GBAO

DEFEND THE VOTE ACTION FUND

Defend The Vote

Focus Group & MaxDiff Survey Results & Analysis

May 2026

Research Methodology

Figure 2

Qualitative



- Conducted April 9, 2026
- Each 90 minutes in length, and with 6-7 participants

ONLINE, APRIL 9

- **Group 1**: Swing voting men, 25-45, from Republican-held congressional battleground districts
- **Group 2**: Swing voting women, 45-70, from Democratic-held congressional battleground districts

Quantitative



- n = 1000 likely general election voters across 65 battleground districts (27 “Democratic held” districts, 38 “Republican held” districts)
  - Oversample of 80 AAPI voters
  - Oversample of 150 Black voters
  - Oversample of 100 Latino voters
- Conducted May 11-21, 2026, via online panel
- Margin of error = +/- 3.1 percentage points

Key Findings

Figure 3

- Democrats continue to hold advantage in battleground as Trump's struggles intensify;
  - But despite GOP struggles, Congressional Dems remain unpopular.
- Congress is seen as corrupt, political system viewed as deeply broken;
- Top priorities to combat corruption include ending gerrymandering, stopping elected officials and insiders from profiting from their position and securing our voting systems;
- "Cost of corruption" frame remains extremely salient – particularly with persuadable voters;



Lay of the Land

Voters Are Very Pessimistic, Driven By Economic Concerns

Figure 5

When participants were asked to describe how they feel about the way things are going in the country these days, all volunteered negative words.

"Pessimistic." "Disappointed." "Perplexed." "Nervous."
"Scared." "Overwhelmed." "Down."

This negative mood and anger is heavily driven by frustration about costs.

"I mean, the **prices of everything have gone up**. Our electricity bill too is another thing. Ridiculously it said we used 37% less electricity this month than last month, but our electricity bill went up $87. **Brutal**."
- Male persuadable voter

"Here we are with gas at $5, $6, $7 a gallon, and you can't go to the grocery store without spending $1,000 it seems like every time you go, you know. **It's crazy**."
- Female persuadable voter

"The economy is in a free fall. The **cost of living is out of control**… They jack up the prices, but the prices never come down, because we've met the prices, but it's killing us. **We're strapped.**"
- Female persuadable voter

"You go to the grocery store and we're providing for six people. I got to drive kids to school, and it's expensive. It's whether or not at the end of the week **if we're going to have enough money to get everywhere we need to go**."
- Male persuadable voter

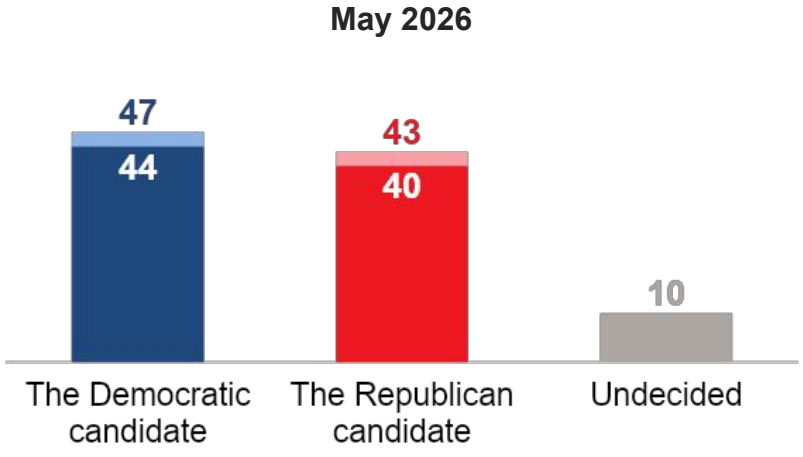
Democrats Maintain Edge In Generic Ballot

