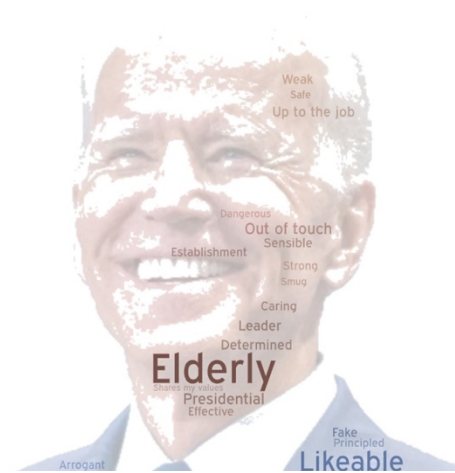


## Lord Ashcroft Polls



# THE HOME STRETCH

## Campaigning in the age of coronavirus

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC  
April 2020



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April 2020



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# INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus has turned life upside down. Millions of Americans have had their movements restricted, lost jobs and businesses, had their income curtailed, suffered terrible ill health or even lost loved ones at the hands of a virus that was unheard of until a few short weeks ago. Though understandably few are concentrating on the politics of crisis, my latest polling offers some clues as to how the situation might shape people's attitudes as November approaches and the time comes for them to decide who they want in charge.

Americans give President Trump higher marks for his handling of the economy than for any other policy area. Indeed, apart from national security and defence, it is the only one for which voters as a whole give him more than five out of ten. But in this poll, optimism about the economy is notably lower than in our previous round of research, conducted last October. Though more still thought the economy would do well than badly over the next year – both for themselves and their family and, to a lesser extent, the country as a whole – all voter groups were more pessimistic than they were last year. This can only intensify as more businesses suffer and job losses mount.

On the face of it, this must be bad news for a president whose appeal has rested largely on a burgeoning economy and a booming stock market. But at this stage, few blame Donald Trump for the economic consequences of a global health crisis. Indeed, though economic confidence is down since our previous survey, I found the president's job approval heading in the opposite direction.

This is often seen in times of crisis, as Americans rally to the flag. It can prove fleeting, as President George HW Bush found to his cost at the 1992 election, having enjoyed stratospheric ratings a year earlier during the first Gulf War. In the current case, it is also far from unqualified. In our focus groups of 2016 Trump voters in Michigan and Florida (conducted online with participants joining from home, so no-one was put at risk), many were scathing about the executive response to the situation, and about President Trump's personal role.

Voters of all political leanings were horrified that the country had seemed so unprepared, with not enough ventilators, testing kits, or protective equipment for health workers. They also felt the response had been much too slow, not least

because the president had initially downplayed the seriousness of the situation, comparing the coronavirus to flu. While many praised the response by their local and state authorities, they lamented a lack of leadership at the national level. "You don't know who's in charge, you don't know who is the adult in the room," as one former Trump supporter put it.

While many wondered how they would pay their next month's rent, the spectacle of Congress wrangling over political agendas rather than swiftly agreeing the stimulus package needed to save livelihoods impressed nobody. Despite their financial worries, most people we spoke to felt that for now, the economy should take a back seat to defeating the virus. But the president's declaration, subsequently abandoned, that he wanted the country back in business by Easter Day underlined fears that medical and scientific advice were not driving the agenda as they should be.

The crisis had also offered several prime examples of "Trump being Trump." Chief among these are his rambling press conference performances, in which he seemed to confuse or even contradict the scientist with whom he shared the stage, or stray from the issue at hand, at one point even boasting about his personal wealth. "He's missing the compassion gene," as a vexed former supporter put it. "It's not what people really need to hear right now." Another classic Trumpism has been his references to the "Chinese virus," which were considered very unhelpful even by those who believe the term contains an element of truth.

But it was striking that the most critical were those who had already become disillusioned with the Trump presidency by the time the current crisis began to unfold. For them, his familiar flaws had simply become more grating while the change he promised had yet to materialise for them personally. His response to Covid-19 simply encapsulated why they were disappointed with him. While they hoped he would surround himself with experts having drained the swamp of Washington politics, he seemed to be ignoring or undermining the people whose advice ought to be holding sway.

For others, the coronavirus simply highlighted Trumpian character traits that they had decided to discount – as long ago as 2016. He might be self-indulgent and undiplomatic, they argued, but sooner or later the country is going to have to get back to business, and for them, Donald Trump is the man to make that happen. "Who do you want there



to rebuild the country?” as a man in Tampa put it. “To me, that’s going to be his greatest opportunity to shine.”

Even those who doubted that Donald Trump was the man for this moment, those who thought Joe Biden fit that description better were few and far between. Most found him inoffensive, but there was no sense that he represented change, or that he was new or dynamic or capable of gripping a situation or getting things done. In my poll, the word Americans most often chose to describe him was “elderly.”

Many of Biden’s primary voters told us he had been their second or third choice and that they were no more enthusiastic about voting for him than they had been about Hillary Clinton four years ago. Our survey, completed before the withdrawal of Bernie Sanders, found only seven in ten of the Vermont Senator’s primary voters saying they intended to turn out for Biden should he win the nomination. At the same time, Biden attracted none of animosity of the kind directed at Clinton in 2016. He was the embodiment of the compromise Democrats might have to make to deny Trump a second term, but however uninspiring, it was a compromise most were prepared to make.

Still, the Democrats we spoke to were pessimistic. Though they saw Trump behind in the polls and saw what they regarded as his worst features magnified each day as the crisis wore on, something told them that this, like 2016, was not going to be their year. The poll put that feeling into numbers: when we asked how people would vote, Biden beat Trump by 12 points. When we asked who they thought would win, only 37% named Biden; 43% thought Trump would prevail.

However momentous its consequences in the real world, it may be that the political effect of the coronavirus – as with all the other flashpoints of Donald Trump’s presidency – is not to change people’s minds but to reinforce what they thought already. If that is the case, the outcome in November is no more certain now than it was when the coronavirus was a minor item in the overseas news.

Michael Ashcroft  
April 2020



# METHODOLOGY

10,357 adults in the US were interviewed online between 10 and 24 March 2020. Data have been weighted to be representative of all adults in the US. Full data tables are available at [LordAshcroftPolls.com](http://LordAshcroftPolls.com).


Six online focus groups were held between 23 and 26 March with participants in two locations:

- Macomb County, Michigan (2016 Trump voters who had voted for Obama in 2012 and were undecided how to vote in November; Democrats who had voted for Joe Biden in the Michigan primary; Democrats who had voted for Bernie Sanders in the Michigan primary)
- Hillsborough County, Florida (reluctant 2016 Trump voters who were undecided how to vote in November; African American voters who had voted for Obama in 2012 but had not voted in 2016).



