



Biden v. Trump: Race Against Time

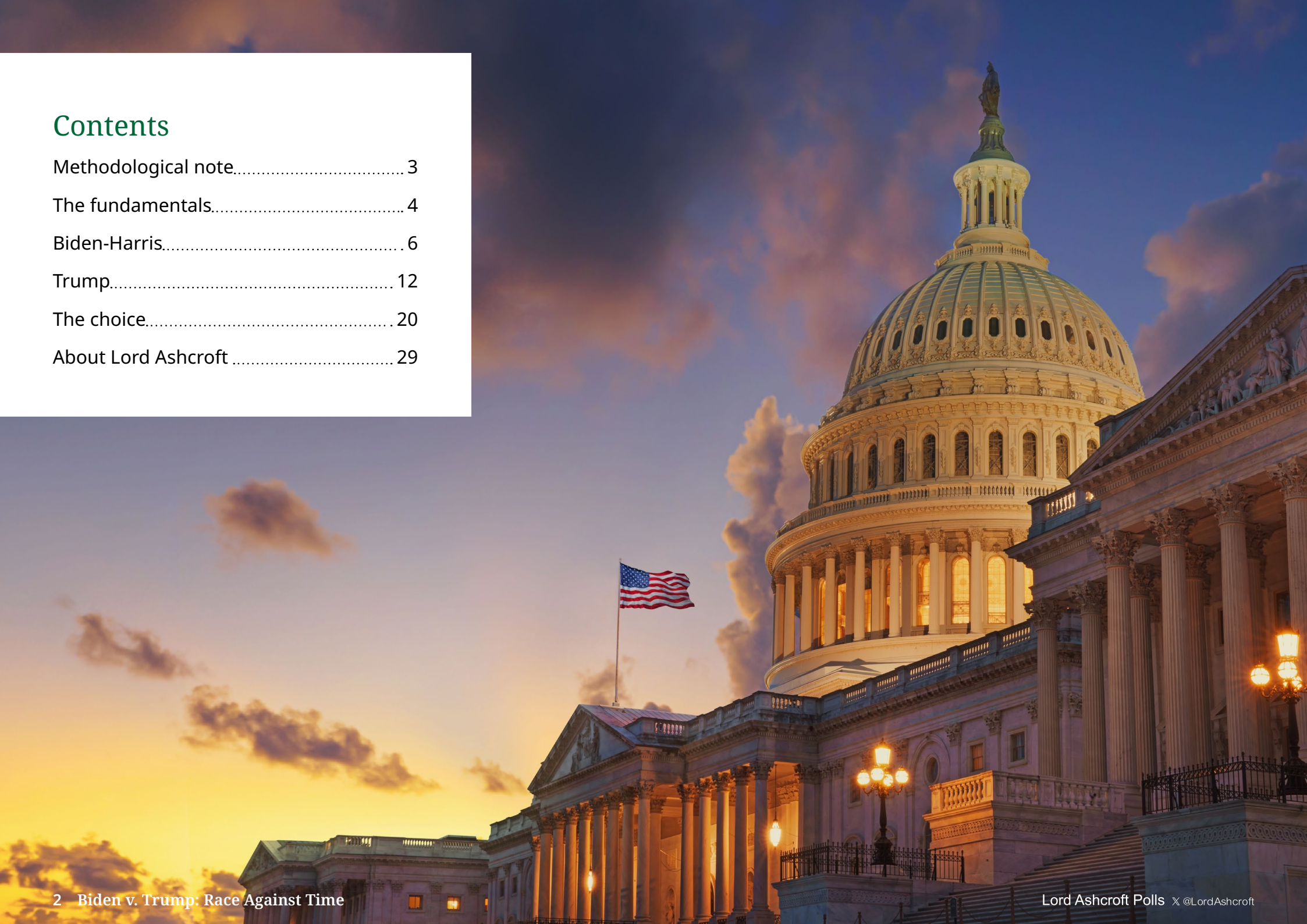
Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC
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Lord Ashcroft Polls

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The background of the entire page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes in detail.