Figure 6

Generic Vote

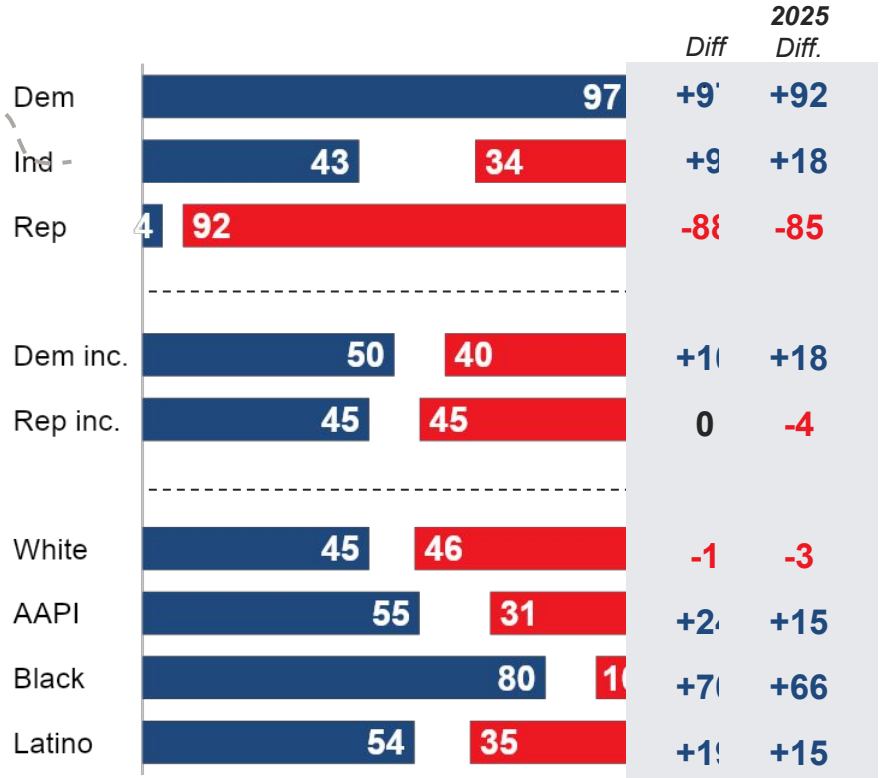
Darker shade = Without leaners

If the November election for U.S. Congress were being held today, for whom would you vote?



September 2025:
48 Dem candidate – 43 Rep candidate

2024 Recall among Ind
Sept. 2025: +5 Harris
May 2026: -2 Harris



Both Parties Remain Underwater & Drop Slightly Since September

Figure 7

Party Favorability

The Democratic Party brand is struggling, with swing voters viewing it as extreme or radical.

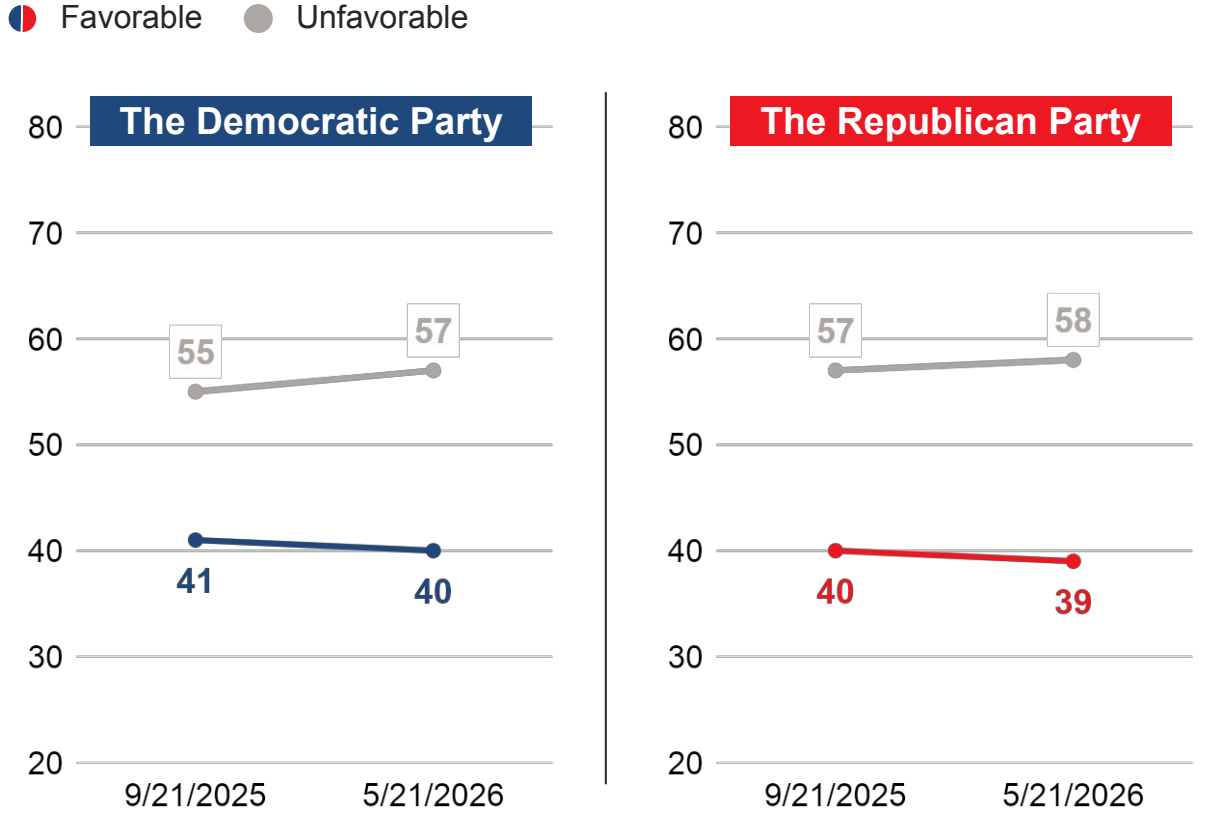
"Their policies are just so far fetched. It's like not even common sense anymore."