# THE AMERICAN ELECTORATE

## Segment descriptions

	Democrat core			Centrist Voters		Trump Targets			Republican Partisans	
	Cosmopolitan Activists	Mainstream Liberals	Blue Collar Democrats	Melting Pot Moderates	Faithful Centre	Low Key Pragmatists	Losing Ground	Left Behind & Angry	Republican Mainstream	Fox News Militants
% of the population	10%	17%	11%	19%	10%	7%	13%	5%	4%	3%
% politically active	66%	45%	44%	38%	39%	39%	35%	39%	47%	58%
 Trump approval	5%	20%	43%	53%	57%	57%	34%	64%	92%	95%
Three most important issues	1. Healthcare 2. Environmental issues & climate change 3. Dealing with the Coronavirus	1. Healthcare 2. Dealing with the Coronavirus 3. Environmental issues & climate change	1. Healthcare 2. Dealing with the Coronavirus 3. The economy and jobs	1. Dealing with the Coronavirus 2. Healthcare 3. The economy and jobs	1. Dealing with the Coronavirus 2. Healthcare 3. The economy and jobs	1. Dealing with the Coronavirus 2. Healthcare 3. The economy and jobs	1. Healthcare 2. Dealing with the Coronavirus 3. The economy and jobs	1. Dealing with the Coronavirus 2. Immigration & border control 3. Healthcare	1. Immigration & border control 2. Dealing with the Coronavirus 3. The economy and jobs	1. Immigration & border control 2. National security & defense 3. Dealing with the Coronavirus
Trump on Coronavirus 0 = extremely bad 10 = excellent	1.6 out of 10	3.2 out of 10	5.3 out of 10	5.4 out of 10	5.9 out of 10	5.6 out of 10	4.0 out of 10	6.0 out of 10	7.9 out of 10	8.7 out of 10
% optimistic on economy	21% for country 35% for family	32% for country 43% for family	58% for country 60% for family	57% for country 64% for family	58% for country 64% for family	47% for country 51% for family	32% for country 36% for family	53% for country 56% for family	72% for country 76% for family	72% for country 75% for family
Trump vs Biden vote	84% Biden	70% Biden	51% Biden 31% Trump	43% Biden 42% Trump	52% Trump 32% Biden	49% Trump 33% Biden	49% Biden 28% Trump	59% Trump	91% Trump	95% Trump

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Our survey shortly before the presidential election in October 2016 asked 30,000 Americans about their background, ethnicity, family, housing, education, health, work, income, religion, level of political interest and commitment, sources of news – among other things – as well their political views and attitude to social and cultural issues. Our

analysis of the results identified ten distinct segments of voters within the American electorate, which fell into four clusters: the Democrat Core, Centrist Voters, Republican Partisans, and a more disengaged but dissatisfied group which we designated the Trump Targets.



We re-examined the segments after the 2018 midterm elections (see *Half-Time! American Public Opinion Midway Through Trump's (First?) Term*), in October 2019, and have done so again in this survey. While each segment has grown or shrunk slightly from survey to survey, most of these changes have been within the margin of error. However, there appears to have been a small shift within the larger groups, with the Democrat Core and Centrist groups growing and the Republican Partisans declining in numbers.

**Cosmopolitan Activists** are disproportionately young and female, affluent, and the most likely to have a college degree. They are by far the most likely to share political information on social media, donate to campaigns, attend political meetings and campaign actively for candidates. They are the most liberal segment in their social and political attitudes.

**Mainstream Liberals** are more likely than average to be younger, female, and highly educated. They are significantly more likely than the population as a whole to describe themselves as liberal or very liberal, and more than half identify as Democrats.

**Blue-Collar Democrats** are the youngest segment, and are more likely than average to be female. They are less likely than most to have been to college, to be registered to vote or to take an interest in politics and public affairs. They have a lower household income than most segments. They are the most likely to be black or Hispanic, and almost half the segment is non-white. Though the segment contains almost twice as many Democrats as Republicans, the political outlook of its membership divides broadly evenly between liberals, moderates and conservatives. Though supportive of immigration, same-sex marriage and marijuana legalisation, Blue-Collar Democrats differ from the two other Democrat-leaning groups by being pro-life, supportive of gun-ownership rights, and believing religion is being wrongly driven out of American life.

**Melting Pot Moderates** are among the least likely to be politically active or to take a close interest in public affairs. The segment is fairly evenly divided between Democrats, Republicans and Independents, and its members are more likely to describe themselves as moderate than either liberal or conservative. One third of this segment are non-white.

Members of the **Faithful Center** segment are neutral or divided on immigration, gun control and green energy, but believe religion is wrongly being driven out of national life, are opposed to same-sex marriage and are the most pro-life outside the Republican Partisan groups. They are more likely than most to be African American.

**Low-Key Pragmatists** are more likely than average to be white and female. They are more likely than average to describe their political outlook as moderate, and twice as likely to be conservative than liberal. Members of this segment tend to think immigration and free trade deals have had a negative impact on the US in recent years. They are also in favour of same-sex marriage, marginally pro-choice, and in favour of defending gun ownership rights. They are less likely than average to have been to college.

The **Losing Ground** segment are generally pessimistic about life in the US. They are neutral or divided on controversial issues including immigration, same-sex marriage, gun control and the role of religion in political life, and have the lowest involvement in politics of any segment. They are the least likely to be registered to vote.

Members of the **Left Behind and Angry** segment are among the least likely to have a college education and have a lower household income than most segments. Almost half are aged 55 or over. They take an interest in public affairs and around half describe themselves as conservative, but they are not politically active. Members of this segment tend to think immigration has had a negative effect over recent years and to oppose same-sex marriage. They prioritise reducing energy costs over investing in green energy sources.

**Republican Mainstream** members are disproportionately white, male and married. More than half are over 55, they have an above average level of education and are among the most likely to earn over \$100k. Almost three quarters described themselves as conservative, and two thirds as Republicans. They are more likely than average to be politically active.

**Fox News Militants** are the oldest segment, and the most likely to be male and married and are also likely to be white. They have an above average level of education and are among the most likely to earn over \$100k. Nine in ten say they are conservative, and over three quarters described themselves as Republicans. They are the most likely after **Cosmopolitan Activists** to donate to or become involved in political campaigns. They have negative views about immigration, free trade deals, same-sex marriage, the growth of religions other than Christianity and the legalisation of marijuana and feel strongly that religion is wrongly being driven out of American life. They are the most pro-life, constructionist, and supportive of gun ownership rights and smaller government.

