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VOTERS SUPPORT SWEEPING ACTION TO ADDRESS THE ECONOMIC FALLOUT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

▶ Of the twelve policies surveyed—including rent suspension, monthly cash payments, and the forgiveness of at least $10,000 in student debt—all enjoy at least a 30-percentage-point margin of support, with most policies netting even higher support.

▶ The most popular proposal tested is the prohibition of debt collection, garnishing wages, and repossession during the pandemic. This policy is supported by a massive 71-point margin.

▶ Support for all twelve proposals is bipartisan. All proposals enjoy at least plurality support from self-identified Republicans, with even progressive policies like student-debt forgiveness netting a 10-point margin of support.
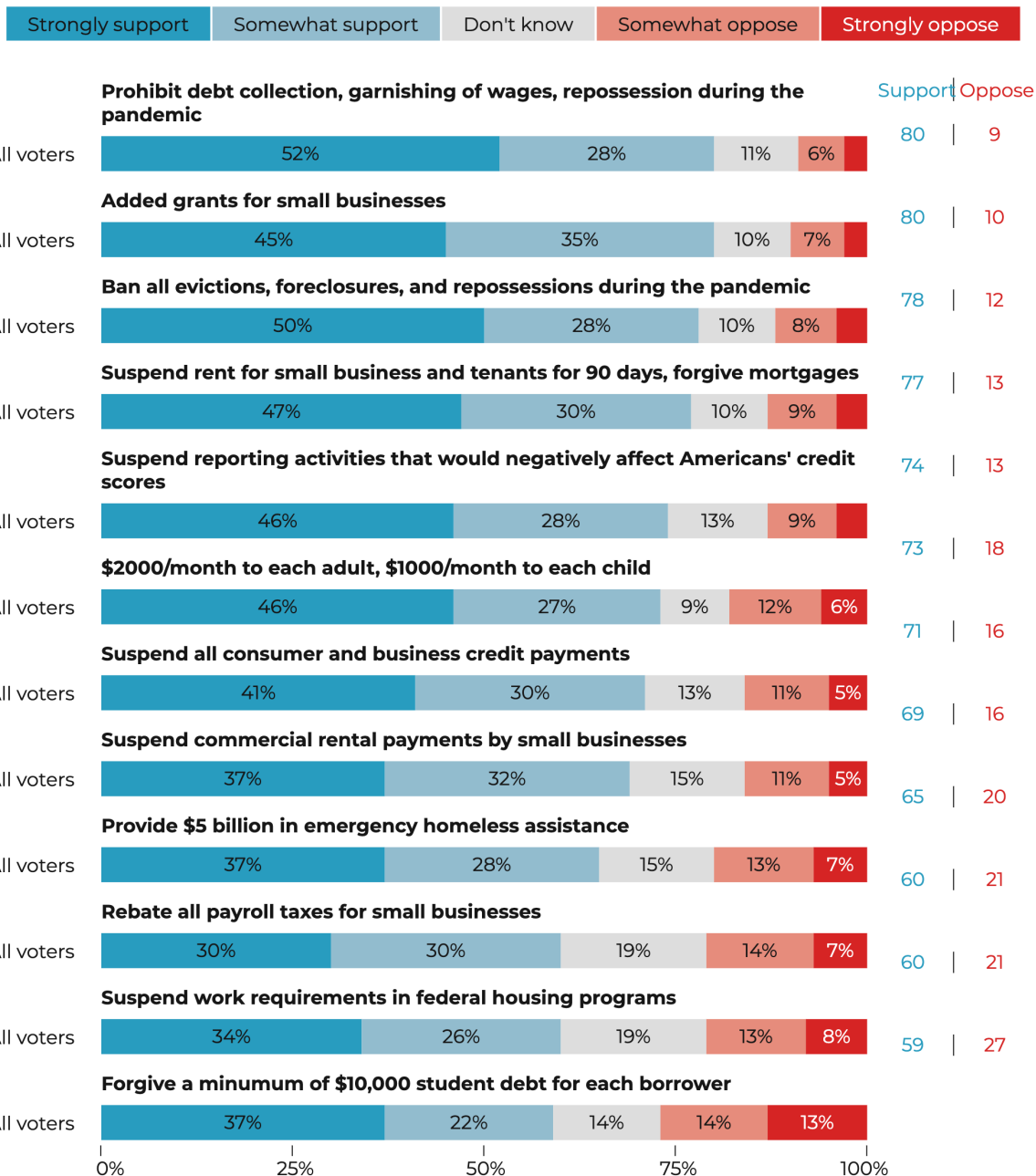
The economy is in free fall. The clearest indicator of this grim reality is the latest unemployment numbers: The United States Department of Labor registered 6.6 million initial unemployment claims for the week ending on March 28. This surpassed the previous record (3.3 million), which was set the week prior. This rapidly deteriorating situation is one that most voters are acutely aware of. For instance, the cash payments from the first coronavirus-response bill were quite meager, and the choice to means-test the payments opened up some fairly large holes in terms of its beneficiaries, not to mention that the program to bail out small businesses is already hitting snags.