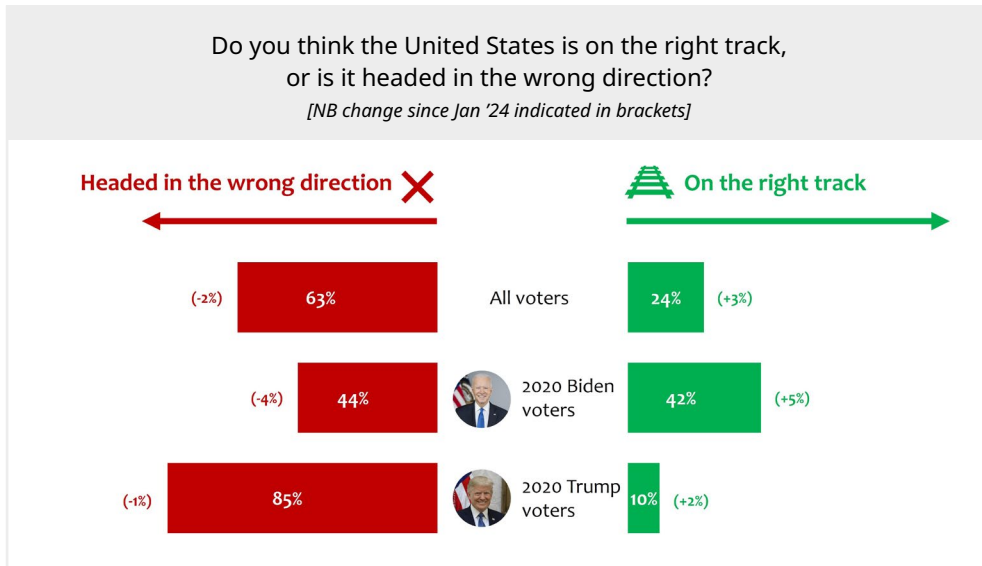
Methodological note

20,210 adults in the US were interviewed online between 17 May and 7 July 2024. 10,025 of these interviews took place before Donald Trump's felony convictions on 31 May, 5,169 took place after, and a further 5,016 took place after the presidential TV debate on 27 June. These are referred to in the text as the pre-conviction, post-conviction and post-debate polls.

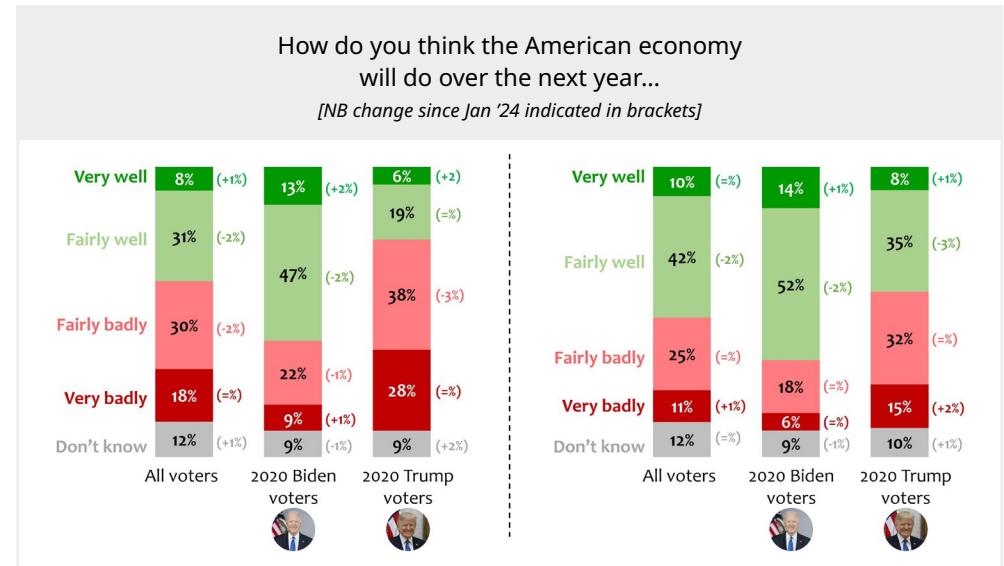
Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in the US. Full data tables are available at LordAshcroftPolls.com

12 focus groups were held between 3 and 11 June 2024 in Philadelphia, PA; Atlanta, GA; and Las Vegas, NV. Participants were drawn from a wide range of social, economic and political backgrounds and the groups comprised equal numbers of men and women overall.

The fundamentals



In our combined polls, voters said America was on the wrong track by 63% to 24% – though the gap had narrowed by 5 points since our previous poll in January. Those who voted for Joe Biden in 2020 said “wrong track” by a 2-point margin down from 11 points at the beginning of the year.



