

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey blazer over a striped top, is holding a syringe in her left hand and a small vial of naloxone in her right hand. The background is a blurred office setting with papers and a sign that partially reads "G for m P".

 DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

Combating the Opioid Epidemic

A Bipartisan Platform

Ethan Winter *Senior Analyst, Data for Progress*

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Introduction

Nearly 72,000 Americans died of drug overdoses in 2019—a record number—according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and an increase of nearly 5% from 2018.

2020 will likely be even worse. Drug deaths have risen an average of 13 percent so far this year over last year, according to data collected by the New York Times.

People experiencing substance use disorders are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19, and are more likely to die once diagnosed than the general population. The risk of adverse outcomes for those with substance use disorders and the coronavirus is even greater for African Americans.

As part of a mid-September 2020 survey, Data for Progress polled likely voters about their attitudes regarding drug use and their support for various treatment proposals. There is strong, bi-partisan support for a range of ambitious policies to tackle overdose. This set of compelling, common sense policies create a public health platform that prioritizes increasing access to care rather than incarceration, stopping preventable overdose deaths, making treatment widely available and accessible, and supporting people to recover and get the care they need. Several of these policies can be put in place immediately, and without additional costs to taxpayers.

Naloxone & Emergency Overdose Response

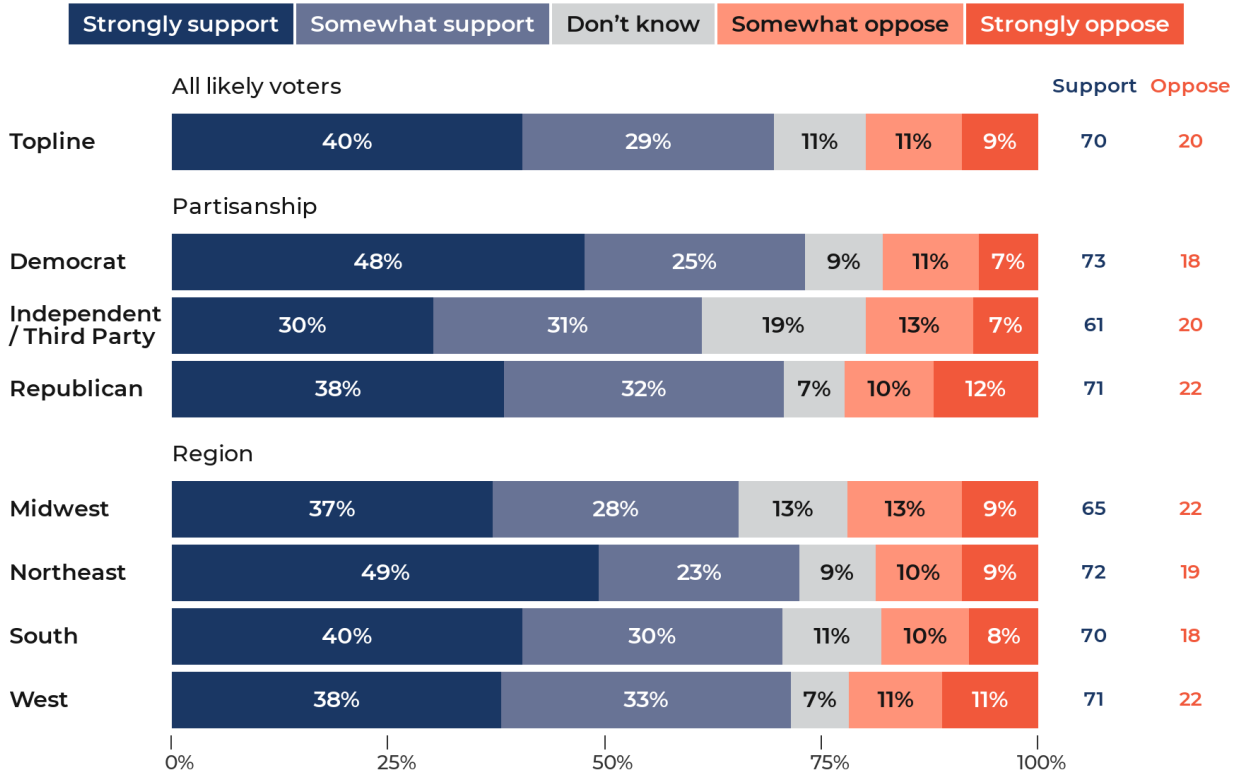
Naloxone is a medication that blocks the effects of opioids. Commonly sold under the brand name “Narcan,” it can work to reverse an overdose. The medication is safe and easy to use. It can be administered either through the nose (intranasally) or injected. We find that there is robust support for expanding naloxone availability and finding cheaper ways to supply naloxone.

We first tested to see if likely voters would support or oppose a proposal to increase accessibility to naloxone so that it’s as widely available as other commonplace safety equipment, such as first aid kits, fire extinguishers, or seatbelts.

Overwhelmingly, likely voters want to increase access to naloxone, favoring this proposal by a 49-percentage-point margin (69 percent support, 20 percent oppose).

Voters Want Naloxone To Be As Widely Available As Possible

Would you support or oppose a proposal to increase access to naloxone with the aim of making it as widely available as possible, just as accessible as first aid kits, fire extinguishers, and seat belts?