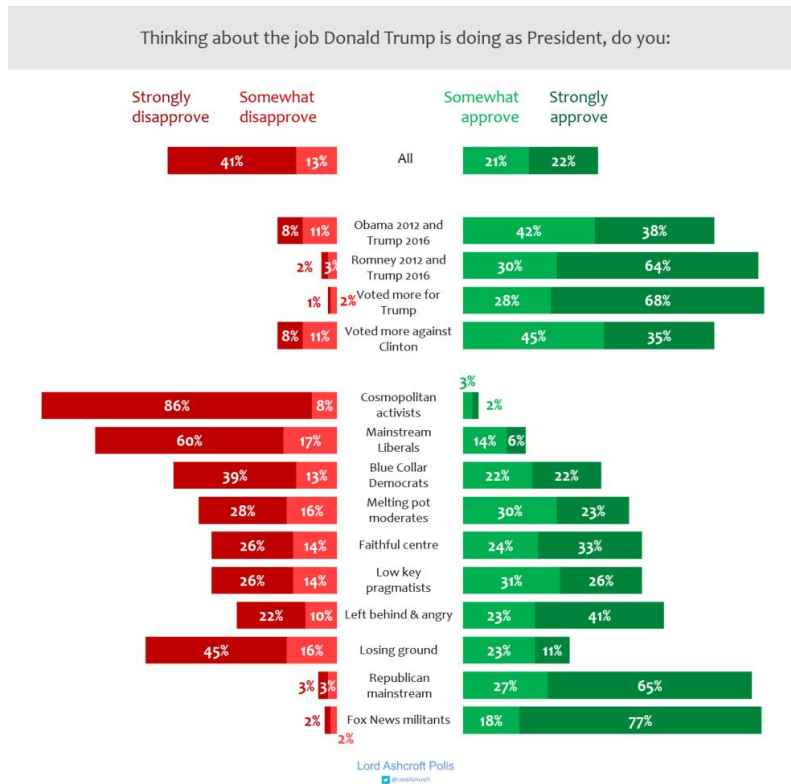




# THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY

## Job approval

In our survey, 43% said they approved of the job Donald Trump was doing as president (22% 'strongly'), while 54% said they disapproved (41% 'strongly'). Approval was at 96% among those who had voted positively for Trump in 2016, and 80% among those who had been voting mainly to stop Hillary Clinton. Obama-Trump voters also approved by 80% to 19%.

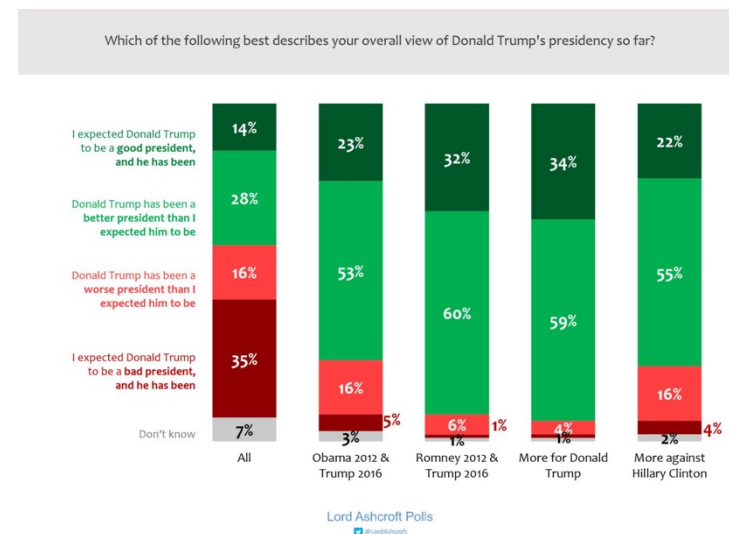


Approval was higher than disapproval among the Fox News Militants, Republican Mainstream, Left Behind & Angry, Low Key Pragmatists, Faithful Centre and Melting Pot Moderates segments. Disapproval outweighed approval among Cosmopolitan Activists, Mainstream Liberals, Blue Collar Democrats and Losing Ground groups.

This shows an improvement in President Trump's rating since our last survey, conducted in October 2019. Approval is stable or higher in all groups, and up three points among voters overall. The biggest rises in approval are among the centrist Low Key Pragmatists (+8 to 57%) and Melting Pot Moderates (+8 to 53%).

## Expectations

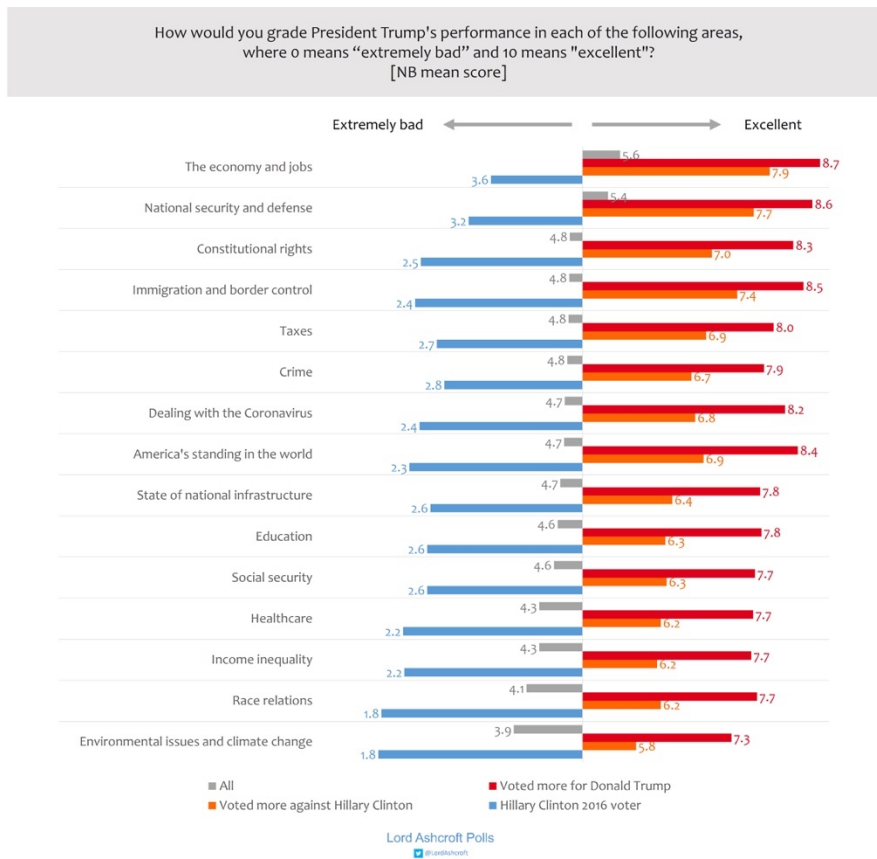
Overall, 42% of voters said they had met their positive expectations or been a better president than they expected (up from 39% last October). Just over half (51%) said he had been as bad as they expected or worse.