As part of a March 2020 Data for Progress survey, we tested voters' attitudes toward a sweeping set of twelve proposals intended to shore up the "real economy" and to provide necessary relief to people.

What we found is that all twelve of the policies are overwhelmingly popular with voters. In this first chart, we present topline results for the proposals. The most popular is a prohibition on debt collection, garnishing wages, and repossession during the pandemic; voters support this proposal by a margin of 71 percentage points (80 percent support, 9 percent oppose). Right behind this policy is one for additional grants to small businesses, which has a 70-point margin (80 percent support, 10 percent oppose). Three other policies—a ban on evictions, foreclosures, and repossessions during the pandemic; suspending rent payments for business and tenants affected by the crisis and forgiving the mortgages of affected landlords; and suspending rents of affected businesses for ninety days—all enjoy margins of support over 60 points. A policy to give families $2,000/month payments for adults and $1,000/month payments for children, a policy to suspend all business and credit payments, and a policy to suspend commercial rent payments for businesses are three policies that voters support by 50 points or more. Voters support the four other policies we tested—including suspending work requirements for public housing—by 30 points or more. From these results, one thing is abundantly clear: Voters want dramatic action for this dire economic situation.

Voters Support Sweeping Additional Economic Relief

Lawmakers in Congress are discussing various ways that they can respond to the current coronavirus outbreak. For each of the following actions they are considering, please indicate your level of support. Should the federal government …?

| Strongly support | Somewhat support | Don't know | Somewhat oppose | Strongly oppose |

		Support	Oppose

Prohibit debt collection, garnishing of wages, repossession during the pandemic

All voters: 52% | 28% | 11% | 6% — Support 80 | Oppose 9

Added grants for small businesses

All voters: 45% | 35% | 10% | 7% — Support 80 | Oppose 10

Ban all evictions, foreclosures, and repossessions during the pandemic

All voters: 50% | 28% | 10% | 8% — Support 78 | Oppose 12

Suspend rent for small business and tenants for 90 days, forgive mortgages

All voters: 47% | 30% | 10% | 9% — Support 77 | Oppose 13

Suspend reporting activities that would negatively affect Americans' credit scores

