To: Interested Parties
From: GBAO
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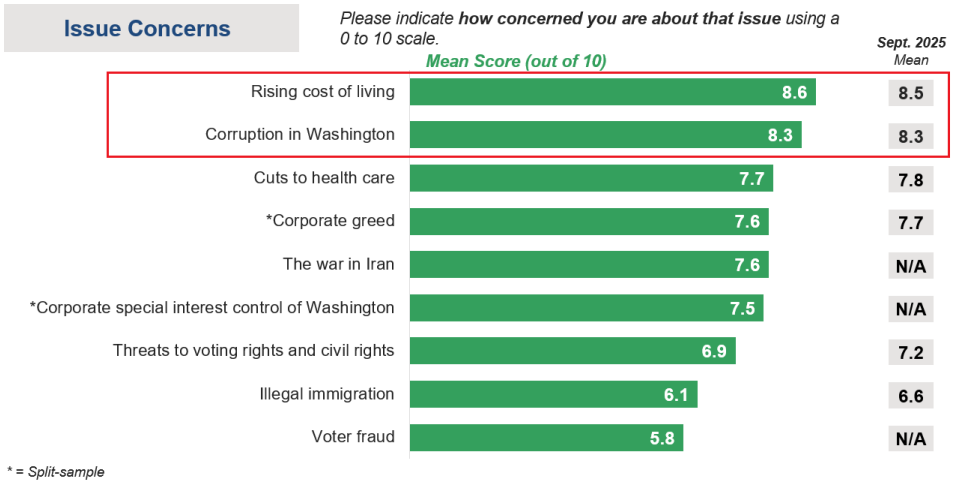
Democrats Can Maximize Mid-term Gains with Focus on "Costs of Corruption"

A recent survey of likely voters across the 2026 Congressional battleground[1] on behalf of Defend the Vote Action Fund shows voters' top concerns remain corruption and affordability. The survey also suggests that by linking the two issues and tackling the "costs of corruption" head-on, Democratic candidates can demonstrate that they share the public's priorities and can offer a different path forward than the one Republicans have set the country on in recent years.

Democrats hold a 4-point lead in the generic ballot, yet they do not have high favorability with voters. Many voters still do not trust either party to handle the issue of political corruption, creating an opportunity for Democrats to lean into the issue. Messaging that links rising costs to Washington corruption is very effective and policy proposals that bring real reforms to Congress – including banning members of Congress from trading stock and ending partisan gerrymandering – have deep and broad support.

The following are key findings from our research:

- **Cost of living and corruption remain top concerns.** As we saw last year, no issues animate this electorate more than the rising cost of living and corruption in Washington. These issues are affecting Democrats, Independents and Republicans and are just as salient as they were when we last polled the battleground in October. Other issues, such as corporate greed, the war in Iran and illegal immigration, also raise concerns for the public, but do not rise to the level as rising costs and corruption.



[1] Survey was limited to respondents from 65 targeted Congressional districts considered to be "in-play" in 2026. We reached 1000 likely voters as well as oversamples of 150 Black voters, 80 AAPI voters and 100 Latino voters. Results carry a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Interviews were conducted from May 11-21, 2026 via an online panel. MaxDiff was used for the policy support exercise.

When voters are asked what words or phrases come to mind to best describe Congress, voters across partisanship overwhelmingly describe it as “corrupt,” “divided,” and “not working.”

What is the first word or phrase that comes to your mind that best describes Congress? ***(Open End)***

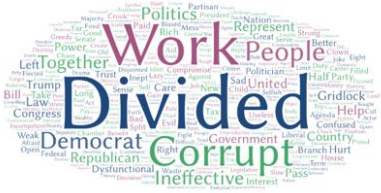
AMONG DEMOCRATS



AMONG INDEPENDENTS



AMONG REPUBLICANS



- **Democrats still have work to do to gain the public’s trust on corruption.** While Democrats in Congress have solid advantages over Republicans on which party people trust on the issues of health care, Social Security and other issues, there is still a large share of the battleground public that does not see either party as better on the issue of political corruption. Democrats’ 4-point edge on that issue is encouraging (up from +1 last year), but nearly a quarter of the electorate still says “neither party” can handle that issue.

  It is also encouraging that Democrats have increased their advantage on which party would do a better job in lowering prices (now +10, up from +4), given how salient of an issue that is this year.

Issue Comparison

*Please indicate which party you think would be better at handling that issue – **Democrats in Congress** or **Republicans in Congress**.*

			% Neither Party	Dem advantage	2025 Dem adv.
*Health care	49	27	14	+22	+22
Reducing corporate influence	38	22	26	+16	N/A
*Social Security	47	31	10	+15	+15
*Protecting voting rights	47	36	7	+11	N/A
*Lowering prices	41	31	19	+10	+4
Political corruption	32	28	23	+4	+1
*Jobs and the economy	40	40	10	0	-1
*Fighting voter fraud	35	37	13	-2	N/A

** = Split-sample*

- **A Democratic frame about the cost of corruption performs extremely well.** In a series of messages designed to highlight Democrats’ focus on bringing real change and reforms to Congress and Washington, the one that stood out most directly linked

corruption (corporations and billionaires getting special breaks) to the higher prices people are paying for everything these days. Seventy-two percent of voters said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who delivered the message below, including 44 percent who would be much more likely to vote for that candidate.

> *Corruption in Washington costs all of us money. When corporations and billionaires buy politicians, it means their interests are served instead of ours. The costs of corruption are clear - tax breaks for the connected, higher prices and cuts to health care and other critical programs for everyone else. We need a system that puts regular people first.*

- **Partisan views of the Supreme Court are locked in.** The Supreme Court's favorability remains at 49 percent and has built a reputation as a partisan institution.