## On the specifics

Americans as a whole gave President Trump positive marks (more than 5 out of 10) for his handling of two policy areas: the economy and jobs, and national security and defense. His lowest marks were for dealing with environment issues and climate change, race relations, income inequality and healthcare. After the economy and national security, positive Trump voters awarded the highest marks for immigration and border control, and America’s standing in the world. His mean score for dealing with the coronavirus was 4.7 out of 10, higher than for most policy areas.



Republican-leaning voters in our focus groups who had voted for Trump mainly to stop Hillary Clinton were still largely supportive, especially when it came to his record on the economy, which even some opponents acknowledged had been positive: “He’s made taxes a lot easier and a lot more beneficial. He’s a businessman and he’s trying to make the money flow;” “He’s cut the unemployment rate in Florida.”

Others were more sceptical: “With jobs there is a natural ebb and flow. I don’t know if it was just on an upward swing;” “He’s got credit for stuff Obama has put in place that has come to fruition;” “Are they jobs people can support themselves on, or just minimum wage jobs?”

“He’s changed some things, but he’s not changing the things that need changing now.”

Previous Trump voters who had been disappointed with his presidency tended to complain that little or nothing had changed to benefit them personally: “He said he would surround himself with the best people, but everyone except his daughter has quit or got fired. It’s always their fault, never on him;” “He focuses too much on big business, not on infrastructure and things like that;” “He’s changed some things, but he’s not changing the things that need changing now;” “He’s in over his head. The coronavirus brings that home, especially his attitude.”

“I’m disappointed. I didn’t think he’d sit on Twitter and be such a nitwit.”

At the same time, though, his familiar flaws were still all too apparent and were more grating: “It shocked me totally when he said yesterday how much money he had given up to become president. That totally floored me;” “He said he would make America great again, but he’s divided it. He’s separated Americans. Like when he talks about the Chinese virus, then it’s the wall, then it’s women in politics, and do black lives matter or do all lives matter – it’s what’s coming out of his mouth directly;” “I’m disappointed. I didn’t think he’d sit on Twitter and be such a nitwit;” “Sometimes things that are serious and affecting people’s lives are made into a joke. Not just coronavirus – when he went to Puerto Rico after the hurricane and was throwing toilet paper. I felt a little let down by that.”



# CORONAVIRUS (AND OTHER ISSUES)

## Most important issues

Dealing with the coronavirus almost tied with healthcare as the most important issue believed to be facing the US today, 47% and 48% respectively naming them among the top three.

For Republicans and Trump voters it topped the list, ahead of immigration and border control, with the economy and jobs in third place (though Obama-Trump voters were more likely to name healthcare as a priority than Trump voters as a whole).

The virus was the most important issue for the Faithful Centre, Low Key Pragmatists and Left Behind & Angry segments, and second for Mainstream Liberals, Blue Collar Democrats, Losing Ground (behind healthcare) and Republican Mainstream (behind immigration and border control).

It was pushed into third place among Cosmopolitan Activists (by healthcare and environmental issues and climate change) and Fox News Militants (by immigration and border control and national security and defense).

Which three of the following would you say are the most important issues facing the United States today?  
NB. % within top three

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
<b>All</b>	Healthcare 48%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 47%	The economy and jobs 34%	Immigration and border control 27%	Environmental issues and climate change 23%	National security and defense 18%
<b>Republicans</b>	Dealing with the Coronavirus 49%	Immigration and border control 45%	The economy and jobs 38%	Healthcare 35%	National security and defense 32%	Social security 18%
<b>Democrats</b>	Healthcare 58%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 47%	Environmental issues and climate change 34%	The economy and jobs 30%	Social security 17%	Income inequality 17%
<b>Independents</b>	Healthcare 48%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 47%	The economy and jobs 37%	Immigration and border control 25%	Environmental issues and climate change 24%	Social security 17%
<b>Obama 2012 Trump 2016 voter</b>	Healthcare 44%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 44%	The economy and jobs 38%	Immigration and border control 31%	National security and defense 23%	Social security 20%
<b>Voted more for Donald Trump</b>	Dealing with the Coronavirus 47%	Immigration and border control 47%	The economy and jobs 39%	National security and defense 34%	Healthcare 33%	Social security 17%
<b>Voted more against Hillary Clinton</b>	Dealing with the Coronavirus 50%	Immigration and border control 45%	The economy and jobs 42%	Healthcare 37%	National security and defense 31%	Social security 20%

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Which three of the following would you say are the most important issues facing the United States today?  
NB. % within top three

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
<b>Cosmopolitan Activists</b>	Healthcare 63%	Environmental issues and climate change 54%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 46%	Income inequality 26%	The economy and jobs 22%	Education 18%
<b>Mainstream Liberals</b>	Healthcare 56%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 48%	Environmental issues and climate change 38%	The economy and jobs 33%	Income inequality 18%	Education 17%
<b>Blue Collar Democrats</b>	Healthcare 46%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 42%	The economy and jobs 34%	Immigration and border control 23%	Social security 21%	Environmental issues and climate change 18%
<b>Melting Pot Moderates</b>	Dealing with the Coronavirus 48%	Healthcare 47%	The economy and jobs 39%	Immigration and border control 26%	National security and defense 21%	Social security 18%
<b>Faithful Centre</b>	Dealing with the Coronavirus 51%	Healthcare 43%	The economy and jobs 35%	Immigration and border control 32%	National security and defense 25%	Social security 20%
<b>Low Key Pragmatists</b>	Dealing with the Coronavirus 43%	Healthcare 43%	The economy and jobs 36%	Immigration and border control 32%	National security and defense 20%	Education 18%
<b>Left Behind &amp; Angry</b>	Dealing with the Coronavirus 49%	Immigration and border control 41%	Healthcare 40%	The economy and jobs 32%	National security and defense 25%	Social security 23%
<b>Losing Ground</b>	Healthcare 52%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 48%	The economy and jobs 34%	Environmental issues and climate change 22%	Immigration and border control 20%	Social security 20%
<b>Republican Mainstream</b>	Immigration and border control 67%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 47%	The economy and jobs 41%	National security and defense 36%	Healthcare 28%	Constitutional rights 20%
<b>Fox News Militants</b>	Immigration and border control 71%	National security and defense 43%	Dealing with the Coronavirus 40%	The economy and jobs 35%	Constitutional rights 34%	Healthcare 22%

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## Coronavirus crisis

In our focus groups, people of all political colours felt the response to the coronavirus had been too slow, and many said they were shocked at how unprepared the country had been – especially when it came to testing and the provision of personal protective equipment to health workers: “We had two and a half months to prepare. Instead we were told it was a hoax and no-one took it seriously, and now we have no supplies and we’re on lockdown;” “There are no systems in place. Everyone is kind of winging it;” “I’m amazed we didn’t have emergency preparedness for something like this;” “We don’t have what we need, and I feel like they dropped the ball. The government that we pay taxes for, whoever is responsible for protecting us as a country, they dropped the ball.”

