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# Voters Oppose State Level Budget Cuts and Want Public Sector Employees Protected

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**Ethan Winter** *Senior Analyst, Data for Progress*  
**Isa Alomran** *Intern, Data for Progress*

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## Introduction

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As part of a December survey, Data for Progress polled 1,136 likely voters nationally to measure attitudes towards the following: first, state and local government shortfalls, second, proposed solutions to addressing these budgetary challenges, and, last, the role of labor unions within this process.

We find that likely voters are extremely concerned about the prospect of additional cuts to the services state and local governments provide. Likely voters also back a host of proposals to raise revenue, such as increasing taxes paid by millionaires and billionaires, closing corporate loopholes, and legalizing marijuana. Lastly, likely voters envision labor groups playing a central role in any budget negotiations and want the safety of workers prioritized.

# Testing the Environment

To start, we informed likely voters that many states are facing budget shortfalls due to the pandemic. We then presented some of the options state and local governments are considering to address this. Likely voters were then asked whether or not they were concerned about these proposed solutions.

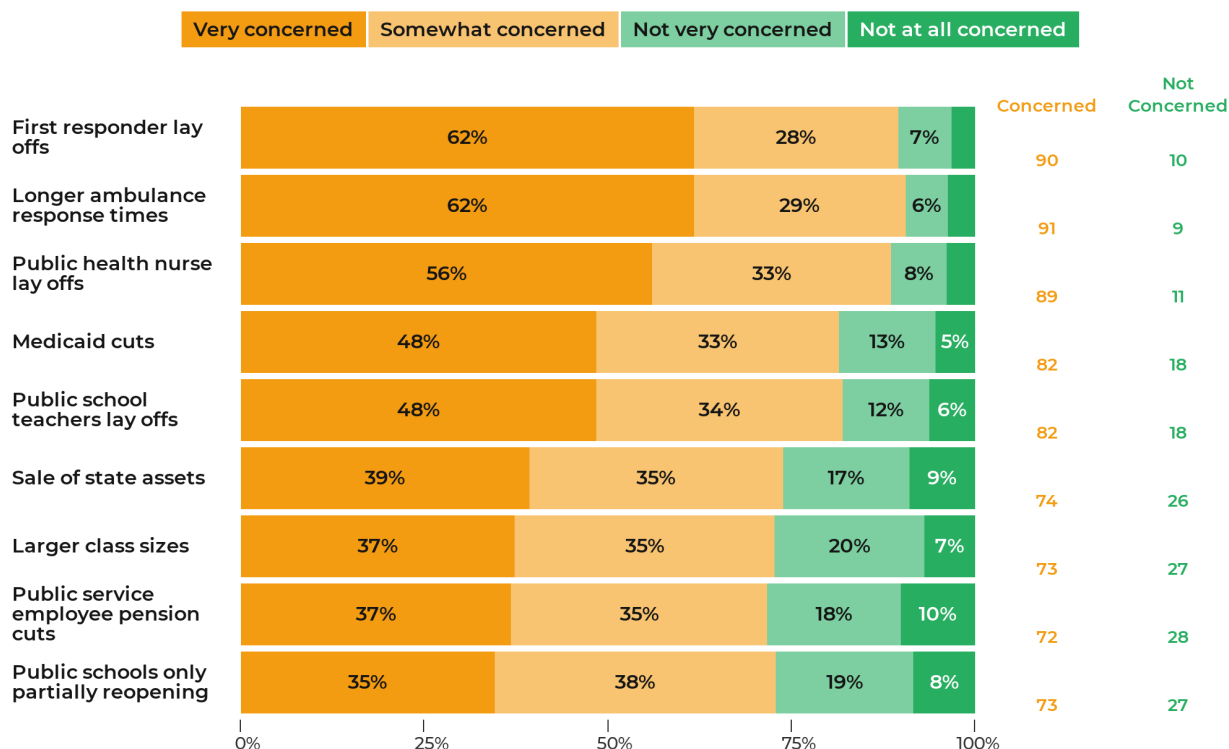
We find that levels of concern around these proposed cuts is high. Likely voters are especially anxious about cuts related to public health services. For example, 62 percent say they are “very concerned” about first responder layoffs and longer ambulance response times, while 56 percent say the same about public health nurse layoffs.