Americans thought that over the next year the American economy would do badly rather than well for the country as a whole by 48% to 39% – though 2020 Biden voters were nearly twice as likely to be optimistic by (60%) as pessimistic (31%).

However, when it came to themselves and their families, people expected the economy to do well by 52% to 36%. 2020 Trump voters were the exception, narrowly saying they expected the economy to do badly for them by 47% to 43%.

Despite falls in headline inflation, focus group participants from all political backgrounds complained about the high cost of living, especially when it came to groceries (notably milk and eggs), gas, energy, housing and car insurance. People often blamed companies for “price gouging” while continuing to use things like the Ukraine war as an excuse.

“Every time I go to Target for food it’s like \$75 for each bag. You can do a million side-hustles and still not have enough money.” [2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

“I went from spending like \$300 on groceries a month to almost \$1,000. For a family of three.” [2020 Biden, Nevada]

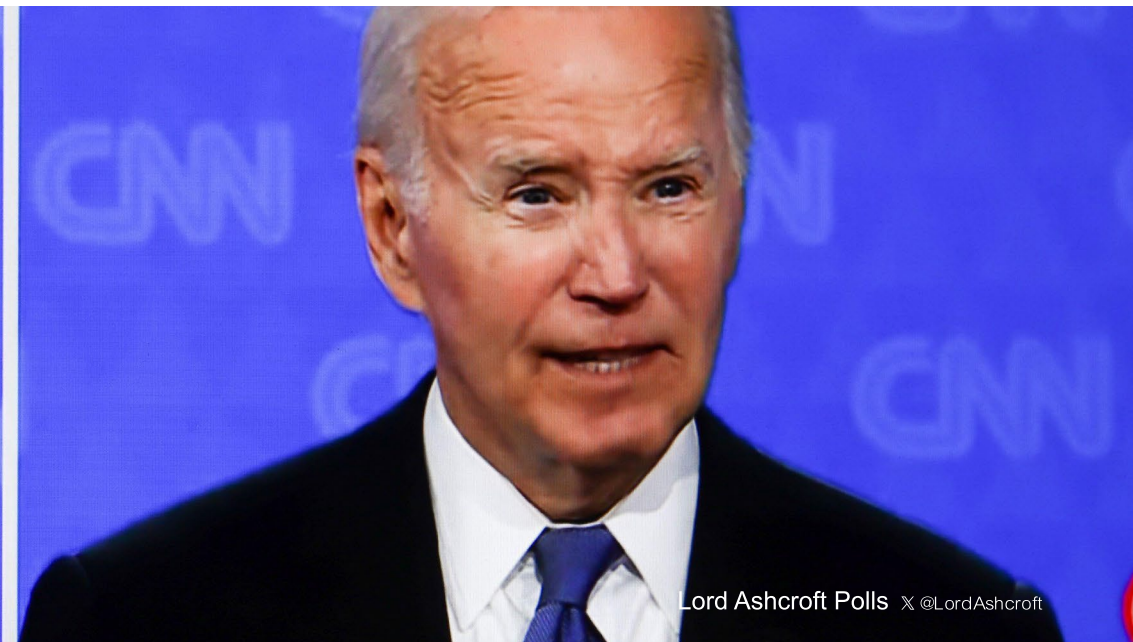
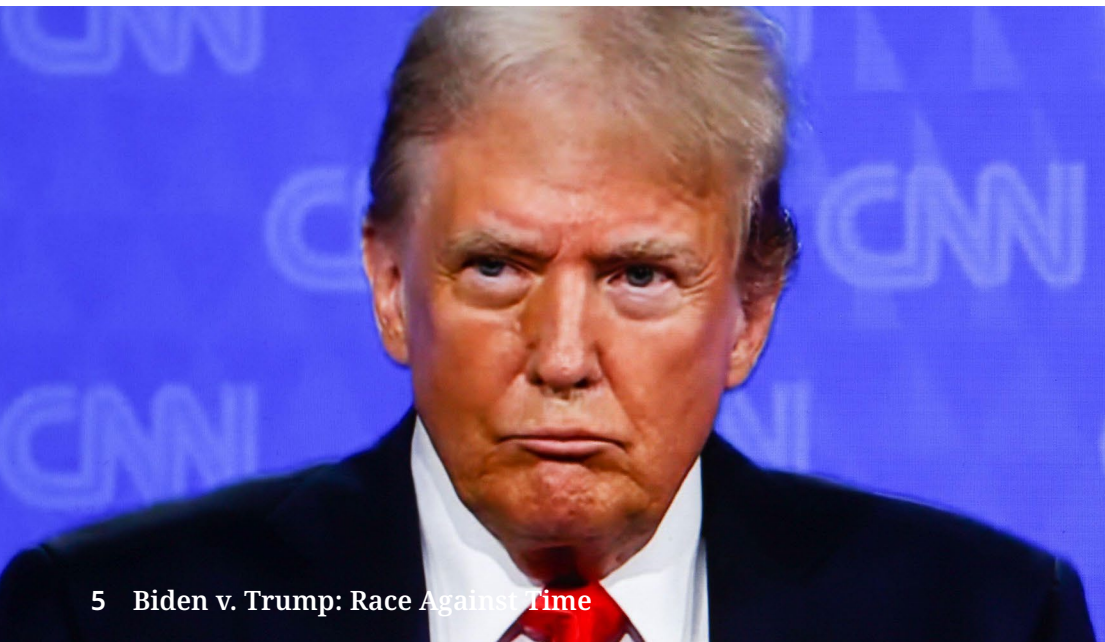
“There are more job opportunities available, but they’re lower-paying, like minimum wage or just above. So a lot of people have to work like two or three jobs to make ends meet.” [2020 Biden, Georgia]

