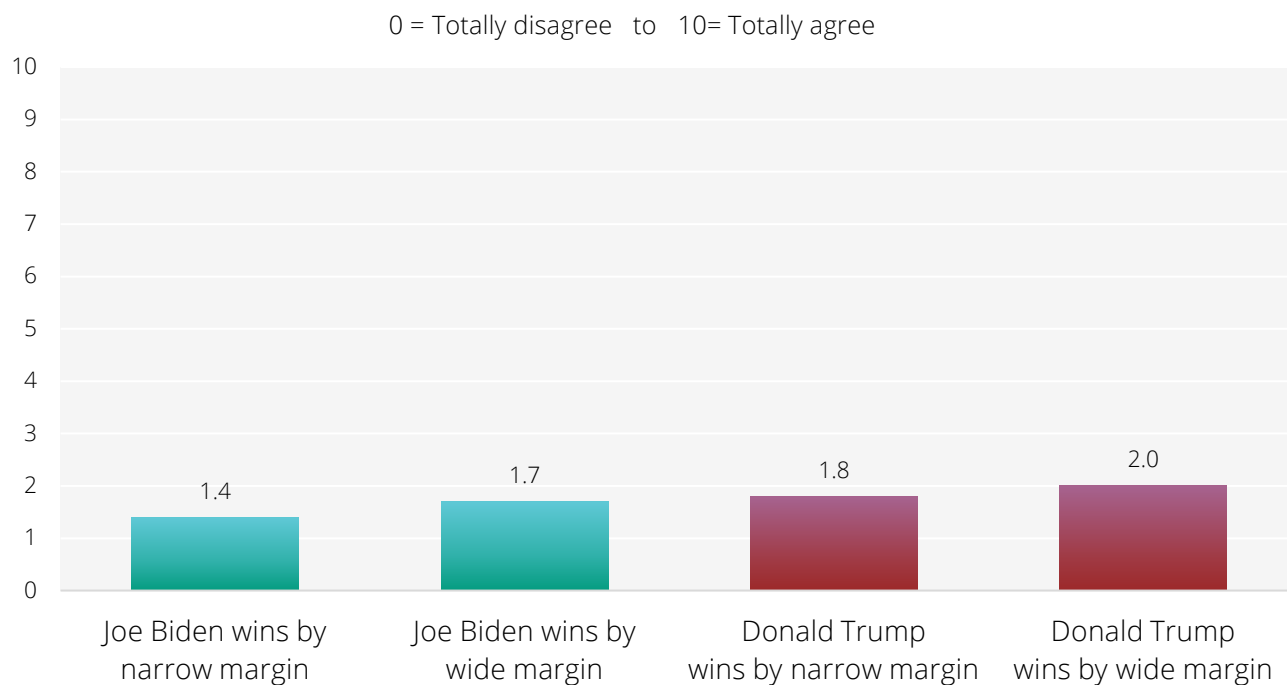


They identified a number of concerns with voting by mail this autumn, including:

- Some have heard about lost and undelivered ballots in recent elections
- Mail gets lost – their ballot could go missing and unprocessed
- The postal service is unreliable, so their vote may not arrive on time
- These ballots are often counted by hand several times, which could result in tallying mistakes
- Forms can be mailed to people who no longer live at the address
- People could fill out ballots for “senile” relatives
- If everyone votes by mail, we may not know the election results for weeks

KEY FINDINGS

Despite their concerns, they disagree with the idea that our election results would be “rigged,” rating how strongly they agree or disagree with each of the following scenarios, on a scale from zero to 10 (from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”):