Likely voters are also concerned about a range of other cuts. Eighty-two percent of voters, for instance, say they are either “very” or “somewhat concerned” about cuts to their state’s Medicaid program. Similarly, 82 percent of voters register some level of concern about public school teachers being laid off. Voters are also very worried about the prospect of public employee pensions being cut (72 percent very or somewhat concerned), larger classes becoming the norm (73 percent very or somewhat concerned), and the sale of state assets like state parks (74 percent very or somewhat concerned).

## Voters Are Very Concerned About Cuts To Public Services

State governments are required to balance their budgets every year. Many state governments are facing budget shortfalls because of the coronavirus pandemic and related economic downturn.

How concerned or not concerned are you about any of the following if states are forced to make spending cuts?



Dec 11 to Dec 13, 2020 survey of 1136 likely voters

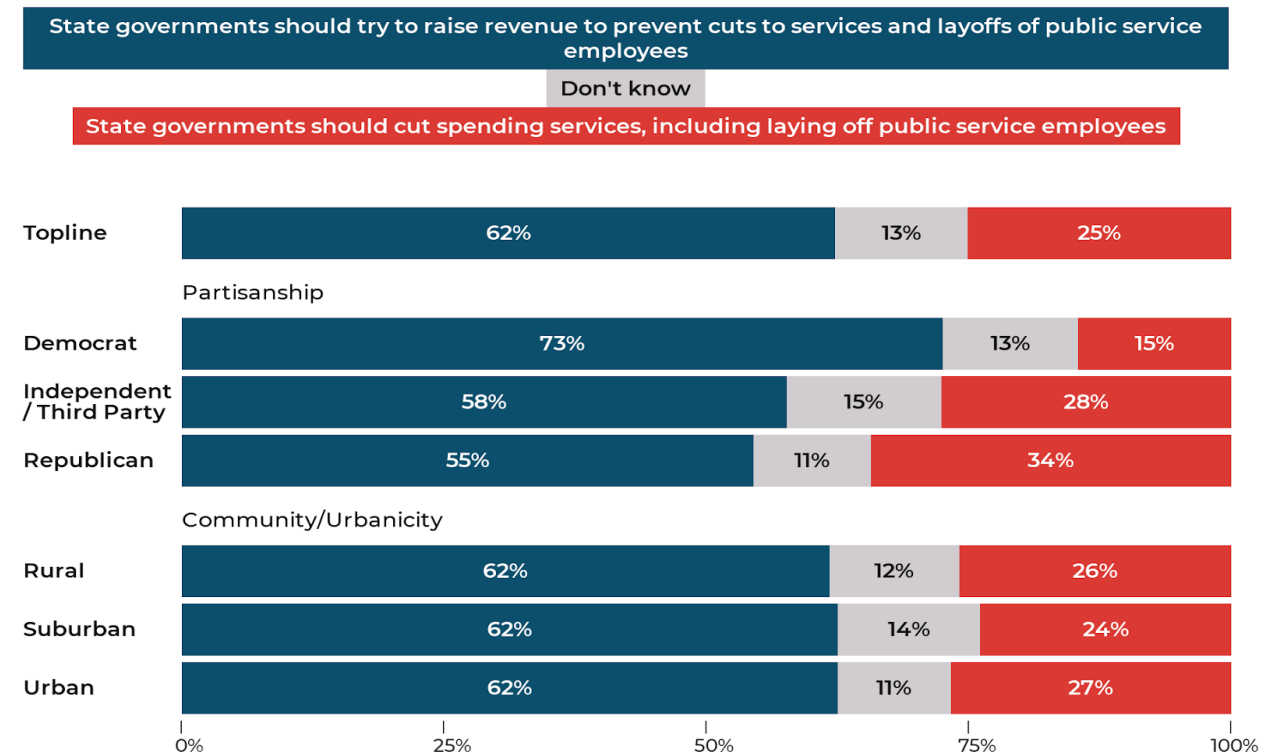
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# Voters Want to Raise Revenue to Address Budget Shortfalls

First, we asked a general question to gauge attitudes about what states should do to address budget shortfalls. Specifically, we offered voters a choice between raising revenue or cutting services. We find that, by a 37 percentage-point margin, likely voters favor revenue raising measures over austerity (62 percent think states should try to raise revenue, 25 percent want states to cut spending). We also find high levels of support for this approach across partisanship: a majority of self-identified Democrats, Independent / Third party voters and Republicans prefer the revenue raising approach, backing it by margins of 58-points, 30-points, and 21-points, respectively.