"Predictable."

"Inept."

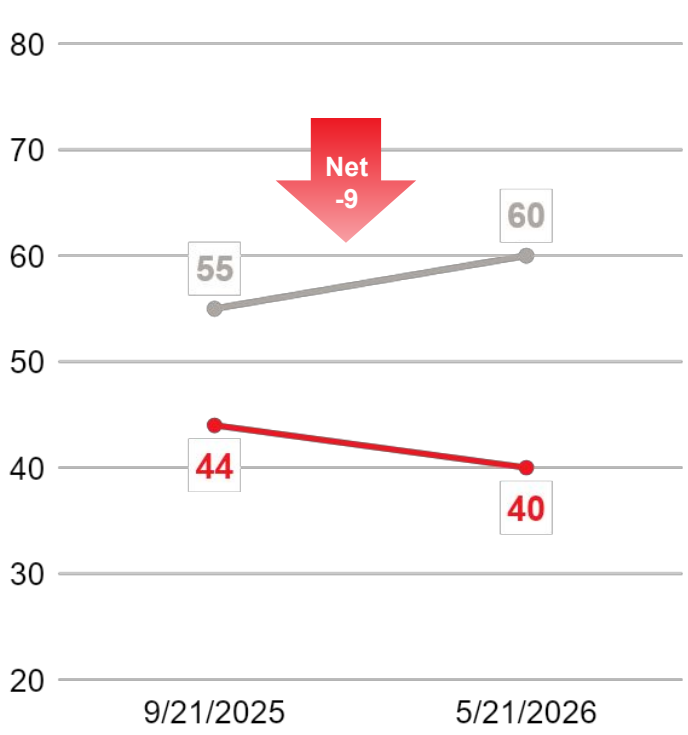
"They're very radical. You can't say anything anymore without them jumping down your throat. It's not normal anymore."

"Too extreme."



Trump Has Taken A Significant Hit In Battleground Since Last Fall

Trump Favorability



Swing voters do not view Trump positively—including some who voted for him in 2024.

"Disappointed. I just thought that it was gonna be different this time around. Here we are with gas at $5, $6, $7 a gallon, and you can't go to the grocery store without spending $1,000 it seems like every time you go, you know. It's crazy. ***So you made all these promises, but you're not standing on those promises****."*

"Liar."

"Clown."

"Criminal."

"Compromised."

"Philandering."

"Egotistical."

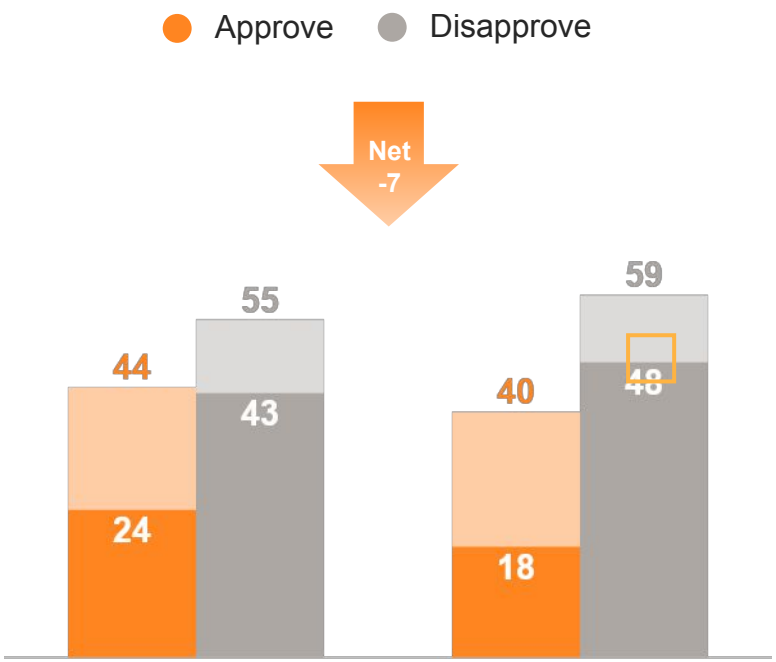
*"****Trump is making money off of being in the White House.*** *Before you had a job and you did it, you weren't having a gift shop, selling your merch. I feel like he's like the guy on Green Acres, Mr. Haney, he's driving around and hocking all this stuff at us, and we're just supposed to go along with it."*