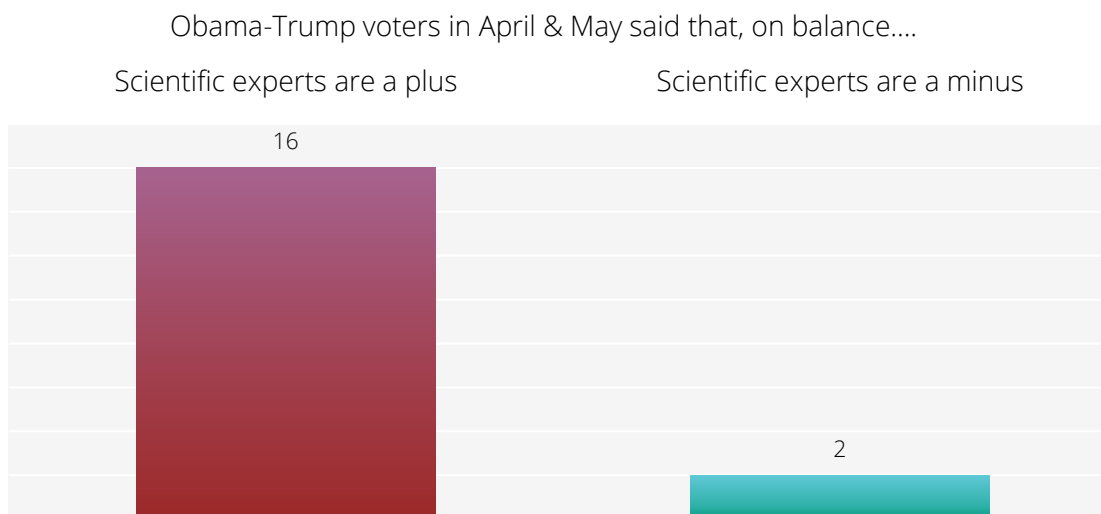
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CONFIDENCE IN SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS IS WANING.

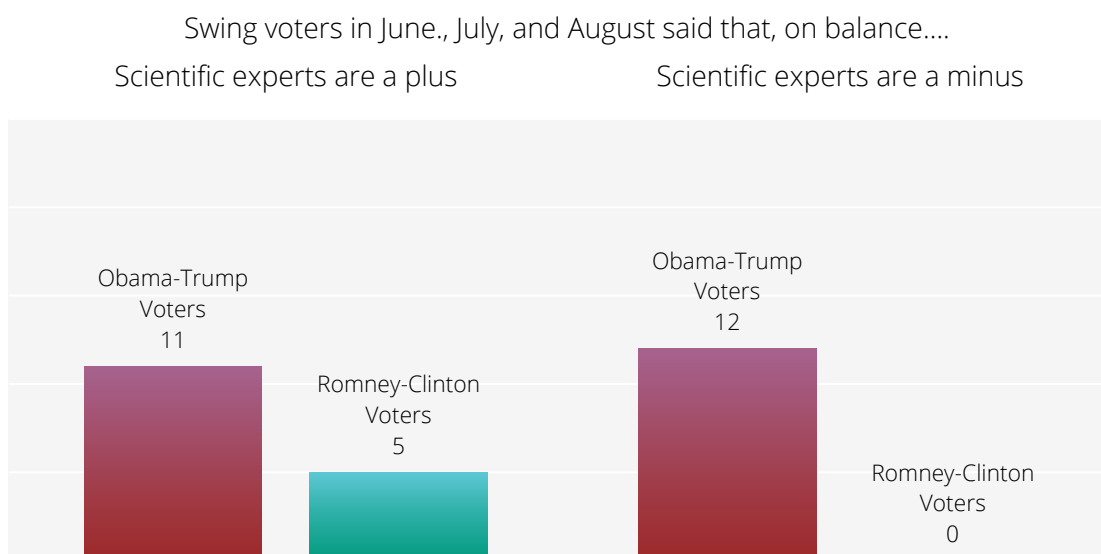
Since April, respondents have reacted to this statement:

"Some people say the coronavirus situation has demonstrated the life-saving value of relying on scientific experts to guide public policy. Others say the coronavirus situation has demonstrated the economic danger of relying on scientific experts to guide public policy."

In April and May, almost all of our Obama-Trump voters viewed scientific experts as a plus:



However, since June, we have seen a substantial shift and our swing voters now view scientific experts far more negatively:



Reasons for this shift include:

- Scientists aren't presenting a unified message – experts disagree and as a result, they are providing the public with conflicting information.
- Some experts' views are publicly shifting without explanation (e.g., Dr. Fauci initially said people should wear a mask in public if they feel sick, but now he says everyone should wear one).
- The coronavirus situation is being exploited and the economy is being harmed to make President Trump look bad and to get him out of office (i.e., they're making the numbers look worse than they really are for political reasons).
- Science takes time, a lot of research, and validation and we don't know very much about the coronavirus at this point to base our country's economic decisions on what scientists say.

One respondent explained:

"I believe [scientific experts] should be part of the guidance, but they shouldn't be the overall guidance because if we listen to nothing but scientific guidance, we'd be shutting down every business in the country. People in this country need to work. We need to keep our economy afloat. It's a delicate balance between the two, so definitely you don't want to listen strictly to scientific guidance because scientific guidance would tell us all to avoid each other until this virus is completely eradicated, which will probably never happen."

– Matt, Obama-Trump voter