## Voters Think State Governments Should Try To Raise Revenue To Avoid Public Service Cuts

State governments are required to balance their budgets every year. Many state governments are facing budget shortfalls because of the coronavirus pandemic and related economic downturn. When thinking about how state governments should address this, which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?



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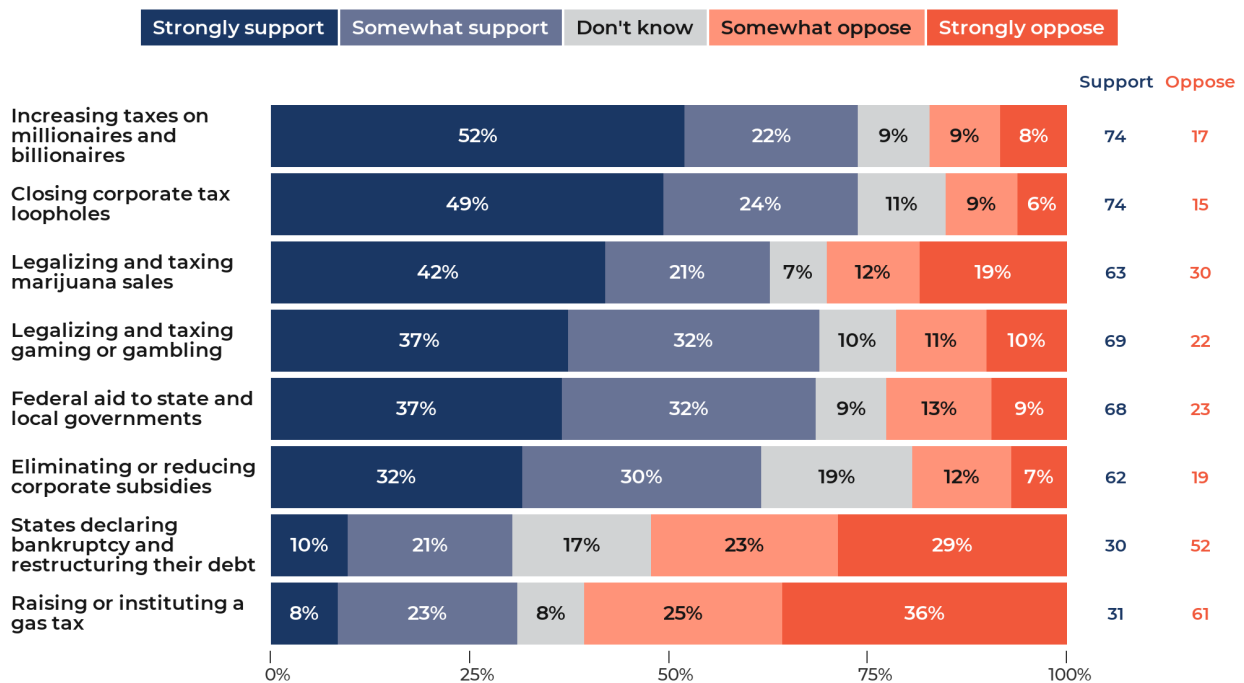
We then moved to test specific proposals by which states could raise revenue. In addition, we also asked likely voters about the federal government providing fiscal aid and about state governments declaring bankruptcy. We find that states increasing revenue is popular and that support for proposals that could forestall any painful budget cuts outpaces public backing for state governments declaring bankruptcy.

The two most popular options among voters are implementing a tax on millionaires and billionaires and closing corporate tax loopholes. These proposals are backed by margins of 57-points and 59-points, respectively. We also find that likely voters support legalizing marijuana and gaming by margins of 33-points and 47-points, respectively. By a 45-point margin, likely voters support the federal government providing aid to state and local governments (68 percent support, 23 percent oppose).

In contrast, we find that states declaring bankruptcy and raising gas taxes are quite unpopular. Likely voters oppose these options by margins of 22-points and 30-points, respectively.

## Voters Support Closing Corporate Tax Loopholes, Among Other Proposals, As Alternatives To Patch Budget Shortfalls

Below are some proposals state governments could use to patch budget shortfalls. For each, say whether you support or oppose it.