Trump's Job Approval Falls At Similar Rate, Intensity On Disapproval

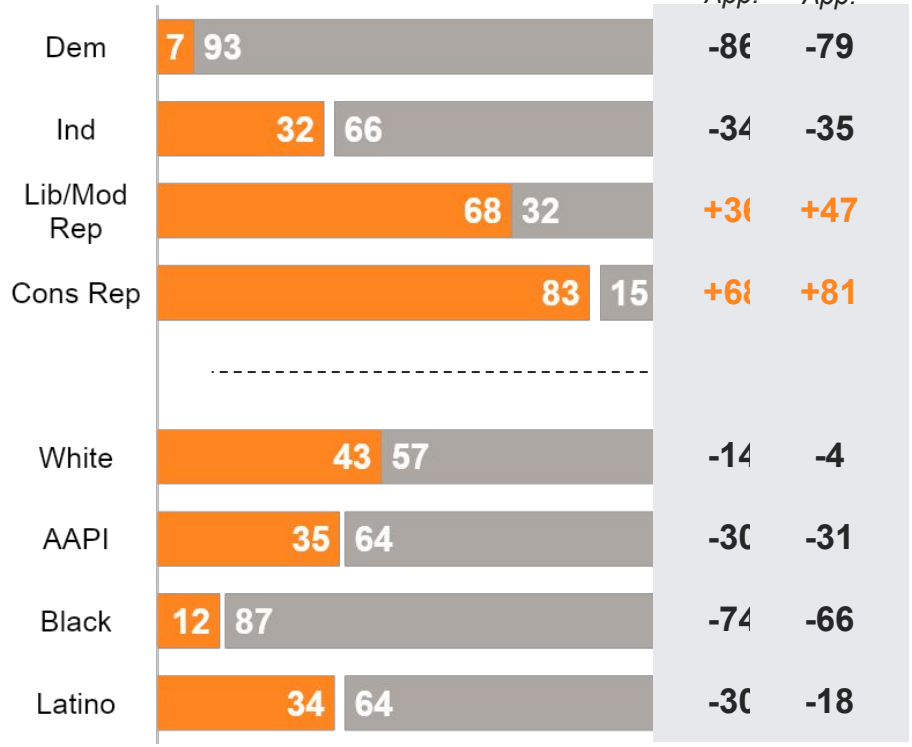
Figure 9

Trump Job Approval

Darker shade = Stronger intensity

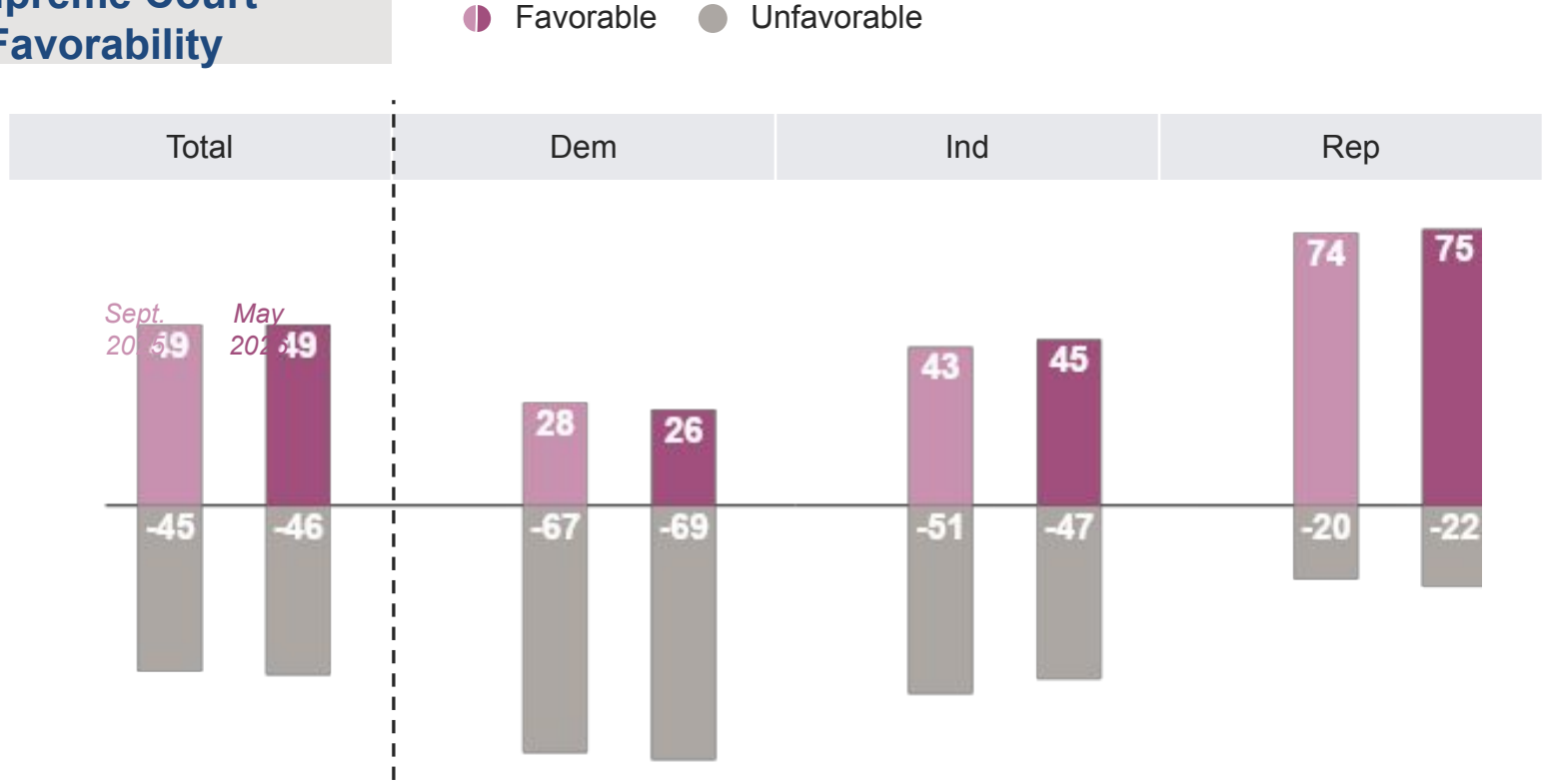


Do you approve or disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as President?