Some noted that economic indicators such as the stock market were improving, but few thought this was yet having an impact in day-to-day life: “To the average American that doesn’t mean anything;” “Inflation may have levelled off but you don’t really see an improvement;” “I think the only people who benefit from that are people in the stock market.”

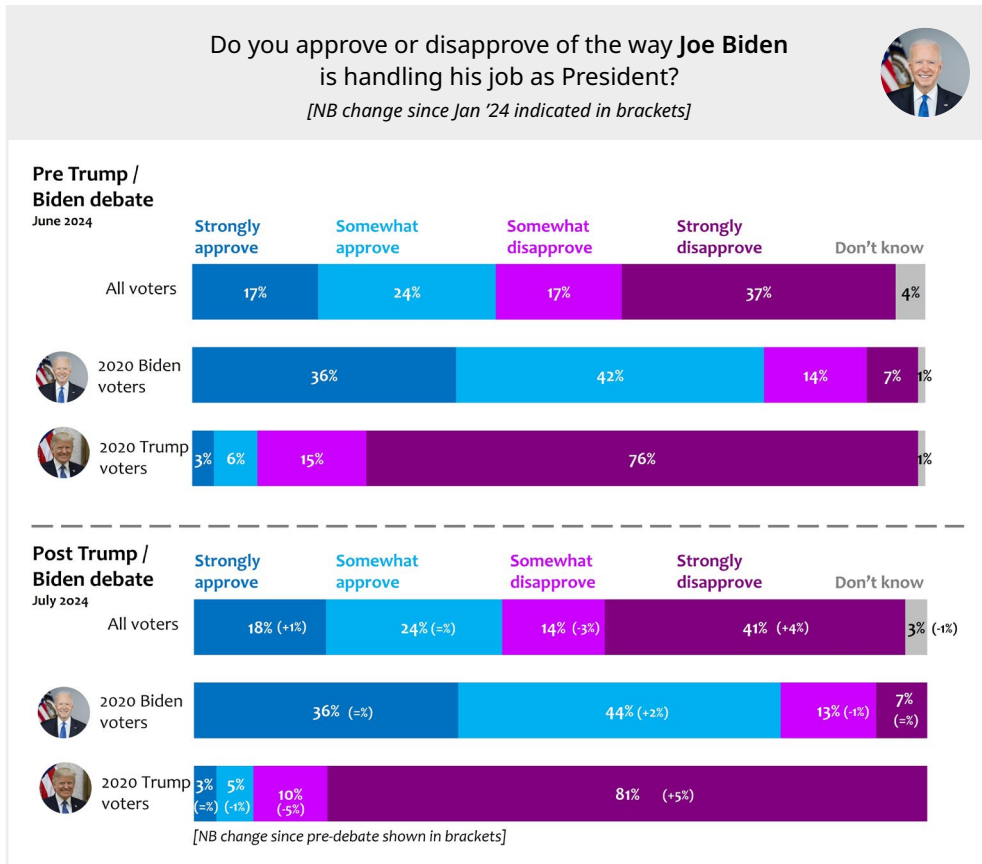
“I invest in stocks and that’s way better than last year, but not as good as in previous years. So there’s a slight improvement in the economy, but not to the point where we’re really feeling it.” [2020 Biden, Georgia]