All voters: 46% | 28% | 13% | 9% — Support 74 | Oppose 13

$2000/month to each adult, $1000/month to each child

All voters: 46% | 27% | 9% | 12% | 6% — Support 73 | Oppose 18

Suspend all consumer and business credit payments

All voters: 41% | 30% | 13% | 11% | 5% — Support 71 | Oppose 16

Suspend commercial rental payments by small businesses

All voters: 37% | 32% | 15% | 11% | 5% — Support 69 | Oppose 16

Provide $5 billion in emergency homeless assistance

All voters: 37% | 28% | 15% | 13% | 7% — Support 65 | Oppose 20

Rebate all payroll taxes for small businesses

All voters: 30% | 30% | 19% | 14% | 7% — Support 60 | Oppose 21

Suspend work requirements in federal housing programs

All voters: 34% | 26% | 19% | 13% | 8% — Support 60 | Oppose 21

Forgive a minumum of $10,000 student debt for each borrower

All voters: 37% | 22% | 14% | 14% | 13% — Support 59 | Oppose 27

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

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This next chart shows a more granular view of attitudes around rent suspension. Specifically, voters were given the following definition of the policy and then asked their support/opposition to it:
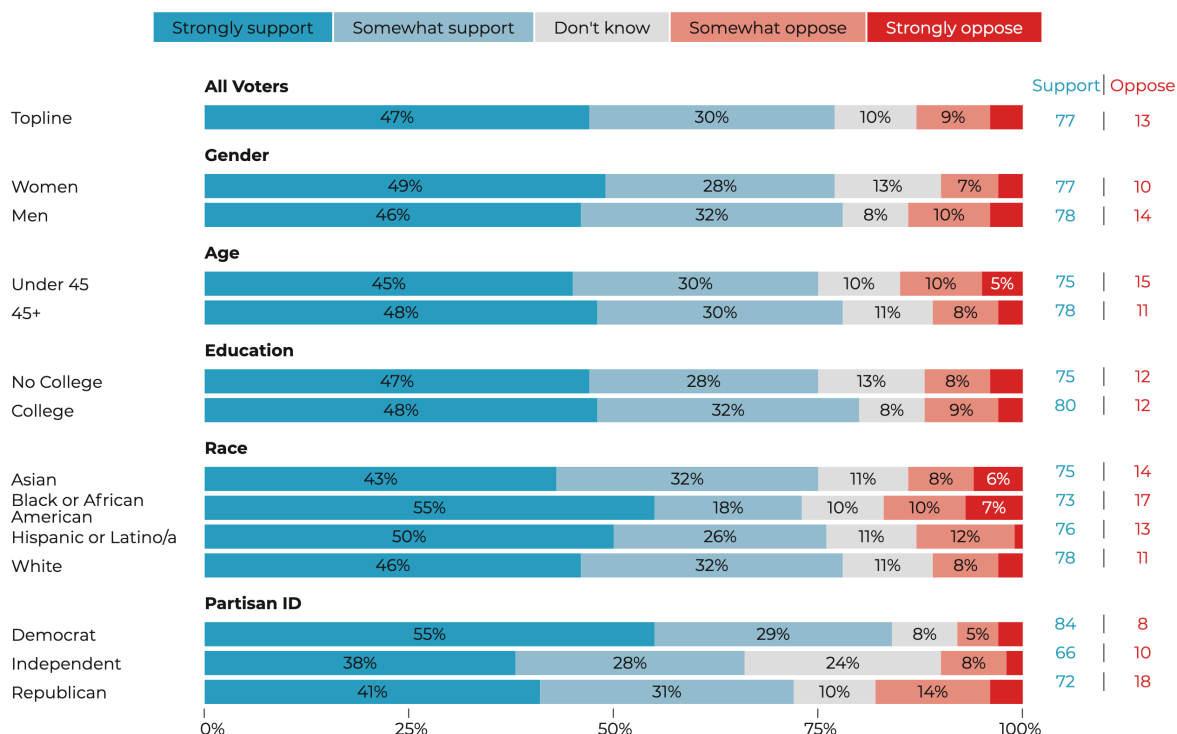
> *For 90 days suspend rents for small-business and residential tenants who are out of work because of the coronavirus and forgive mortgage payments for landlords experiencing financial hardship as a result.*

We found massive support for this proposal. Voters support it by 64 points (77 percent support, 13 percent oppose). The policy is popular across a host of demographic breakouts, including gender, age, education, and race. Rent suspension for those affected by the coronavirus also has bipartisan support. Democrats support the proposal by 76 points (84 percent support, 8 percent oppose), and Republicans support it by 54 points (72 percent support, 18 percent oppose). This idea of suspending rent and forgiving mortgages when necessary is even catching on with politicians. Currently, you can find New York State Senator Mike Gianaris making the case for such a proposal on the Data for Progress blog.