Very Little Change In Supreme Court's Standing As Partisan Views Stay Locked In

Supreme Court Favorability

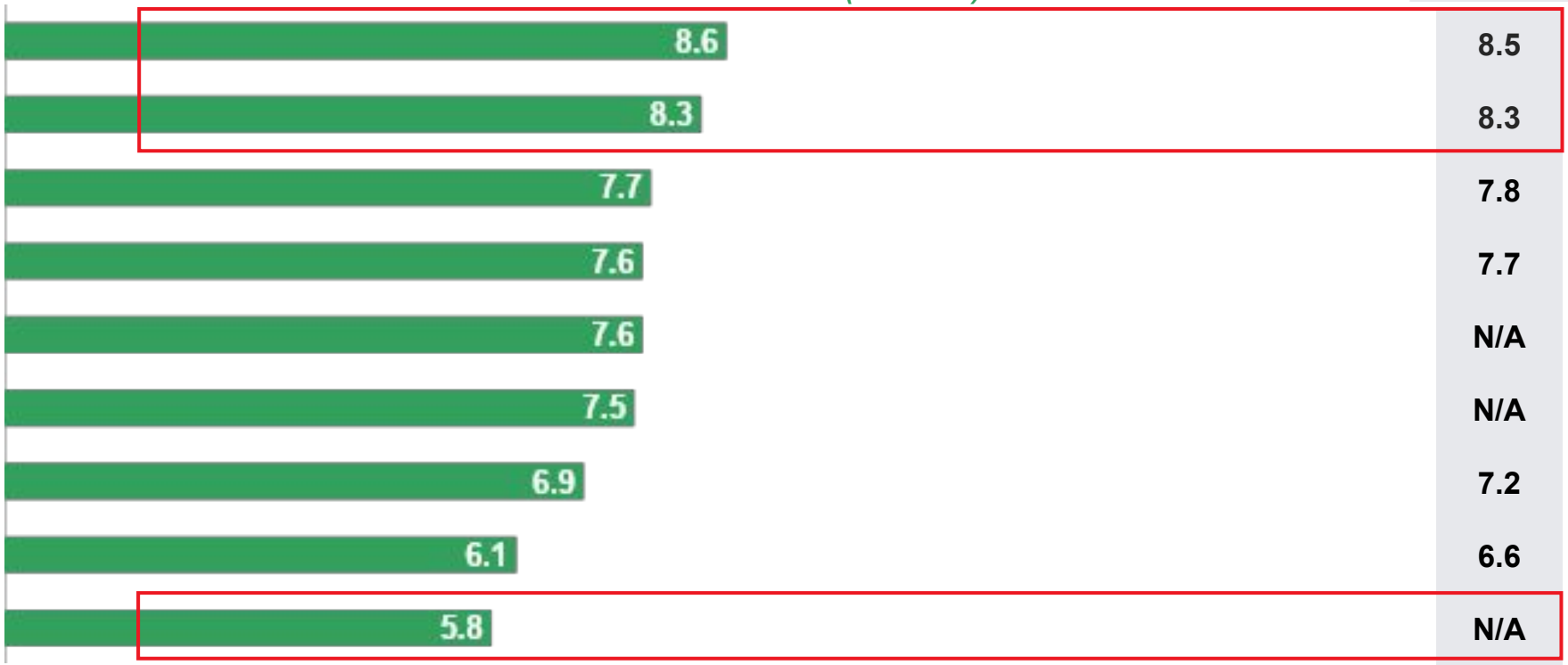


Cost Of Living, Corruption Remain 1st Tier Concerns; Voter Fraud Not Nearly As Resonant