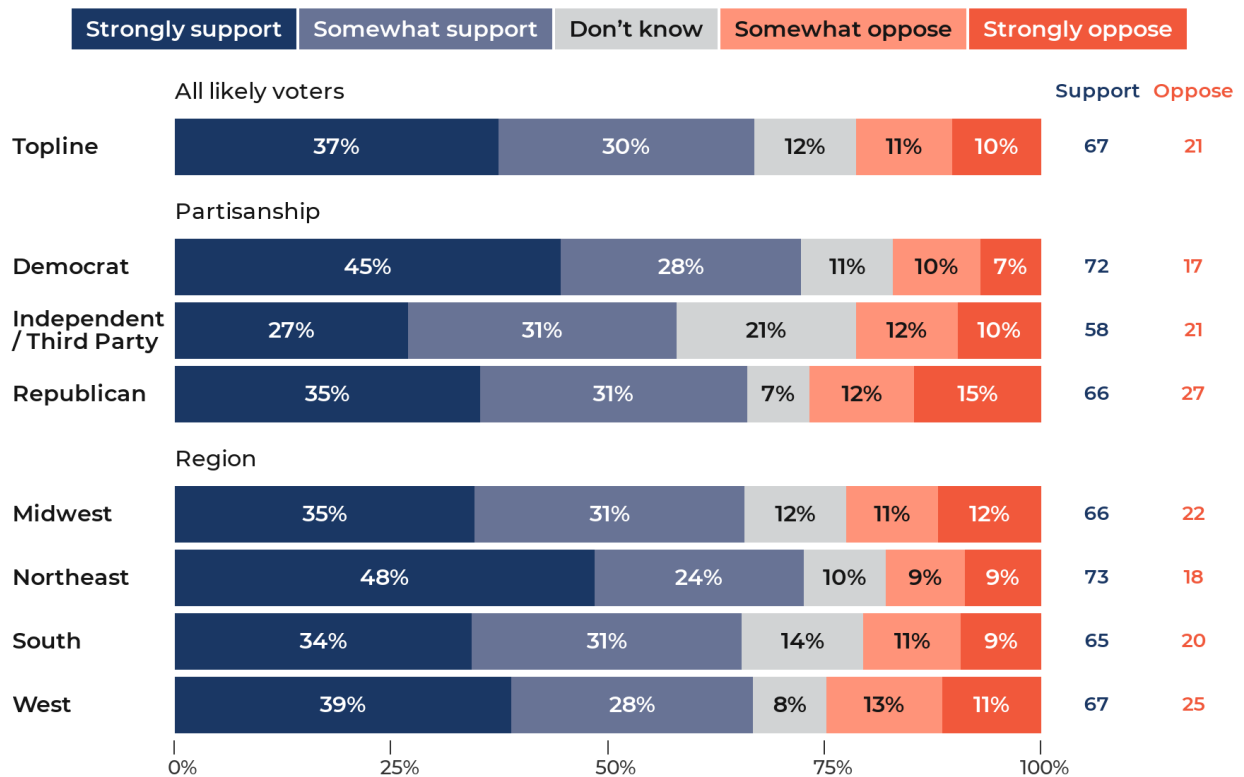
Sep 11 to Sep 12, 2020 survey of 1171 likely voters

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Next, we tested a proposal where naloxone would be distributed to community groups who could then direct it to those who need it. Again, likely voters are incredibly supportive of this, backing the proposal by a 46-point margin (67 percent support, 21 percent oppose).

Voters Support Distributing Naloxone To Community Groups

Would you support or oppose a proposal to increase access to naloxone by distributing it to community groups who can deliver it directly to people who use drugs, their families, and friends?



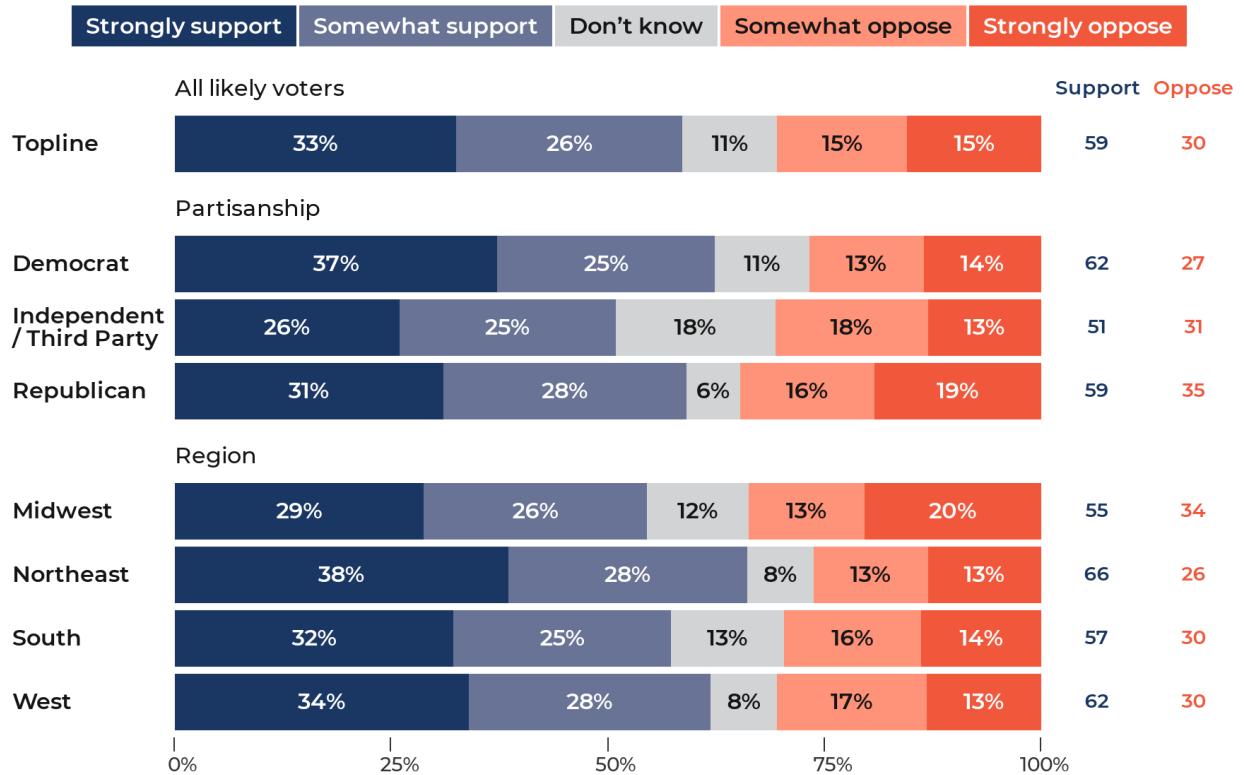
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By a 29-point margin, likely voters also support allowing pharmacists to stock and distribute naloxone to individuals without requiring a prescription from a doctor (59 percent support, 30 percent oppose).

Voters Support Allowing Pharmacists To Stock And Distribute Naloxone

Would you support or oppose a proposal to allow pharmacists to stock and distribute Naloxone to people without a prescription from a doctor?