Voters Support Rent Suspensions For Small Businesses And Tenants Affected By The Coronavirus

Lawmakers in Congress are discussing various ways that they can respond to the current coronavirus outbreak. For each of the following actions they are considering, please indicate your level of support. Should the federal government …? -- For 90 days suspend rents for small-business and residential tenants who are out of work because of the coronavirus and forgive mortgage payments for landlords experiencing financial hardship as a result.

| Legend: Strongly support | Somewhat support | Don't know | Somewhat oppose | Strongly oppose |

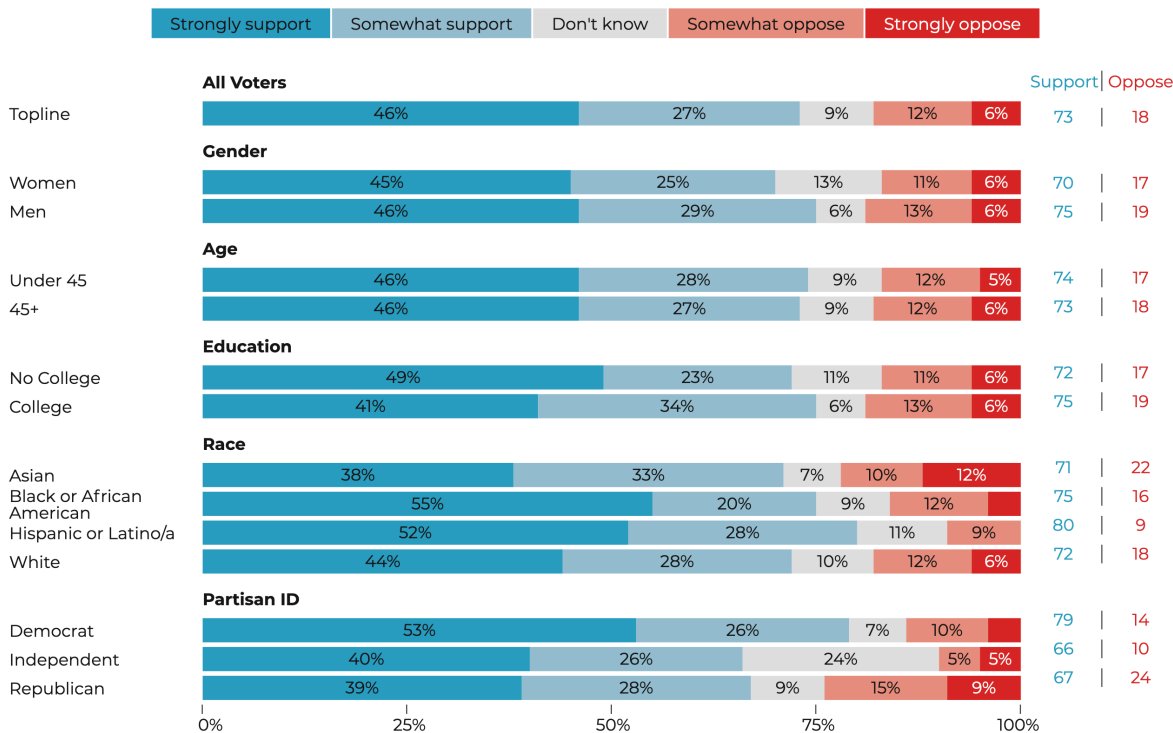| Group	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Don't know	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Support	Oppose
All Voters							
Topline	47%	30%	10%	9%		77	13
Gender							
Women	49%	28%	13%	7%		77	10
Men	46%	32%	8%	10%		78	14
Age							
Under 45	45%	30%	10%	10%	5%	75	15
45+	48%	30%	11%	8%		78	11
Education							
No College	47%	28%	13%	8%		75	12
College	48%	32%	8%	9%		80	12
Race							
Asian	43%	32%	11%	8%	6%	75	14
Black or African American	55%	18%	10%	10%	7%	73	17
Hispanic or Latino/a	50%	26%	11%	12%		76	13
White	46%	32%	11%	8%		78	11
Partisan ID							
Democrat	55%	29%	8%	5%		84	8
Independent	38%	28%	24%	8%		66	10
Republican	41%	31%	10%	14%		72	18