Issue Concerns

*Please indicate **how concerned you are about that issue** using a 0 to 10 scale.*

Mean Score (out of 10)



	Sept. 2025 *Mean*
	8.5
	8.3
	7.8
	7.7
	N/A
	N/A
	7.2
	6.6
	N/A

* = *Split-sample*

Rising Costs & Corruption Are Top Issues Across Partisanship, Race

Figure 12

Issue Concerns

*Please indicate **how concerned you are about that issue** using a 0 to 10 scale.*

Mean Score (out of 10)	*Total*	Dem	Ind	Rep	White	AAPI	Black	Latino
Rising cost of living	***8.6***	9.1	8.7	8.1	8.6	8.4	8.9	8.7
Corruption in Washington	***8.3***	8.5	8.3	8.0	8.3	7.9	8.1	8.2
Cuts to health care	***7.7***	8.8	7.6	6.7	7.6	8.1	8.6	8.1
**Corporate greed/special interests	***7.6***	8.4	7.6	6.7	7.5	7.8	8.0	7.8
The war in Iran	***7.6***	8.4	7.5	7.0	7.6	7.8	7.8	7.7
Threats to voting rights & civil rights	***6.9***	8.5	6.5	5.6	6.8	6.8	8.2	7.2
Illegal immigration	***6.1***	4.3	5.9	7.9	6.0	6.2	5.5	6.1
Voter fraud	***5.8***	4.2	5.8	7.2	5.6	5.8	6.2	6.2

** = *Combined split*



Voters Views On Corruption

Voters Continue To See Congress As Corrupt & Divided

Figure 14

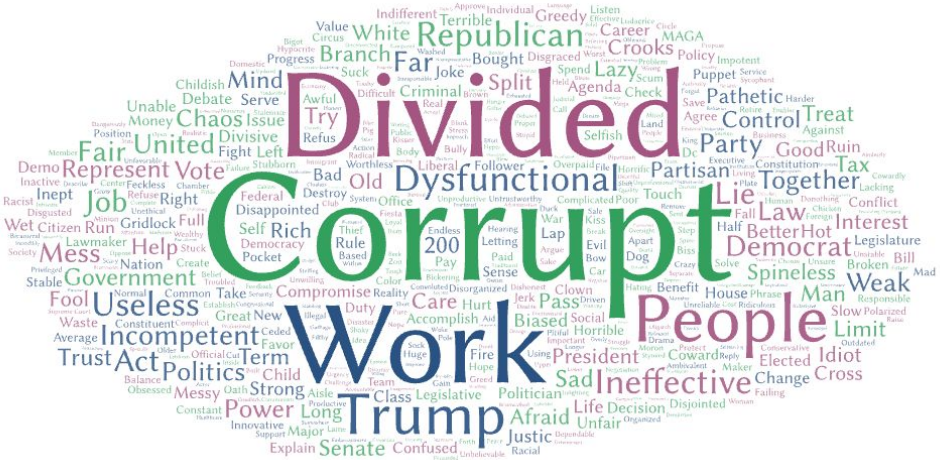
Congress Description

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

Sept. 2025



May 2026



Dems, Inds More Likely To See Congress As Corrupt

Congress Description

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

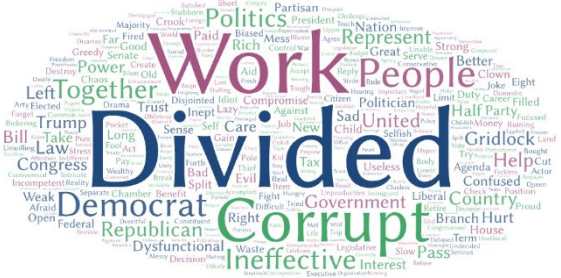
AMONG DEMOCRATS



AMONG INDEPENDENTS



AMONG REPUBLICANS



Swing Voters Are Focused On How Broken Washington Is

Figure 16

Participants repeatedly describe the corruption in Washington as "blatant" and "in your face"

"It's **never been more blatant that people buy elections**, especially with Citizens United, it's legal now basically."

– ***Male persuadable voter***

"It's large entities, oligarchies, corporations, the industries that are **paying the Congressman to vote a certain way**, maybe even against their beliefs."

– ***Male persuadable voter***

"Social media is shining a light on how things have been running in Washington for decades, **like insider trading**. Insanity and **there's no accountability**."

– ***Male persuadable voter***

"Money talks, bulls*** walks."

– ***Female persuadable voter***

"I think **money and power is the root** of a lot of decisions that are made at the government level."