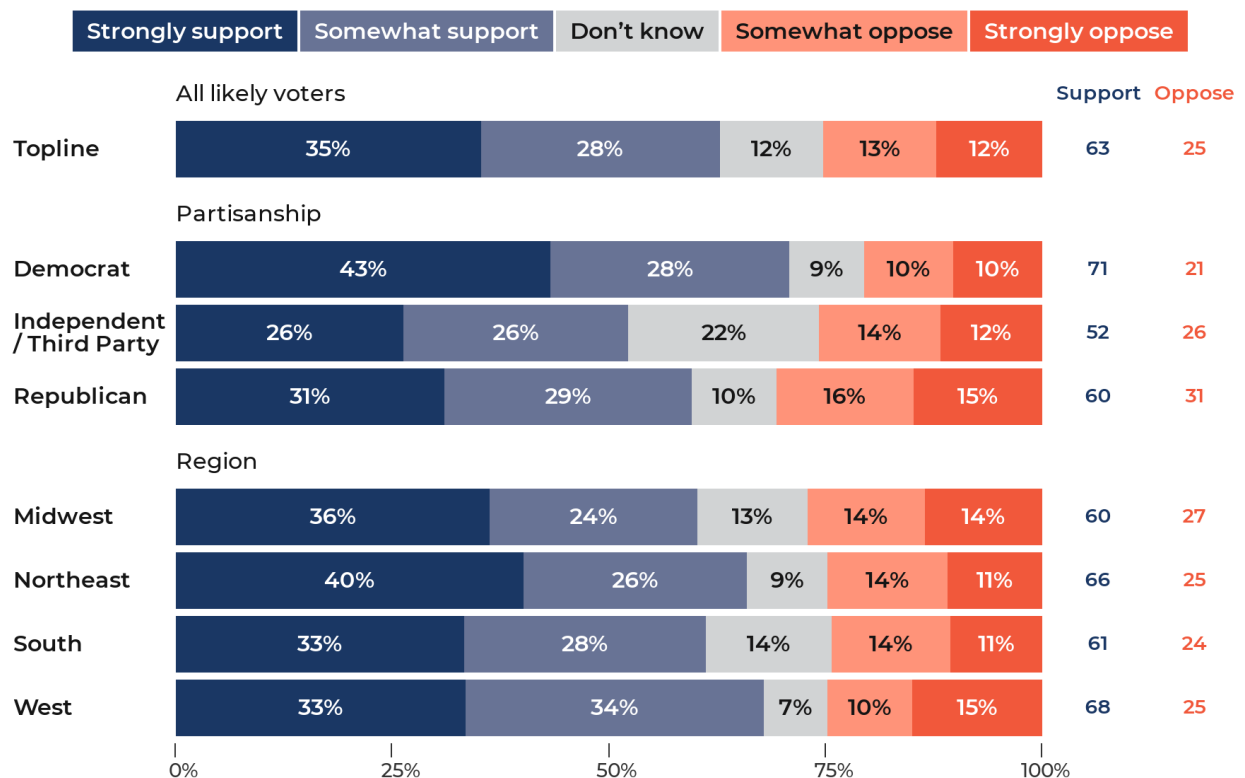
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We also asked likely voters if they would support or oppose a proposal where state governors would form a bloc which could be leveraged to purchase naloxone in bulk, thus getting it at a cheaper rate. We find that this proposal is supported by a 38-point margin (63 percent support, 25 percent oppose).

Voters Support State Governors Forming A Bloc So They Can Purchase Naloxone In Bulk

Some state governors are considering forming a bloc to purchase naloxone in bulk, allowing them to get the medication for much cheaper. Naloxone would then be able to be distributed more widely. Would you support or oppose the governor of your state joining this block, if it were to be created?



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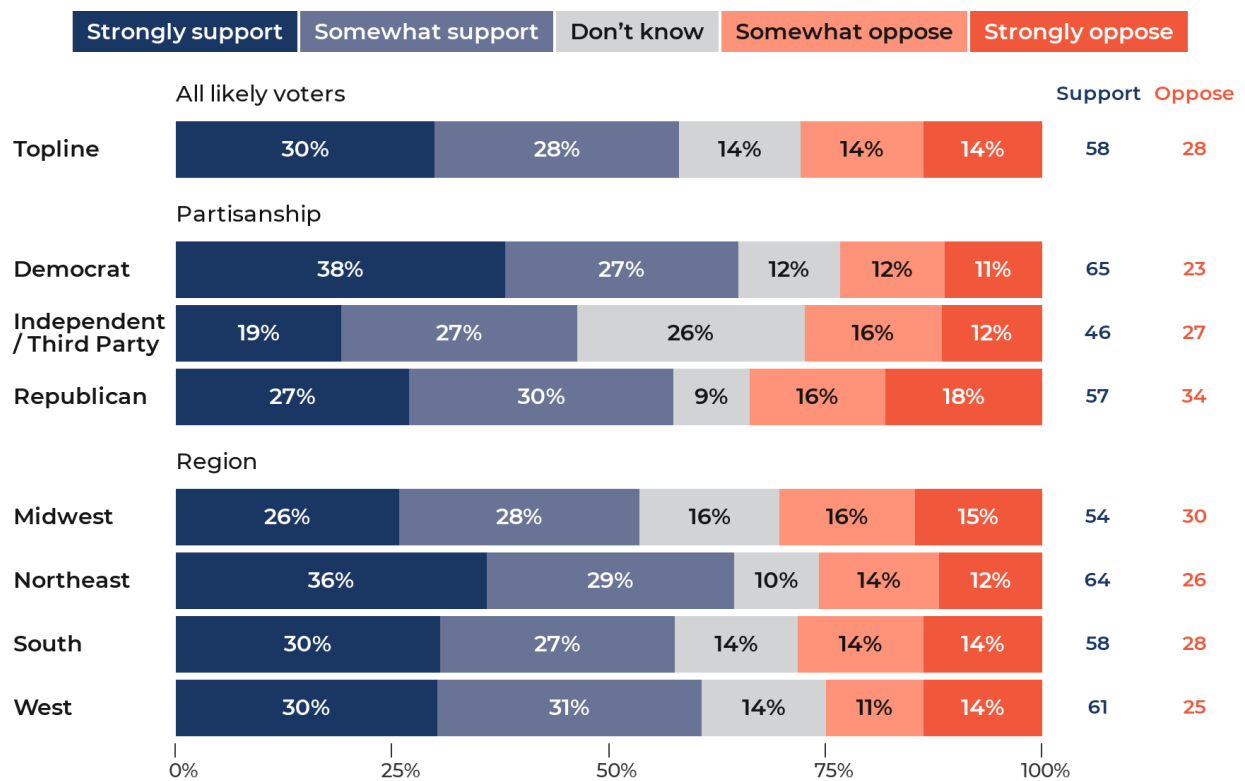
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Naloxone is sold in two variants: one that’s administered intranasally, and one that’s injectable. The injectable version is much cheaper and yet several states continue to spend considerably more for the nasal version.

We tested a proposal where the government would purchase this medication, then distribute it to individuals for use. By a 30-point margin, likely voters support this proposal (58 percent support, 28 percent oppose).