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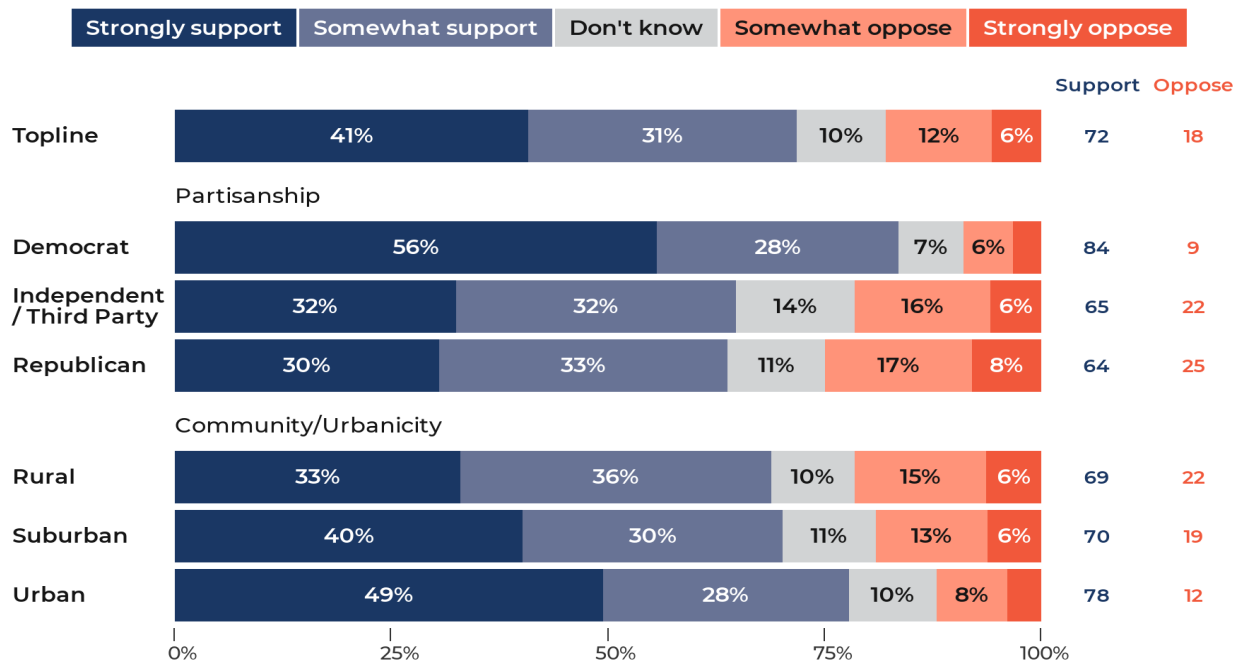
# Voters Support the Federal Government Providing Aid to State and Local Governments

We also asked likely voters whether or not they would support a bipartisan trillion dollar coronavirus federal relief package that would provide financial support to state and local governments. Likely voters are overwhelmingly in favor of this proposal, backing it by a 54 percentage-point margin (72 percent support, 18 percent oppose). Moreover, this package enjoys majority support across party lines: Democrats support it by a 75-point margin, Independents do so by a 43-point margin, and Republicans by a 39-point margin.

## An Overwhelming Majority Of Voters Support A \$1 Trillion Federal Aid Package To Prevent Cuts In Public Services

The coronavirus has caused budget shortfalls in states, cities, towns and schools across the country. State elected leaders, including both Republicans and Democrats, are now working with federal elected officials on a proposal to provide \$1 trillion in new federal aid to prevent cuts to public services such as healthcare, education and emergency response.

Do you support or oppose this proposal?