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Next, we look at levels of support for the government paying each family $2,000/month per adult and $1,000/month per child for the duration of the pandemic. Data for Progress has tested versions of this kind of direct cash several times in the past two months. On March 2, we asked voters if they would support a once-a-year $1,000 payment to all Americans if a recession appeared imminent, and at the time, voters opposed the proposal by 15 points (33 percent support, 48 percent oppose). On March 17, we retested the same policy and found that voters supported it by 32 points (58 percent support, 26 percent oppose)—a dramatic swing of 47 points. In this March survey, we tested a significantly more ambitious proposal: The cash payments for adults double, and the payments repeat on a monthly, rather than yearly, basis. For this more ambitious proposal, we found that voters support it by 55 points (73 percent support, 18 percent oppose)— far more than either previous proposal.

The proposal enjoys consistently high levels of support across a series of demographic and partisan breakouts. Regardless of gender, age, education, and race, voters back the idea of a massive program of direct cash payments. Those self-identify as Democrats support the proposal by 65 points (79 percent support, 14 percent oppose), and those self-identifying as Republicans support the policy by 43 points (67 percent support, 24 percent oppose).

Voters Support An Ambitious Proposal Of Cash Payments To All Americans

Lawmakers in Congress are discussing various ways that they can respond to the current coronavirus outbreak. For each of the following actions they are considering, please indicate your level of support. Should the federal government ...? -- Send $2,000 for each adult and $1,000 for each child each month during this emergency.

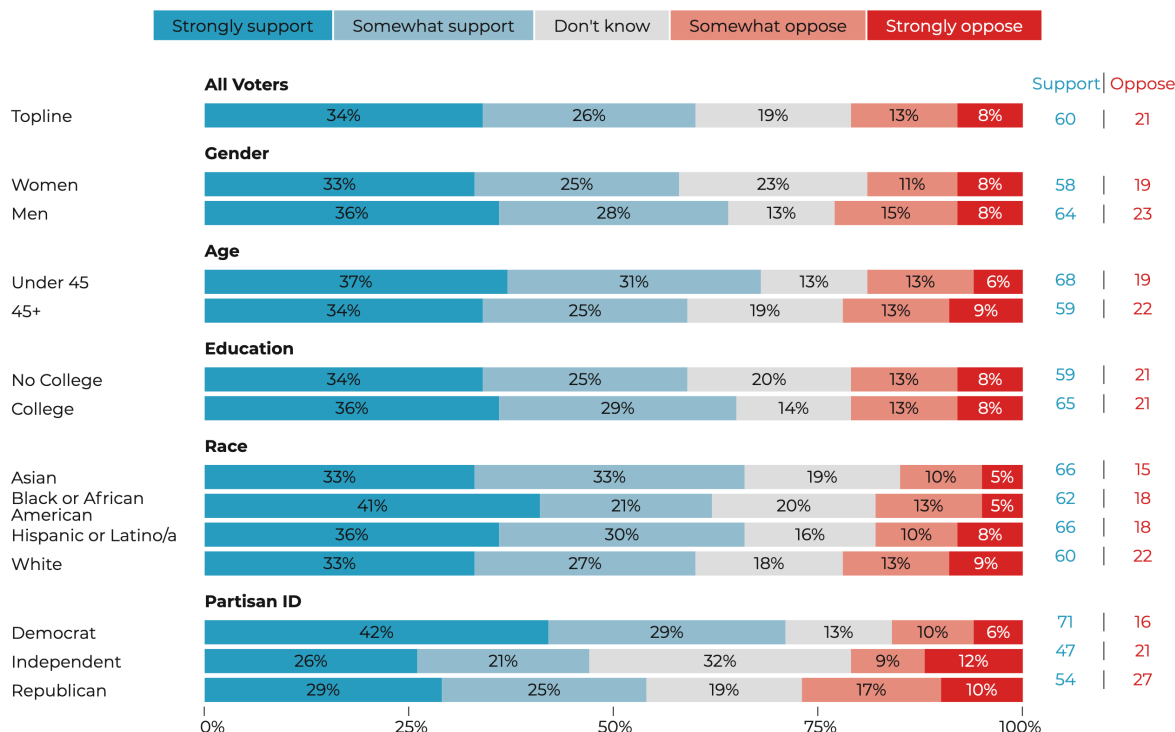|	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Don't know	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose		Support	Oppose
All Voters								
Topline	46%	27%	9%	12%	6%		73	18
Gender								
Women	45%	25%	13%	11%	6%		70	17
Men	46%	29%	6%	13%	6%		75	19
Age								
Under 45	46%	28%	9%	12%	5%		74	17
45+	46%	27%	9%	12%	6%		73	18
Education								
No College	49%	23%	11%	11%	6%		72	17
College	41%	34%	6%	13%	6%		75	19
Race								
Asian	38%	33%	7%	10%	12%		71	22
Black or African American	55%	20%	9%	12%			75	16
Hispanic or Latino/a	52%	28%	11%	9%			80	9
White	44%	28%	10%	12%	6%		72	18
Partisan ID								
Democrat	53%	26%	7%	10%			79	14
Independent	40%	26%	24%	5%	5%		66	10
Republican	39%	28%	9%	15%	9%		67	24