Voters Want The Government To Purchase Injectable Naloxone To Distribute To Individuals

When responding to a drug overdose, Naloxone can be delivered two ways, intranasally (through one’s nose) or through an injection, so delivered with a needle. The cost of injectable naloxone runs in the cents and is much cheaper than the version of naloxone administered intranasally. Below, you’ll read some proposals to increase access to the injectable form of Naloxone. Say whether your support or oppose them. -- Governments purchasing the cheaper injectable Naloxone so that it can be distributed to individuals for use



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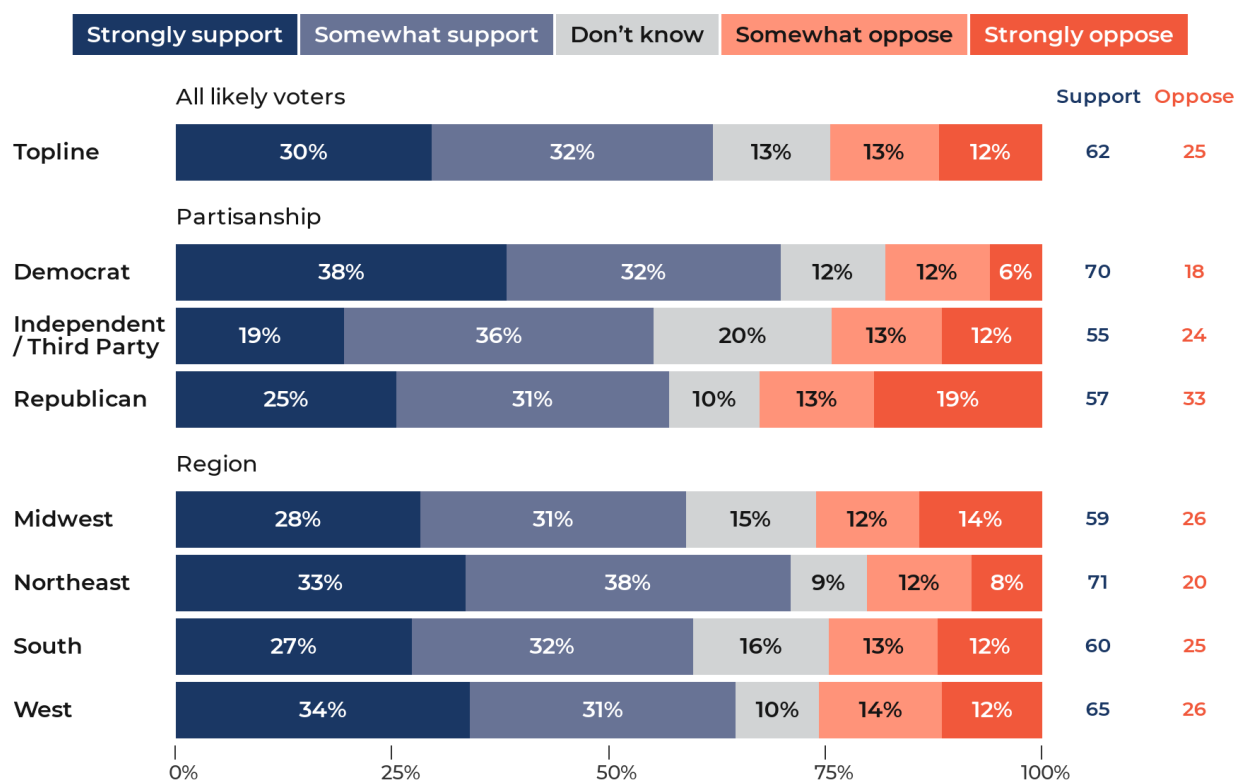
Medically assisted treatment

The World Health Organization, an international agency committed to improving public health, describes the medically assisted treatment (MAT) with methadone and buprenorphine as the standard of care for Opioid-Use Disorder (OUD). More than any other single intervention, increasing access to these medications has been proven to have a positive impact on decreasing rates of overdose. We tested a range of proposals around increasing access to MAT and find that likely voters favor making it more available.

We find that likely voters want Medicaid—a government-run program that provides health insurance to low-income Americans—to cover MAT for those enrolled across all states, with this proposal supported by a 37-point margin (62 percent support, 25 percent oppose).

Voters Want Medicaid To Cover MAT

Some policymakers are proposing that MAT, which includes medications like Buprenorphine that treat addiction, should be covered by Medicaid, a program that provides health insurance to lower-income Americans. Do you support or oppose this proposal?



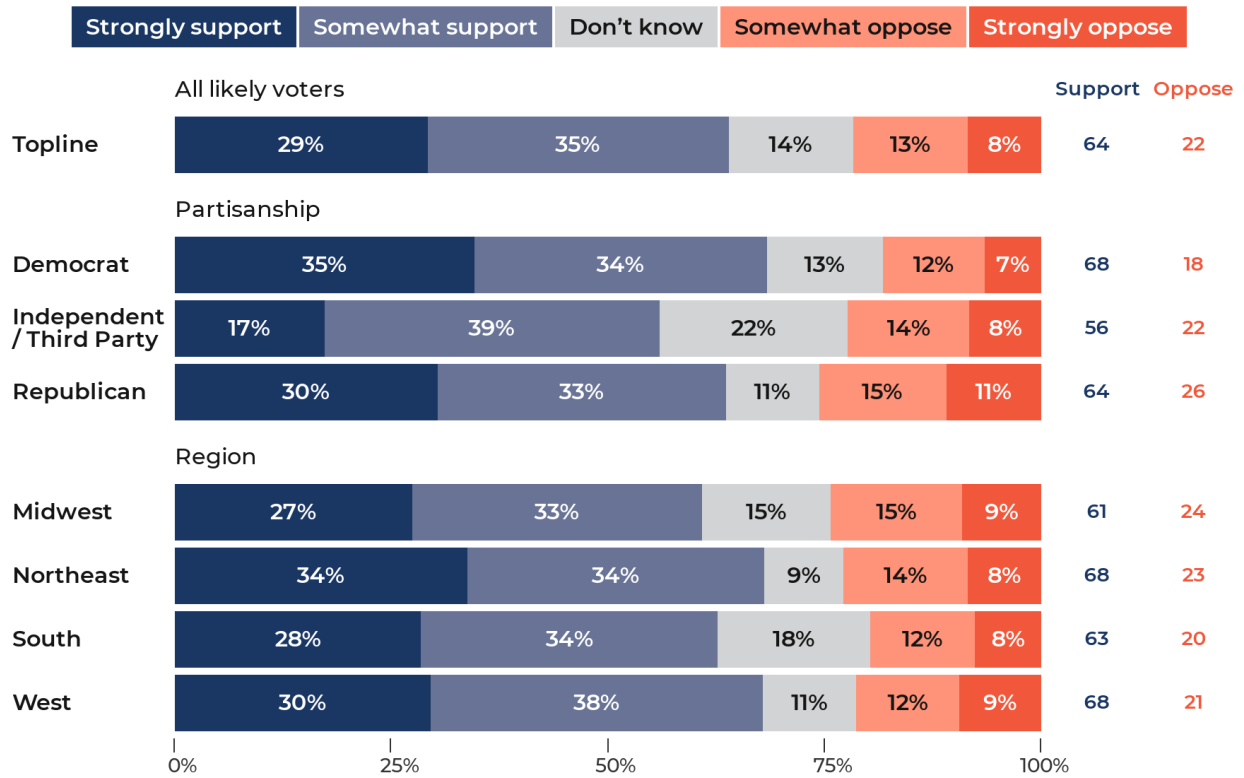
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Currently, patients on MAT have to go to a clinic everyday to receive their medicine. By a 43-point margin, likely voters also support allowing pharmacists to stock and distribute MAT to patients with a prescription (64 percent support, 21 percent oppose).