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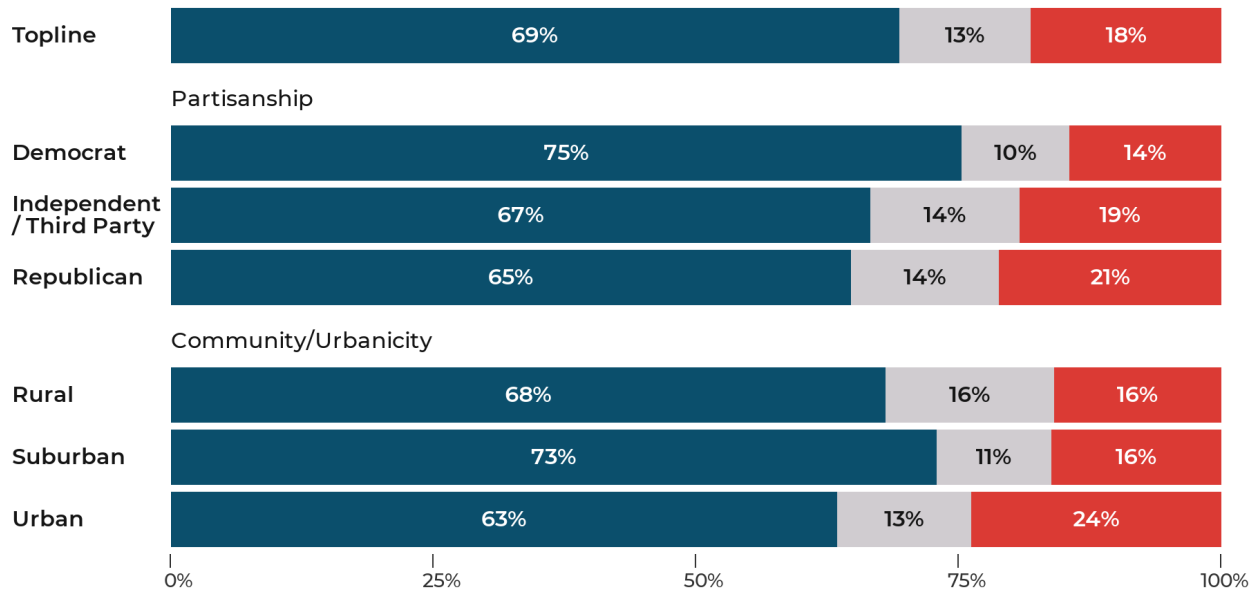
# Voters Want Workers Protected

We also asked likely voters about whether or not they would support laying off additional public sector employees to address budget shortfalls. We find that by a 51-point margin, likely voters do not want states to make additional cuts. This preference extends across party lines: Democrats, Independents, and Republicans oppose more cuts by margins of 61-points, 48-points, and 44-points respectively.

## Voters Believe Now Is The Wrong Time To Lay Off Additional Public Service Workers

Since the coronavirus pandemic began, some state governments have furloughed or laid off thousands of public service workers such as nurses, teachers, and firefighters to address budget shortfalls caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Some state governments are thinking of making **additional** cuts to public services, possibly laying off millions of these workers across the country.

When thinking about this proposal what comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?



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We then asked voters about the role public service employees and their unions should play in budget negotiations. We find that by a 55-point margin, likely voters think these workers and unions should be included in budget negotiations given their expertise in delivering efficient, high quality services. Support for the inclusion of unions in these negotiations also crosses party lines, with Democrats, Independent / Third party voters, and Republicans agreeing that unions should be included by margins of 54-points, 63-points, and 52-points, respectively.

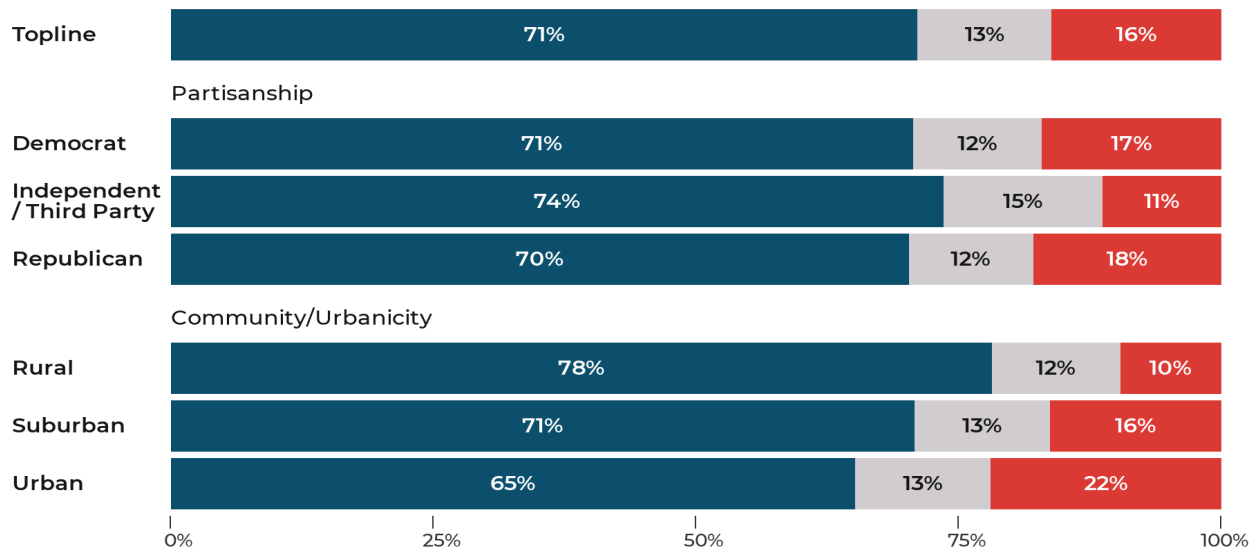
## Voters Think Public Service Employees And Their Unions Should Be Included In Budget Shortfall Negotiations