**“We had two and a half months to prepare. Instead we were told it was a hoax and no-one took it seriously, and now we have no supplies and we’re on lockdown.”**

Some said they found the response particularly poor when compared to what they heard about other countries: “We’ve been significantly slower than Germany;” “China, once they admitted what was going on, seem to be handling it better than we are;” “We’re supposed to be the best at things! We’re supposed to be the wealthiest nation!”

The American health system seemed ill-equipped and badly suited to deal with a pandemic: “We don’t have what we need now, let alone for what’s coming. Italy has four hospital beds per thousand people, and they’re turning away people over 60. We have three beds per thousand;” “Hospitals are appealing for donations of facemasks!” “A serious illness could bankrupt you, and people getting laid off no longer have health insurance;” “Hospitals are very disorganised at the moment. Doctors are not treating people as patients; they’re scared of getting the disease. Even though they’ve all signed oaths, they don’t want to be around people because of germs, they don’t want to get too close. I wouldn’t want my family to be in a hospital right now.”

**“Hospitals are appealing for donations of facemasks!”**

Several had detected a marked difference between the local and national response: “In Michigan, I feel like they’ve been on top of it. But at a federal level they’ve been trying to downplay things, when they should have been making them appear as bad as they can be;” “There is no national plan. Everyone is doing their own thing, state by state. You have a shutdown in one state and a bordering state open for business.”

## The crisis and the economy

Many of our participants had already suffered financially because of the crisis, or expected to soon: “I don’t have April’s rent. There’s no immediate help. I don’t know where to go from here.” Some were relying on savings, which in most cases would not last longer than a month or two. Though mortgage and loan companies had offered pauses in repayment, most required the delayed payments to be made up after two or three months, rather than added to the end of the loan as people had hoped and expected. “It’s as big as the crash, but in a different way. It will look more like the depression; no-one has the money to ride this out. People are asking for food.”

**“One check isn’t going to do it.”**

They acknowledged that some government help was available but did not feel that the initial offer of \$1200 would go far: “It’s a drop in the bucket;” “One check isn’t going to do it.” People had also been very unimpressed with the Congressional haggling over the contents of the bailout package: “They’re trying to get their agenda met in return for agreeing on a package. It’s criminal. All kinds of people have no income now and they need that money to get through. They’re using us as pawns to get what they want;” “They were super-slow. The process was slow because everyone was arguing about how they were going to get their cut of the money;” “They’re such nitwits they can’t focus on the people they’re supposed to represent!”

A few in the groups had started to feel that the shutdown measures were disproportionate given the effect they were having on the economy: “In 2009, 60 million people in the US got H1N1, thousands died, and we didn’t shut down our entire economy. I’m afraid we’ve gone a little too far to the extreme and that we’re going to take years to recover from this.”

**“Health is the bottom line. I’d hate to see people wiped out because we’re worried about the stock market tanking.”**

At this stage, though, this was a minority view. More often, people felt it was more important to “beat the virus first and worry about the economy later.” “It’s easy to say they’ve gone too far until it’s affected you personally;” “We’ve been through hard times before. The biggest thing is taking care of our people and giving everyone the best chance to survive;” “We need to do both. I’m a small businessman and these have been the toughest two weeks of my life. I’m trying to worry about other people’s livelihoods as well as my own, and my parents have respiratory illness;” “People are more important than the economy right now. There is a hierarchy of needs, and being



healthy is the bottom line. I'd hate to see people wiped out because we're worried about the stock market tanking;" "When we open back up it will boom again. We don't want to sacrifice people;" "We've got to listen to people with experience. We shouldn't let politicians tell the medical community how to deal with this."

Although the economic consequences might be felt for years, most in the groups assumed that life would be more or less back to normal by the summer, but even this felt a long way off: "I don't want to be locked in for that long. I pray that the doctors and scientists can come up with a plan to have life back to normal."

### The executive response

Many felt confused as to who if anybody was driving the national response to the crisis, and the extent to which decisions were being made based on science or other considerations: "Every day they show a different person on TV, they hand the mic to a different person. You don't know who's in charge. You don't know who is the adult in the room;" "Our governor is relying heavily on the medical field, but I don't see the president relying on the medical field, so what comes out of his mouth is inaccurate and he sounds dumb;" "I think he takes Fauci out the back after press conferences and slaps him if he tells the truth. If he gets fired, we'll know it was because he was telling the truth."

**"Every day they hand the mic to a different person. You don't know who's in charge, who is the adult in the room."**

Even many Trump voters said they found the president's response confusing or unhelpful: "There are contradictory statements. Dr Fauci will explain the science, then Donald Trump will come on and say the opposite of what he's just been saying;" "I've had more from my mayor and my governor and even my son's school superintendent than I have from my president;" "He's missing the compassion gene. He reads bullet points and then goes off on a tangent about how rich he is and how he doesn't need a paycheck. It's not what we really want to hear right now;" "It's almost painful to watch. I have to change the channel."

**"He's missing the compassion gene... He goes off on a tangent about how rich he is and how he doesn't need a paycheck. It's not what people really want to hear right now."**

While many felt the president had not initially taken the coronavirus outbreak seriously, some felt he was still not doing so – or was being wildly over-optimistic about the timescale on which things would get back to normal: "He wants to get everyone out to work in a week or two. I don't think it's going to happen." People in our groups thought his stated hope of having the country back up and running by Easter Day was "ridiculous. I'm a true believer and I don't think Christ would want us to go to church with this going on." There was also a widespread view that such statements would lead people to take unnecessary risks and undermine the advice from health professionals: "He's not listening to the people who do this for a living and study this. His ego is getting in the way;" "People are not isolating as they should. They need to be afraid. You don't have to have an underlying condition to die. It's not an old person thing anymore;" "I know we need to get back to work but this is more important."

However, some took a much more lenient view of Trump's handling of the crisis, and of his apparent eagerness to get life back to normal as soon as possible: "I can't really frown on him, because what would you do? It's not a time to bash him;" "Whoever was president, no-one would know what to do;" "There is a balance, a cost-benefit analysis between the medical consequences and the downturn that will come from the shutdown. So I would like to give him the benefit of the doubt that he is trying to weigh both of those."

**"There is a balance between the medical consequences and the downturn... I'd like to give him the benefit of the doubt that he's weighing both of those."**

None were impressed by the president's talk of the "Chinese virus," which was "really unhelpful" even if some believed it contained an element of truth: "I don't think that's a useful part of the discussion. It doesn't matter where it came from anymore, it's here now;" "Swine flu started here but it's not known as the American virus;" "It's Trump being Trump but it's unnecessary. I'm supportive of him for the most part but his mouth gets him in trouble too often and this is one of those moments."