Voters Support Allowing Pharmacists To Stock MAT

Would you support or oppose expanding access to MAT in pharmacies by enabling pharmacists to stock these medicines, and distribute them directly to patients with a prescription?



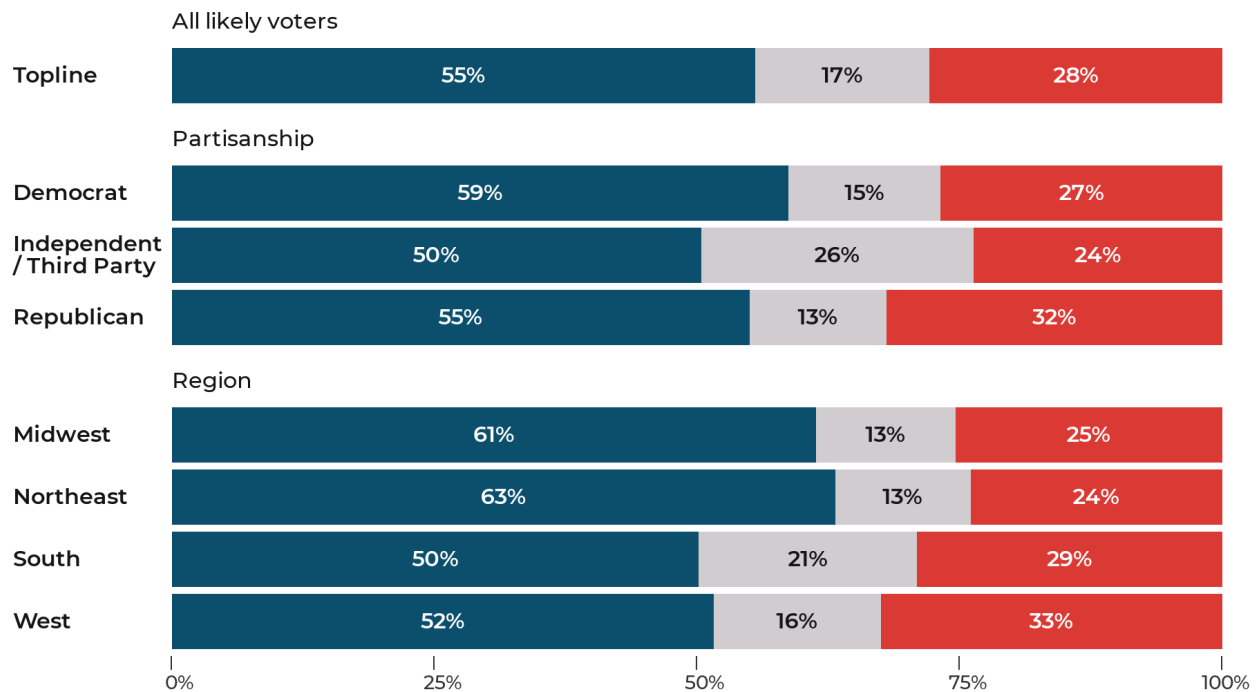
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We find that a majority (55 percent) of likely voters want patients and their doctors to have a choice in deciding what kind of MAT they'll pursue as part of their treatment plan, with only 28 percent of likely voters thinking that patient preference shouldn't be taken into account. (The remaining 17 percent of likely voters weren't sure.)

Voters Want Patients And Their Doctors To Choose Whatever Form Of MAT Works Best For Them

When thinking about a patient's choice of medically-assisted treatment (MAT), what comes closer to your view?



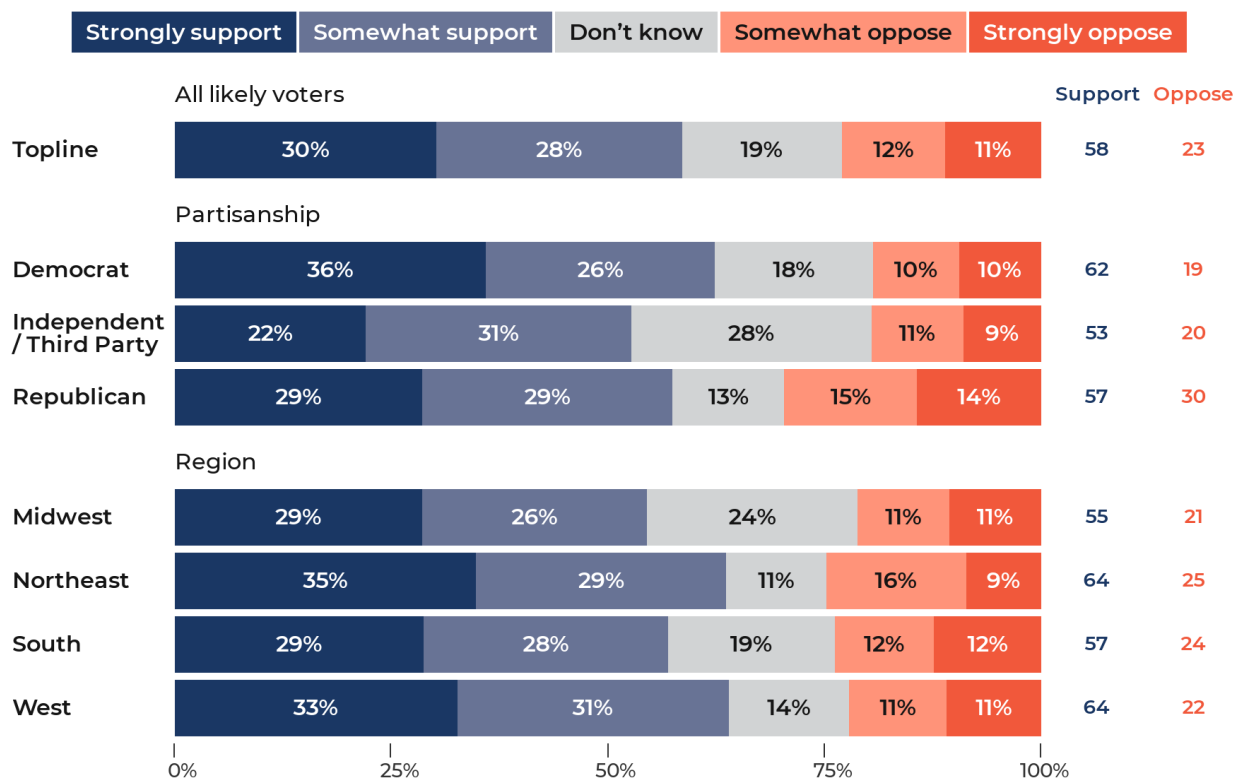
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Likely voters back two proposals to expand access to MAT. First, by a 35-point margin, likely voters support allowing doctors to prescribe MAT without any additional licensing (58 percent support, 23 percent oppose).