– ***Male persuadable voter***

"Corruption has always been in place to some degree. I think it is out of control, and there's a lot of egos and power and money at play. I do think **it's more brazen than ever, because it's in your face**… it's just terrifying to witness."

– ***Female persuadable voter***

Voters Have Internalized The “Cost Of Corruption”

When participants were asked to react to the term “the cost of corruption” during the groups, they were quick to understand and even offer examples.

“Like when they make these deals for the data centers, and then it affects nature, affects people's water, you know, I feel like that’s the cost of corruption. **It affects the people. It affects our health. It affects our wealth.**”

– Male persuadable voter

“We can't afford health care, we can't afford basic living expenses, we can't afford anything. And it just goes back to that corruption. **[The costs] trickles down to us.**”

– Female persuadable voter

“There's actually a book I read, it was on this topic specifically, and it went into detail: healthcare impacts, tax evasion, reduced economic growth. And I think worldwide, it was something like $3.5 trillion is lost annually due to corruption. So, I think in the US, **you could slice it probably a dozen different ways, where we're hurt economically and health wise, due to corruption**.”

– Male persuadable voter

Some Voters Want To Completely Tear Down The Current System

Several focus group participants voiced support for dismantling the system completely and rebuilding.

"Fire everybody."
– Male persuadable voter

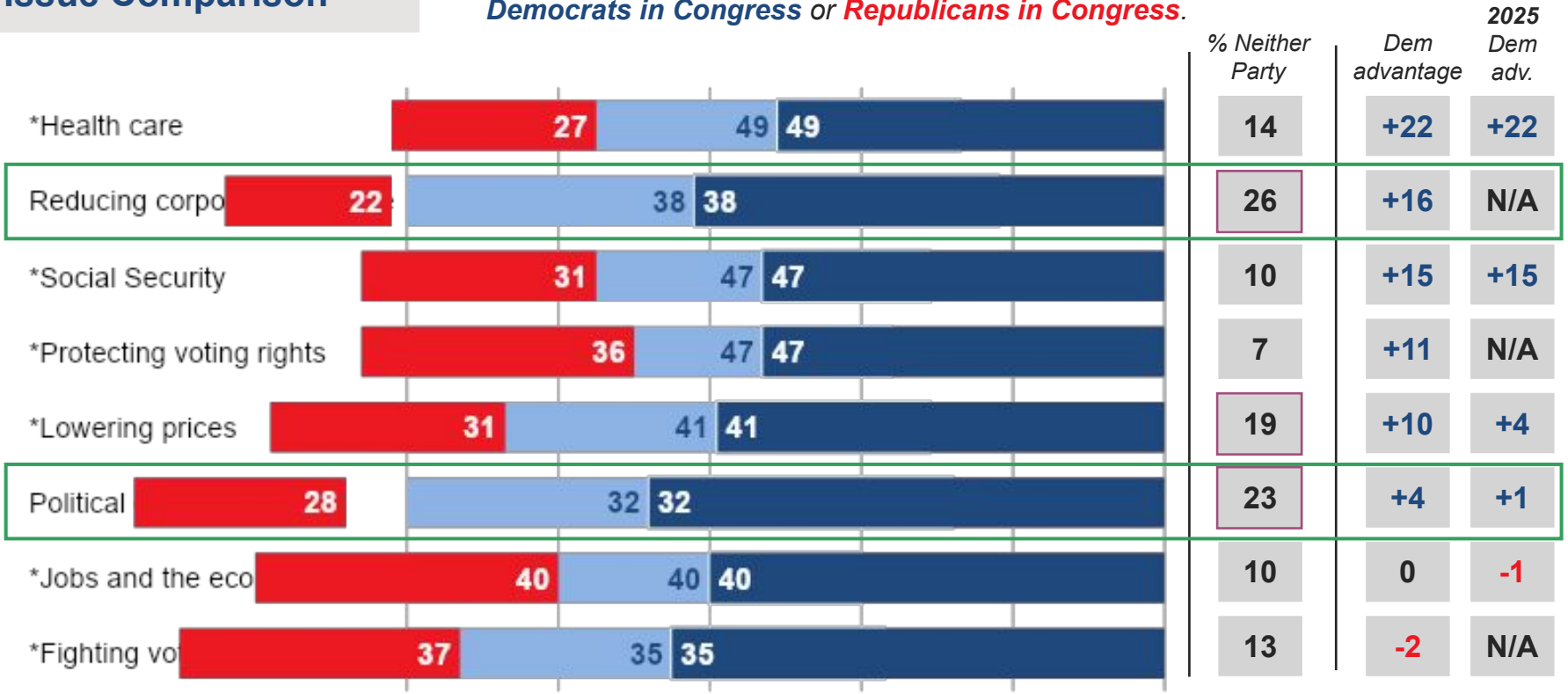
"You need to clean house, because these people are grandfathered in for some reason, or they got tenure. So like, clean the house, start over."
– Female persuadable voter