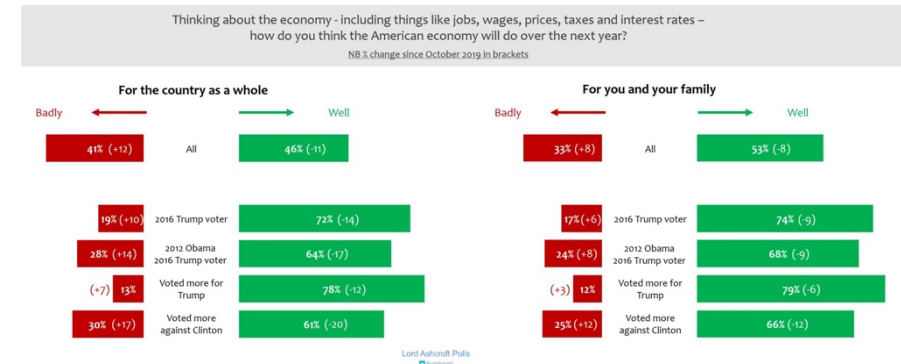


## Economic optimism

This survey was conducted before the large-scale job losses associated with ‘lockdown’ in many US states. Even so, in the first half of March we found a significant decline in confidence compared to our previous survey in October 2019.

In the current survey, voters were at this stage more optimistic than pessimistic about the economy both for the country as a whole (by 46% to 41%) and, by a much bigger margin, for themselves and their families (53% to 33%). All groups were more optimistic for themselves than for the country, but the difference was most pronounced among Democrat-leaning segments.

The proportion expecting the economy to do well for the country as a whole is down 11 points among voters as a whole, 14 points among Trump voters as a whole, 12 points among positive Trump voters, 20 points among reluctant Trump voters, and 17 points among Obama-Trump voters. For “myself and my family,” the optimistic proportion is down by 8 points overall, and between 6 points (positive Trump voters) and 12 points (those mainly voting against Hillary Clinton).





# THE BLUE TEAM

## The nominee – what matters?

We asked all those who had voted or were intending to vote in the 2020 Democratic primaries how important they considered each of seven qualities that might be desirable in a presidential nominee. For primary voters as a whole, and for both Biden and Sanders supporters, the most important of all was “they have the right priorities for the country.”

Fractionally behind in second place for Biden voters was that the candidate should “stand the best chance of beating Donald Trump.” For Sanders voters, this quality was only the fourth most important behind having “policies to make life better for me and my family,” and that “their values seem in tune with my own.”

Their “likely appeal to people I don’t necessarily agree with” was bottom of the list for both groups, but received a lower score from Sanders voters (56/100) than Biden voters (61/100).

On a scale of 0 to 100, how important are each of the following qualities in determining who you are likely to end up voting for in the Democratic primary, where 0 means they are completely unimportant and 100 means they are very important indeed?  
[NB mean scores, among those who have voted in 2020 Democrat Primary]

	All Democrat Primary voters	Biden Primary voters	Sanders Primary voters
1	They have the right priorities for the country 83	They have the right priorities for the country 85	They have the right priorities for the country 86
2	They have policies to make life better for me and my family 81	They stand the best chance of beating Donald Trump 85	They have policies to make life better for me and my family 85
3	Their values seem in tune with my own 78	They have policies to make life better for me and my family 82	Their values seem in tune with my own 81
4	They stand the best chance of beating Donald Trump 77	Their values seem in tune with my own 80	They stand the best chance of beating Donald Trump 79
5	They are likeable and I find them relatable 72	They are likeable and I find them relatable 76	They are likeable and I find them relatable 74

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This was reflected in our focus groups of Democrat primary voters in Michigan. None of those who had voted for Joe Biden had done so with any enthusiasm, and most said he had not been their first choice: “Cory Booker was my number one, Elizabeth Warren was my number two, and Biden is my number three.” Most said the decision felt like a compromise, but that Biden “may be able to pull over some of the centrist Republicans who don’t like Trump. It’s the best chance to win.” Though some admired the idealism of Bernie Sanders, he would put off some potential voters and “his numbers didn’t add up.” There was also some disappointment that after a promising start to the primary campaign, the choice had come down to “two old white men.”

The African American voters in Florida we spoke to were slightly more positive about Biden, sometimes because “he ran with Obama, he will have some Obama tendencies.” They did not feel they could take the risk of choosing Sanders even if they liked what he stood for in principle: “In my utopia I’d like Sanders, but growing up black in America, I would rather Biden;” “I like what Sanders is saying but it would take a long time. We need all this stuff now. Biden is the only way we’d get some kind of justice;” “We use them as a stepping stone. He will get certain things done.”

“Cory Booker was my number one, Elizabeth Warren was my number two, and Biden is my number three.”

Sanders voters were no less downbeat, often feeling – as in 2016 – that the Democratic party machine had somehow got its way: “He’s the safe candidate. It was disturbing on Super Tuesday, all those people dropped out and said, ‘here’s Biden.’ He doesn’t have a platform. He doesn’t connect with people;” “He’s going to do nothing different, he’s totally phony, he’s a puppet of the Democratic party.” Even some Biden voters worried that he seemed to offer nothing new and was simply “riding on Obama’s coat tails.”

“Voting for Hillary was very painful. She and Biden are both a continuation of the things we like least.”

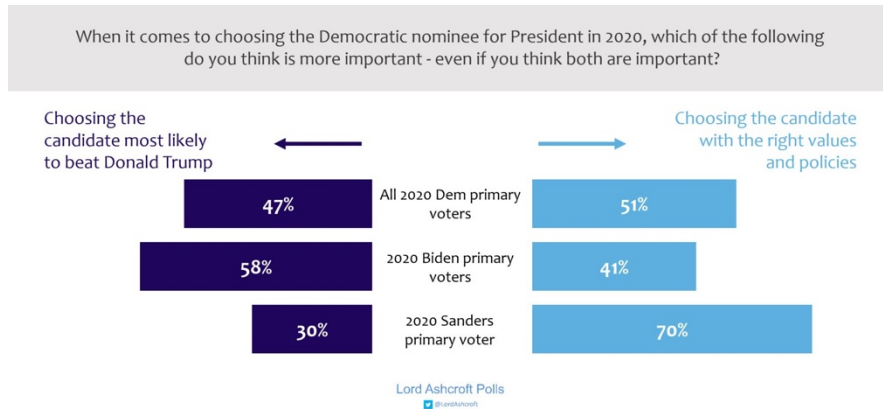
Most of them said they would “probably” turn out and vote for Biden in November (“but there are a lot of people who won’t”), though with no more enthusiasm than they did for Hillary Clinton (“they’re both a continuation of the things we like least.”)



## Values or victory?

We asked Democrats which was ultimately more important – choosing the candidate “with the right values and policies,” or the one “most likely to beat Donald Trump”?