State governments are required to balance their budgets every year. Many state governments are facing budget shortfalls because of the coronavirus pandemic and related economic downturn. When thinking about how states should go about addressing these shortfalls, what comes closer to your view?

**First responders, public school teachers, and their unions should have a seat at the table of these negotiations because these workers know ways to gain efficiencies while still delivering high quality services.**

Don't know

**Politicians and management should take the lead at these negotiations because they're the elected leaders and they know best.**



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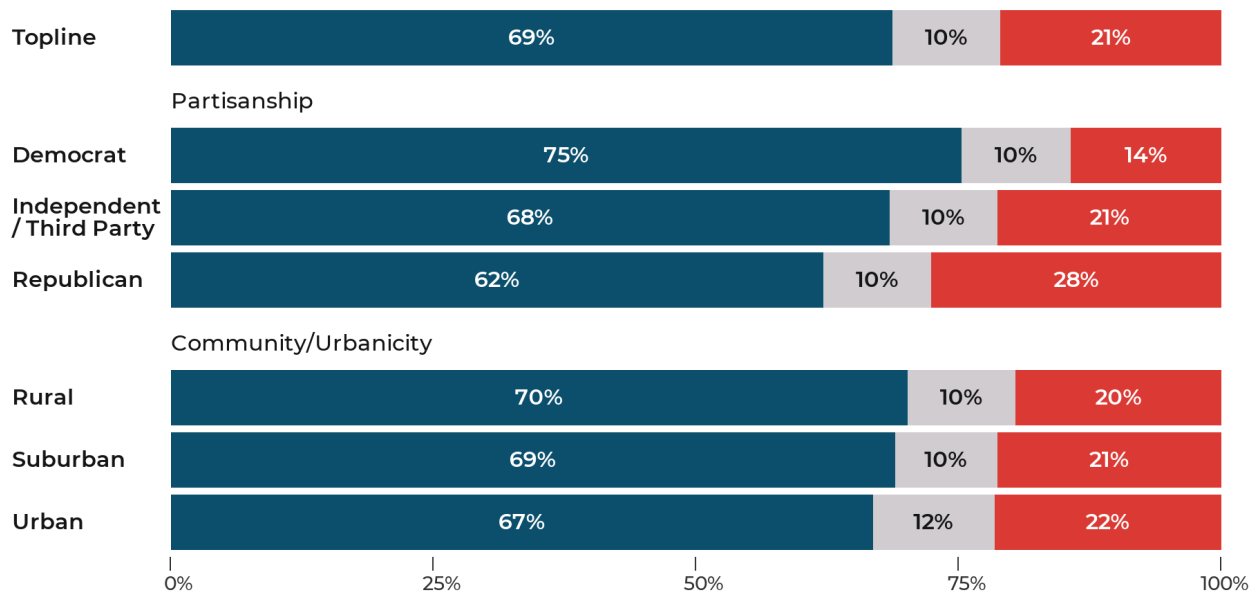


We also asked likely voters about liability shields for businesses and the reopening of the economy. These shields, a major priority of congressional Republicans, would limit the ability of employees and customers to sue businesses who expose them to the coronavirus through unsafe practices.

We find that by a 48-point margin, likely voters oppose these liability shields and want to focus instead on protecting workers and their families, seeing these protections as a crucial prerequisite to eventually reopening the economy. Though these shields are a priority of Republicans in Congress, framing the issue in a way that emphasizes how jeopardizing the safety of workers can actually impede the smooth operation of the economy makes even Republican voters oppose the shields by a wide margin of 34-points.