"In the old days when they started this, senators and representatives still went home and worked their farm and did their everyday job, but went back to Washington and represented us, because they were one of us. Now they look at it, it's a job and an investment."
– Female persuadable voter

Democrats Hold Or Expand Advantages Across Issues; Large Blocs Still Don't See Either Party Handling Corruption Better

Issue Comparison

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



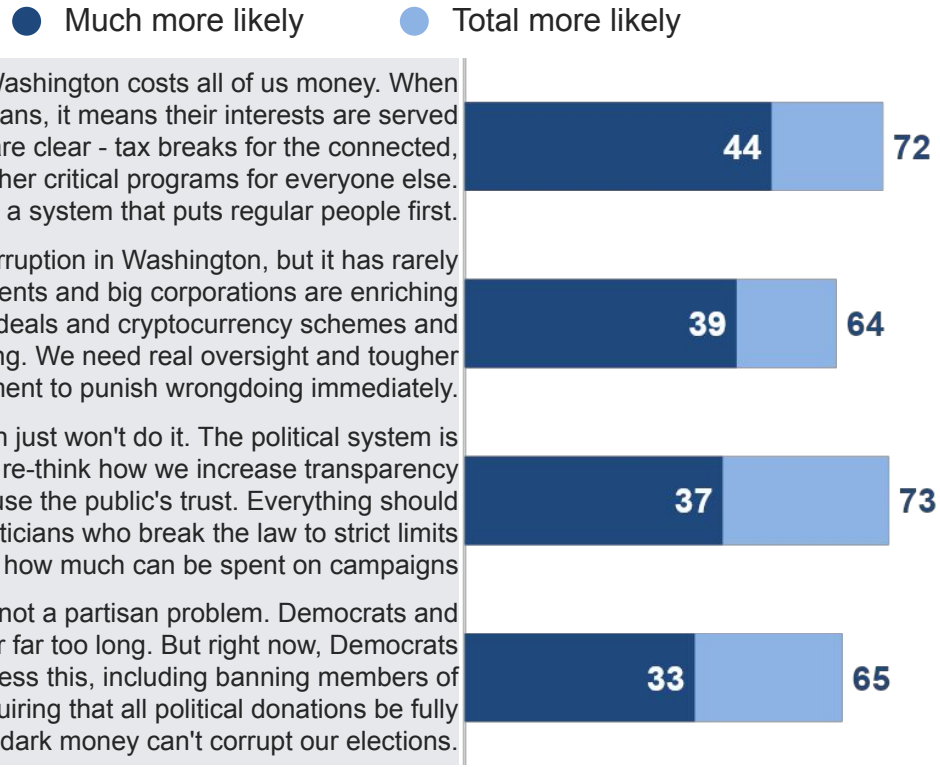
* = *Split-sample*

Cost Of Corruption Argument Most Powerful Message

Figure 20

Democratic Candidate Statements

Please indicate whether it makes you more or less likely to support that candidate, or if it would not impact your decision to support that candidate.



	% Much more likely	
	Ind	Generic Init. Und.
(COST OF CORRUPTION) 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.	40	36
(OVERSIGHT) There has always been corruption in Washington, but it has rarely been as brazen as it is now. Foreign governments and big corporations are enriching the President and his family through business deals and cryptocurrency schemes and Republicans sit on their hands and do nothing. We need real oversight and tougher law enforcement to punish wrongdoing immediately.	37	28
(OVERHAUL) Minor reforms to Washington just won't do it. The political system is deeply broken, and we need to completely re-think how we increase transparency and punish people and corporations who abuse the public's trust. Everything should be on the table from tougher penalties for politicians who break the law to strict limits on how much can be spent on campaigns	33	28
(PLAN) Corruption in Washington is not a partisan problem. Democrats and Republicans have both gamed the system for far too long. But right now, Democrats are the only party with an actual plan to address this, including banning members of Congress from stock trading and requiring that all political donations be fully transparent so dark money can't corrupt our elections.	31	21

Recommendations

- ✔ Voters (especially persuadable ones) don't see this as a partisan issue, so we shouldn't be talking about it as one.
  - A message putting the blame squarely on the GOP and saying Dems "are only party with an actual plan" is weaker.
  - EVERYONE needs to step up and tackle the costs of corruption, Democrats and Republicans alike. We should urge GOP to sign on to our proposals – take on the system, not just the other team.

Recommendations

- ✔ Democratic candidates should be laser focused on the **costs of corruption** as they talk to voters this summer and fall.
  - Rising costs and DC corruption remain the top concerns for battleground voters.
  - The ‘cost of corruption’ frame is the best way to link these two items together and meet voters where they are.

Recommendations

Figure 23

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.


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