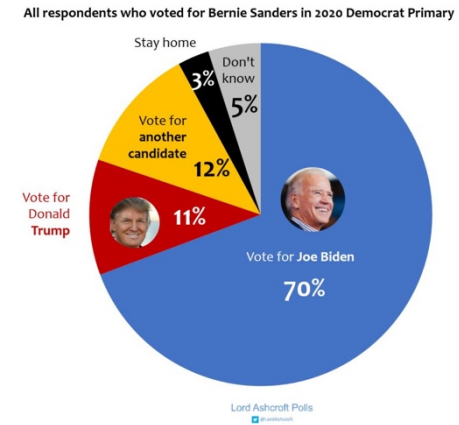
For a clear majority of Biden voters, beating Trump was the top priority. But by a much bigger margin, those who had voted for Bernie Sanders said that having the candidate with the right values and policies mattered more than choosing the one best placed to win in November.



At the same time, nearly two thirds of those who had voted for Sanders (64%) said they thought their man did have the best chance of beating Trump – but 36% Sanders voters thought the candidate with the best chance of winning in November was Joe Biden.

Overall, just over two thirds of Americans (68%), including nearly three quarters (73%) of Republicans, thought Biden had the better chance of winning against the incumbent President

If Joe Biden ends up being the Democratic nominee in 2020, what will you do in the Presidential election in November?



Only 7 in 10 of those who had voted for Sanders in the primary said they would turn out for Biden in November. Nearly a quarter said they would vote for someone else, either Trump himself (11%) or another candidate (12%).



# NOVEMBER

## What are the options?

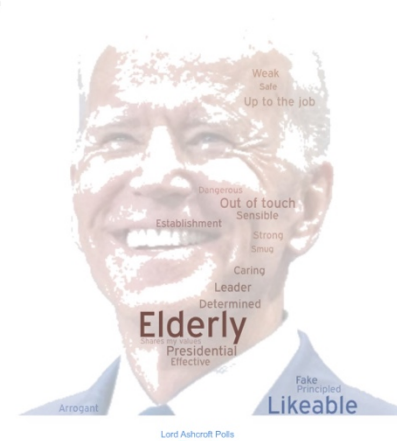
Below are some words and phrases that people have used about different political leaders. Please pick those you most associate with...?

Donald Trump



Below are some words and phrases that people have used about different political leaders. Please pick those you most associate with...?

Joe Biden



In our poll we offered people a selection of 32 words and phrases – positive, negative and neutral – and asked which they most associated with Donald Trump and Joe Biden. For Trump, four of the top ten most chosen words could be seen as positive (“ruthless,” “determined,” “leader,” and “strong”), but none in the top five, which were “arrogant,” “dangerous,” “racist,” “fake” and “smug.”

Six of Biden’s ten most chosen words were positive (“likeable,” “presidential,” “up to the job,” “leader,” “determined,” and “sensible.”). However, the word most often selected was “elderly” – followed by “likeable,” “out of touch” and “presidential” and “up to the job” for Biden.

For the two Democrats, these selections were also reflected in our focus groups. Obama-Trump voters, many of whom had become disillusioned with the president, remarked that both the potential alternatives were old and showing signs of “mental decline”. Democrats also worried that age was both candidates’ biggest weakness.

**“They’re both old and nearing the end of their energy rope.”**

Some of those who had voted for Trump in 2016 mainly as a way to stop Hillary Clinton and had grown weary of the President said they were leaning towards Biden, but again, with little enthusiasm: “He’s got a little bit of stability;” “He’s not offensive. You can



see the mental decline but he’s got a chance of getting respect back around the world.” The fact that he was not as off-putting as Clinton (“I couldn’t even stand to look at her”) and appeared “more presidential” than Trump was enough for some. None could imagine him describing Trump supporters as “deplorable.”

“He’s not offensive. You can see the mental decline, but he’s got a chance of getting respect back around the world.”

It was also clear that in many cases their support for Biden was not a done deal: “I keep thinking, is this the best we have in this country, seriously?” “He’s more in touch than Donald Trump, he’s more willing to rely on help and advice. But he’s also fickle, and he’s not all there. We need better candidates;” “He’s as much of a gaffe machine as Trump. He’s less offensive but no more polished.”

“I keep thinking, is this the best we have in this country, seriously?”

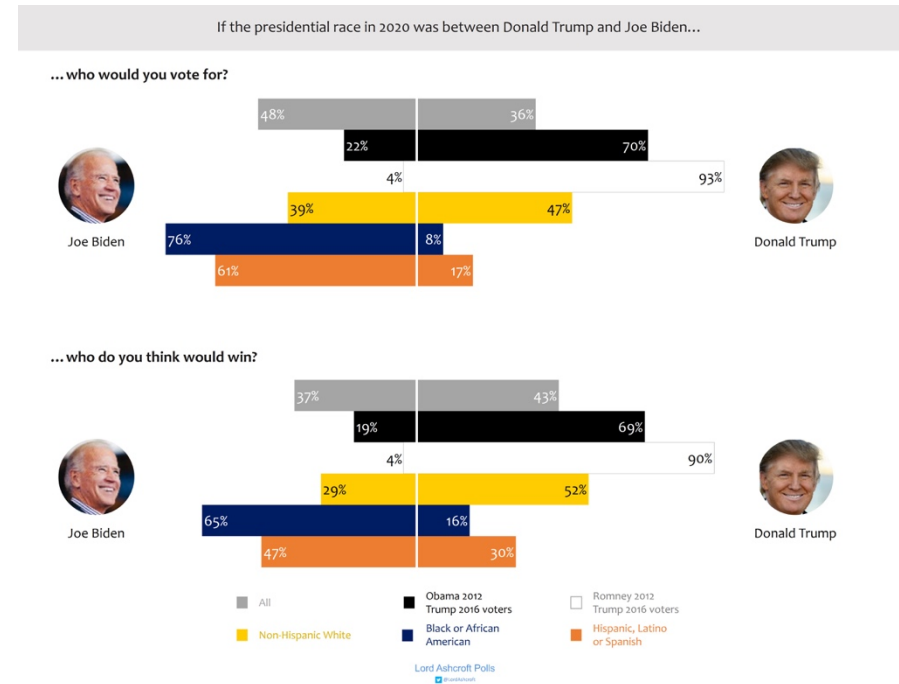
Participants had noticed the candidates’ promises to choose a woman as their running mate and vice-presidential candidate. None of the potential switchers from Trump was impressed – while they would happily support a woman as vice president, they did not want her to be picked *because* she was a woman: “I’m not a fan of the whole identity politics thing – it has to be a woman, a black person, all that. Why not just choose the most qualified person?”

## Who will you vote for... and who will win?

When we asked people who they would vote for in November, Biden beat Trump by 48% to 36%, with the remainder saying they would vote for another candidate or stay home.