## Voters Overwhelmingly Believe In Safely Reopening Business, Reject Liability Shields

Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?



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## Conclusion

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These results should make clear that likely voters are staunchly opposed to austerity at the state and local level — they are highly concerned about cuts to first responders and public schools. In addition, there is widespread enthusiasm about a host of provisions that could be used to raise revenue, including increasing taxes on millionaires and billionaires and legalizing marijuana. Likely voters also want to protect public sector employees, both from the coronavirus by opposing liability shields, and from its related economic downturn by blocking additional layoffs and making sure that their unions have a seat at any budget negotiation table.

## Methodology

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From December 11 to December 13, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,136 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  $\pm 2.9$  percentage points.

### QUESTION WORDING

*State governments are required to balance their budgets every year. Many state governments are facing budget shortfalls because of the coronavirus pandemic and related economic downturn. How concerned or not concerned are you about any of the following if states are forced to make spending cuts?*

- ▶ Ambulance response times will get longer
- ▶ Class sizes in public schools will increase
- ▶ Public schools will only be able to reopen partially, for example, with classes four days a week
- ▶ The pensions of public service employees will be cut
- ▶ State assets, such as state parks, will be sold
- ▶ Medicaid, a program that provides health insurance to low-income Americans, will be cut.
- ▶ Public school teachers will be furloughed or laid off
- ▶ First responders, such as 911 operators and paramedics, will be furloughed or laid off
- ▶ Public health nurses will be furloughed or laid off
  - ▶ Very concerned
  - ▶ Somewhat concerned
  - ▶ Not very concerned
  - ▶ Not at all concerned

*Below are some proposals state governments could use to patch budget shortfalls. For each, say whether you support or oppose it.*

- ▶ Legalize marijuana for adults and tax its sale
- ▶ Closing corporate tax loopholes

- ▶ Eliminating or reducing corporate subsidies
- ▶ Raising or instituting a gas tax
- ▶ Increasing taxes on millionaires and billionaires
- ▶ Legalizing and taxing gaming or gambling
- ▶ States declare bankruptcy and attempt to restructure and renegotiate their debt
- ▶ The federal government provides aid to state and local governments
  - ▶ Strongly support
  - ▶ Somewhat support
  - ▶ Somewhat oppose
  - ▶ Strongly oppose
  - ▶ Don't know

*State governments are required to balance their budgets every year. Many state governments are facing budget shortfalls because of the coronavirus pandemic and related economic downturn. When thinking about how state governments should address this, which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?*

- ▶ State governments should cut spending services, including laying off public service employees
- ▶ State governments should try to raise revenue to prevent cuts to services and layoffs of public service employees
- ▶ Don't know

*The coronavirus has caused budget shortfalls in states, cities, towns and schools across the country. State elected leaders, including both Republicans and Democrats, are now working with federal elected officials on a proposal to provide \$1 trillion in new federal aid to prevent cuts to public services such as healthcare, education and emergency response. Do you support or oppose this proposal?*

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

*Since the coronavirus pandemic began, some state governments have furloughed or laid off thousands of public service workers such as nurses, teachers, and firefighters to address budget shortfalls caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Some state governments are thinking of making additional cuts to public services, possibly laying off millions of these workers across the country. When thinking about this proposal what comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?*

- ▶ State governments should cut additional spending services, including laying off public service workers such as teachers, public health nurses, and first responders
- ▶ States should not make additional budget cuts that could leave millions of Americans furloughed or laid off because these workers are on the frontlines of dealing with this pandemic and now isn't the time to cut their pay or lay them off.
- ▶ Don't know

*State governments are required to balance their budgets every year. Many state governments are facing budget shortfalls because of the coronavirus pandemic and related economic downturn. When thinking about how states should go about addressing these shortfalls, what comes closer to your view?*

- ▶ First responders, public school teachers, and their unions should have a seat at the table of these negotiations because these workers know ways to gain efficiencies while still delivering high quality services.
- ▶ Politicians and management should take the lead at these negotiations because they're the elected leaders and they know best.
- ▶ Don't know

*Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?*

- ▶ State governments should put liability shields in place, limiting the ability of workers to sue if they get the coronavirus or are otherwise hurt on the job because it's time to reopen the economy.
- ▶ State governments should do everything they can to keep workers and their families safe on the job, especially in a pandemic situation. Protecting workers is how we can safely reopen the economy.