Voters Support Allowing Doctors To Prescribe MAT Without Additional Licensing

The World Health Organization, an international agency committed to improve public health, described the medically-assisted treatment (MAT) with Methadone and Buprenorphine as the “gold standard” of care for Opiate-Use Disorder (OUD). More than any other single intervention, increasing access to these medications has been proven to have a positive impact on decreasing rates of overdose. However, unlike other medicines there are specific obstacles to accessing MATs. Would you support or oppose the following proposals to increase access to these medically-assisted treatment? -- Allow doctors to prescribe MAT without additional licensing, and as part of their general practice



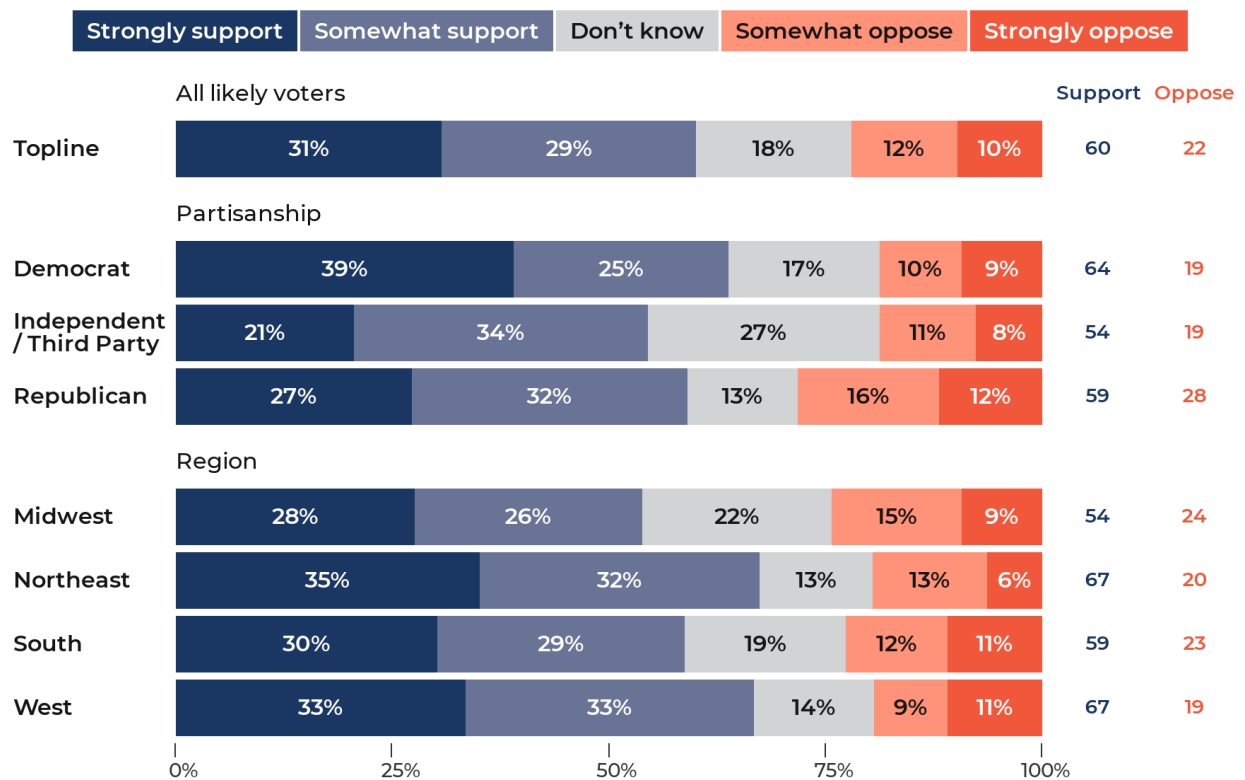
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Likely voters also want nurses, nurse practitioners, and physicians' assistants to be allowed to prescribe MAT, backing this by a 48-point margin (60 percent support, 22 percent oppose).

Voters Support Allowing Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, And Physicians' Assistants To Prescribe MAT

The World Health Organization, an international agency committed to improve public health, described the medically-assisted treatment (MAT) with Methadone and Buprenorphine as the “gold standard” of care for Opiate-Use Disorder (OUD). More than any other single intervention, increasing access to these medications has been proven to have a positive impact on decreasing rates of overdose. However, unlike other medicines there are specific obstacles to accessing MATs. Would you support or oppose the following proposals to increase access to these medically-assisted treatment? -- Allow nurses, nurse practitioners and physicians' assistants to prescribe MAT