Seven in ten Obama-Trump voters said they would vote for Trump again over Biden; 22% said they would switch to the Democrats. White voters said they would vote for Trump by 8 points over Biden. African American voters said they would back Biden over Trump by 68 points and Hispanic voters said they choose Biden by 44 points.

However, when asked who they thought would win, 43% thought Trump would beat Biden with 37% expecting the reverse.



In our group of African American voters who had turned out for Obama in 2012 but not for Clinton in 2016, most said they would not take the chance of staying at home this year: “He won last time because a lot of us thought he wasn’t going to win and we didn’t go out there and vote. I was like, who’s going to elect this guy president?” “I’m definitely going to vote. I’m mailing it in the first day it comes to the house;” “I would vote for anybody. I would even have voted for Buttigieg;” “As long as Trump’s in, I’m not staying home.”

“As long as Trump’s in, I’m not staying home.”

Several of the Obama-Trump voters in our groups had grown weary of the Trump presidency and were intending, at this stage, to vote for his opponent: “Trump is not as



attractive as in 2016. He puts his foot in his mouth too many times;” “Calling people names and throwing out insults gets old after a while, especially if the economy is not good;” “We need someone who can bring America together, bridge the separation.”

“Calling people names and throwing out insults gets old after a while, especially if the economy is not good.”

However, despite polls putting Trump behind, most of our Democrats were very downbeat about the chances of defeating him in November. By “not getting a candidate people are enthused to vote for, rather than a candidate who just isn’t Donald Trump” the party had failed to learn the lessons of 2016. They had also failed to present a united front: “They are fractured, and honestly I don’t know if they are going to win the next election.” In another election that came down to “the lesser of two evils,” the likelihood is that history would repeat itself: “Trump will probably win. I don’t want to say it out loud.”

“Trump will probably win. I don’t want to say it out loud.”

## The coronavirus effect?

A few in our groups thought the coronavirus crisis would hurt President Trump in the general election: “His initial response was so laissez-faire, it’s coming back and biting him in the ass;” “He’s damaged by the way he comes across, the things he says;” “Seeing how he’s handling this, they would be crazy to re-elect him.”

“They can’t pin this one on him!”

But more often, people argued that it would have little effect or might even help him – either because they would not blame him for the crisis, would not want to change the

leader at such a time, or would see him as best placed to rebuild the economy: “It makes it harder to oust a sitting president in a time of crisis;” “It’s not Trump’s fault. If it wasn’t a global thing, he would be in much more trouble. They can’t pin this one on him!” “There is a lot of time for him to recover. If this goes down by July, who knows what can happen.”

Some also argued that even if the crisis does not show Trump in his best light, these flaws did not detract from the reasons they voted for him in the first place: “I voted for him because he’s not a seasoned politician who will give things lip service. He’s sometimes offensive and makes us squirm, but people voted for other reasons.” These included his business acumen, which would be all the more valuable in the aftermath of the crisis: “If things are going down because of the virus, who do you want there to rebuild the country? To me, that’s going to be his greatest opportunity to shine;” “He does have experience with bankruptcy. He knows how to get himself out of a hole.”

For some, the crisis also highlighted some long-standing Trump policy themes, such as the importance of bringing back domestic manufacturing capability and food supply. Others argued that his performance on this particular crisis needed to be seen in a wider context: “Do I wish he’d be more statesmanlike? Yes, but it’s a payoff for the way he’s turning the country around. We might make it back to where we started after this but at least we had that cushion. Imagine if this had happened when he first took over.”

“He does have experience with bankruptcy. He knows how to get himself out of a hole.”

There were also doubts as to whether voters would see his likely opponent doing a better job: “It hurts Trump, but nobody is going to capitalise on it. What’s Biden going to say? ‘I’m Joe Biden, vote for me!’ He doesn’t have a solution, he’s just a guy;” “I don’t think Biden’s all there. He hasn’t got the mental capacity. If he was there in this situation, I’d be terrified.”

“It hurts Trump, but nobody is going to capitalise on it. What’s Biden going to say? ‘I’m Joe Biden, vote for me!’ He doesn’t have a solution.”



## ABOUT LORD ASHCROFT

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is an international businessman, author, philanthropist and pollster. From 2005 to 2010 he was Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party, having been its treasurer from 1998 to 2001. He began conducting political research in the run-up to the 2005 UK general election; the findings formed the basis of his book *Smell the Coffee: A Wake-Up Call for the Conservative Party*. In 2010 he founded Lord Ashcroft Polls, which has established a reputation for insightful non-partisan research on politics and public opinion in the UK, Europe and the United States, looking in detail at elections, referendums, political leadership, party brands and the motivations and priorities of voters.

As well as *Smell the Coffee*, his political works include: *Minority Verdict: The Conservative Party*, *The Voters And the 2010 Election*; *Well, You Did Ask: Why the UK Voted to Leave the EU*; *Call Me Dave: The Unauthorised Biography of David Cameron*; *Hopes and Fears: Trump, Clinton, the Voters and the Future*; and *The Lost Majority: The 2017 Election, the Conservative Party, the Voters & the Future*, and *Jacob's Ladder: The Unauthorised Biography of Jacob Rees-Mogg*.

Lord Ashcroft is also Honorary Chairman of the International Democrat Union, founder and chairman of the board of the charity Crimestoppers, vice-patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, a senior fellow of the International Strategic Studies Association, chairman of the trustees of Ashcroft Technology Academy, Chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University, and a former Trustee of the Imperial War Museum. From 2012 to 2018 he served as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Veterans' Transition. His other books include: *Victoria Cross Heroes*; *Special Ops Heroes*; *Heroes of the Skies*; *George Cross Heroes*; *Special Forces Heroes*; and *White Flag? An Examination of the UK's Defence Capability*.

## ASHCROFT IN AMERICA

Lord Ashcroft's US research began in the autumn of 2016 with focus groups in seven swing states. The findings from these groups, together with analysis from a 30,000-sample poll, formed the basis of his book *Hopes & Fears: Trump, Clinton, The Voters And The Future*, which sought to explain how the country had arrived at its decision, as well as looking in detail at the US electorate and the prospects for the future of American politics. Since then, Lord Ashcroft has continued to conduct regular polls and focus groups which, together with his interviews with prominent figures on the American scene, form the basis of his occasional *Ashcroft In America* podcast, which is available on iTunes and other platforms. He also writes about his findings in the UK, US and international media.

In the coming months *Ashcroft In America* will look in more detail at the 2020 presidential election campaign as it unfolds. Lord Ashcroft's research and analysis is published at [LordAshcroftPolls.com](http://LordAshcroftPolls.com) and his Facebook page, *Ashcroft in America*. You can also follow him on Twitter: [@LordAshcroft](https://twitter.com/LordAshcroft)