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Under normal circumstances, work requirements represent one of the more odious features of America's social safety net. In the case of public housing, as the Urban Institute underline details, work requirements

> *often take the form of a mandated occupancy policy that requires the head of household and all other adult household members to earn income through part- or full-time work unless they are a full-time student, elderly, or disabled. Because work requirements fall under the umbrella of occupancy policies, noncompliance could lead to termination of housing assistance.*

In our current moment, where so much of the public-health response hinges upon people *not* working, the continued existence and enforcement of work requirements borders on the absurd. As our survey found, a majority of voters understand this. When posed with a proposal of "[s]uspend[ing] work requirements in federal housing programs," voters support it by 39 points (60 percent support, 21 percent oppose). The policy enjoys consistently high levels of support across a range of demographic breakouts such as gender, age, education, and race. Support also extends across partisan identification. Democrats support the proposal by 55 points (71 percent support, 16 percent support), and Republicans support the proposal by 27 points (54 percent support, 27 percent oppose).

Voters Support Suspending Work Requirements For Public Housing

Lawmakers in Congress are discussing various ways that they can respond to the current coronavirus outbreak. For each of the following actions they are considering, please indicate your level of support. Should the federal government …? -- Suspend work requirements in federal housing programs.

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Don't know	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose		Support	Oppose
All Voters								
Topline	34%	26%	19%	13%	8%		60	21
Gender								
Women	33%	25%	23%	11%	8%		58	19
Men	36%	28%	13%	15%	8%		64	23
Age								
Under 45	37%	31%	13%	13%	6%		68	19
45+	34%	25%	19%	13%	9%		59	22
Education								
No College	34%	25%	20%	13%	8%		59	21
College	36%	29%	14%	13%	8%		65	21
Race								
Asian	33%	33%	19%	10%	5%		66	15
Black or African American	41%	21%	20%	13%	5%		62	18
Hispanic or Latino/a	36%	30%	16%	10%	8%		66	18
White	33%	27%	18%	13%	9%		60	22
Partisan ID								
Democrat	42%	29%	13%	10%	6%		71	16
Independent	26%	21%	32%	9%	12%		47	21
Republican	29%	25%	19%	17%	10%		54	27

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

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CONCLUSION

Our polling shows that proposals such as universal basic income and credit suspensions—proposals hitherto considered too radical for an American audience—are now seen as common sense among most voters.