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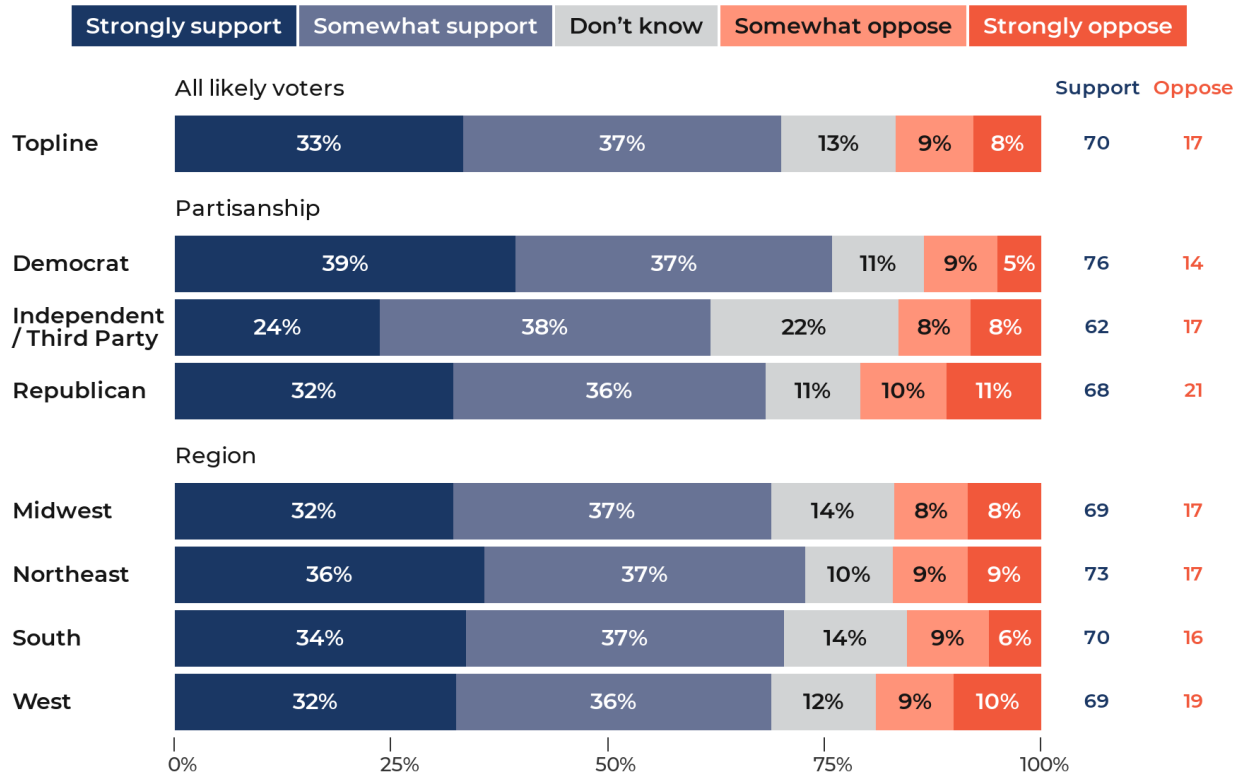
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Connection to care

People want to ensure that treatment is widely available, and they want to increase points of access to care and services. One way to reduce deaths from drug overdoses is to establish “health hubs” where individuals who are active drug users can access MAT, other health services, and referrals to housing and job-training programs. Overall, likely voters support establishing these hubs by a 53-point margin (70 percent support, 17 percent oppose).

Voters Support The Creation Of Health Hubs In Their States

Some state governors are proposing the creation of “health hubs” in their states. These would be places where people can get access to MAT, other primary health services, and referrals to housing and job training programs. Would you support or oppose the creation of these “health hubs”?



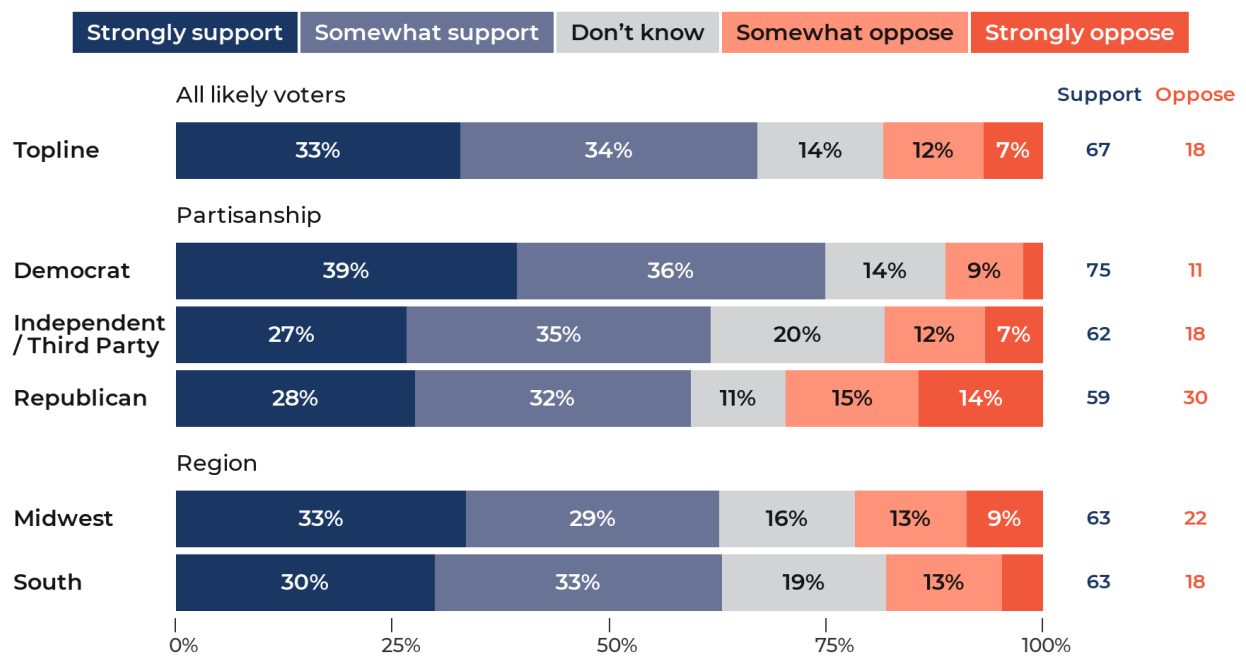
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Voters also back the creation of overdose prevention centers, facilities that function as safe spaces for individuals still using drugs that may not be ready for treatment yet and designed to prevent them from dying while connecting them to community support. Overall, the creation of these sites is supported by a 49-point margin (67 percent support, 19 percent oppose).

Voters Support The Creation Of Overdose Prevention Centers

Some lawmakers in Congress are proposing the creation of overdose prevention centers, in order to bring drug users who may not have homes inside, and to create safe spaces for people who are still using drugs and may not be ready for treatment. These centers would be designed to prevent people from dying and to link them to community support. Would you support or oppose this proposal?



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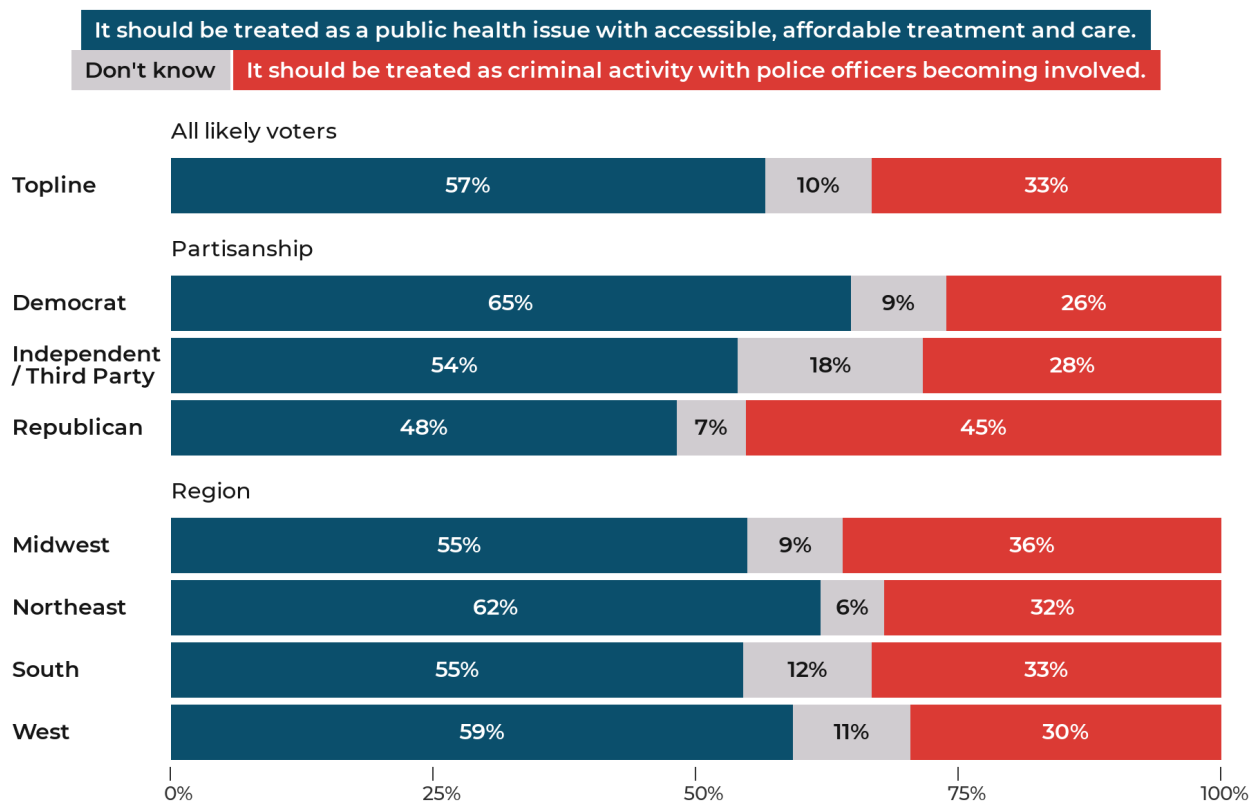
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Criminal justice

Likely voters want the use of illegal drugs in their community to be treated as a public-health issue—with the remedy being accessible and affordable healthcare—rather than as a criminal activity where the police would be involved. Overall, by a 24-point margin, likely voters want the use of illegal drug use in their community treated as a public-health issue, not a criminal activity with the police becoming involved (57 percent public health, 33 percent criminal activity).

Voters Want The Use Of Illegal Drugs Treated As A Public Health Issue

When thinking about addressing the use of illegal drugs in your community, what comes closer to your belief?



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Conclusion

There is strong, bi-partisan support among likely voters to prioritize common sense public health solutions to prevent overdose deaths and make access to care and treatment widely available. This support for health policies extends across a range of interventions, from increasing access to naloxone, ensuring that Medicaid covers MAT, and creating “health hubs” that can increase connection to care. These policies could be introduced today.

Methodology

From September 11 through September 12, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,171 likely voters nationally, using web-panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is +/- 2.9 percentage points.

QUESTION WORDING

Would you support or oppose a proposal to increase access to naloxone with the aim of making it as widely available as possible, just as accessible as first aid kits, fire extinguishers, and seat belts?

- ▶ Strongly support
- ▶ Somewhat support
- ▶ Somewhat oppose
- ▶ Strongly oppose
- ▶ Don't know

Would you support or oppose a proposal to increase access to naloxone by distributing it to community groups who can deliver it directly to people who use drugs, their families, and friends?

- ▶ Strongly support
- ▶ Somewhat support
- ▶ Somewhat oppose
- ▶ Strongly oppose
- ▶ Don't know

Would you support or oppose a proposal to allow pharmacists to stock and distribute Naloxone to people without a prescription from a doctor?

- ▶ Strongly support
- ▶ Somewhat support
- ▶ Somewhat oppose
- ▶ Strongly oppose
- ▶ Don't know

Some state governors are considering forming a bloc to purchase naloxone in bulk, allowing them to get the medication for much cheaper. Naloxone would then be able to be distributed more widely. Would you support or oppose the governor of your state joining this block, if it were to be created?

- ▶ Strongly support
- ▶ Somewhat support
- ▶ Somewhat oppose
- ▶ Strongly oppose
- ▶ Don't know

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- ▶ Strongly support
- ▶ Somewhat support
- ▶ Somewhat oppose
- ▶ Strongly oppose
- ▶ Don't know

When thinking about a patient's choice of medically-assisted treatment (MAT), what comes closer to your view?

- ▶ Patients and their doctors should be able to choose whichever form of MAT (Methadone, Buprenorphine, Naltrexone) works best for them, and not be forced into an option.
- ▶ Doctors should prescribe a MAT regardless of a patient's preference, and due to their assessment of perceived risk of abuse by the patient.
- ▶ Don't know

Would you support or oppose expanding access to MAT in pharmacies by enabling pharmacists to stock these medicines, and distribute them directly to patients with a prescription?

- ▶ Strongly support
- ▶ Somewhat support
- ▶ Somewhat oppose
- ▶ Strongly oppose
- ▶ Don't know

Some policymakers are proposing that MAT, which includes medications like Buprenorphine that treat addiction, should be covered by Medicaid, a program that provides health insurance to lower-income Americans. Do you support or oppose this proposal?

- ▶ Strongly support
- ▶ Somewhat support
- ▶ Somewhat oppose
- ▶ Strongly oppose
- ▶ Don't know

Some state governors are proposing the creation of “health hubs” in their states. These would be places where people can get access to MATs, other primary health services, and referrals to housing and job training programs. Would you support or oppose the creation of these “health hubs”?

- ▶ Strongly support
- ▶ Somewhat support
- ▶ Somewhat oppose
- ▶ Strongly oppose
- ▶ Don't know

When thinking about addressing the use of illegal drugs in your community, what comes closer to your belief?

- ▶ It should be treated as a public health issue with accessible, affordable treatment and care.
- ▶ It should be treated as criminal activity with police officers becoming involved.
- ▶ Don't know

EDITED BY

Andrew Mangan, Senior Editor, Data for Progress

COVER PHOTO

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Caption: A pharmacist holds a vial of Naloxone at an outpatient pharmacy at the University of Washington on October 7, 2017.