“I feel like there was a period of time when we were OK for a minute. It’s over the last two years we have noticed the cost of everything. The cost of everything went up and our salaries didn’t.” [2020 Trump, Pennsylvania]

Some felt that they were living through a bad economic era, rather than a temporary downturn: “Listening to my mother and grandmother talk about the great recession I really honestly understand now what it feels like;” “It feels like we’re back in ‘08;” “We need to start heading in a different direction because the direction we’re going in is bad, and I have grandchildren. I want to see better for them.”



Biden-Harris



In our polling before the debate on 17 June we found 41% saying they approved of Biden’s performance as president, with 54% disapproving. In our post-debate sample these numbers hardly shifted, to 42% approval and 55% disapproval. However, there was a slight shift within the negative column, to 41% saying they “strongly” disapproved, up 4 points since the debate.



Some of our focus group participants were attracted to vote for Joe Biden in 2020 by particular policies, often student loan cancellation. More often, it was simply the way to replace Donald Trump and try to end what they saw as the chaos and divisiveness of his presidency. Very few had high expectations of a Biden administration: “It was the lesser of two evils and we just needed a placeholder to wait for the dust to settle, and that’s what’s happening;” “Biden was never meant to thrill. I’m not going to get excited about some dude who’s leaning up against 80 when he gets elected.”

“It was like picking the shiniest turd.”

[2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

“I voted for Biden last time mainly against Trump. But since Biden is in office, I can’t see anything that he’s really done to make me want to vote for him again.” [2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

For some in our groups, Biden’s achievements included action on student loans (though too limited for many – and some who had worked to pay theirs objected to the idea altogether), the infrastructure package, and action on prescription drug prices.

The most frequent criticisms concerned border control, the cost of living, failure to improve the political atmosphere and a readiness to involve the US in foreign wars.

“We practically have open borders at this point with illegals flooding in. Obviously there’s a lot of people who want a better life but a lot of those people are also criminals and they come and cause a lot of problems. It’s insanity.” [2020 Trump, Nevada]

“I feel like he just doesn’t have a plan.”

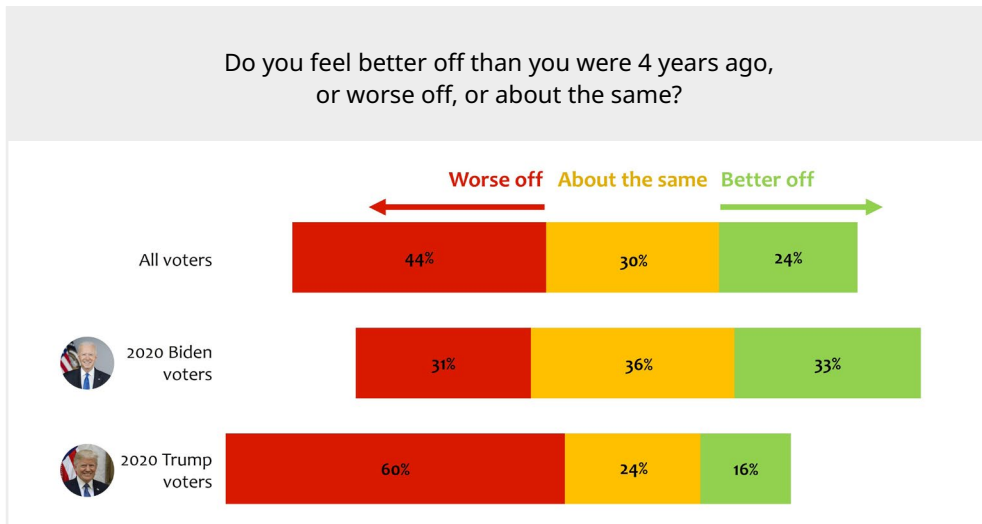
[2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

“He hasn’t secured our safety, but he’s trying to secure the safety of Ukraine.” [2020 Trump, Nevada]

“He was supposed to be someone that would get both sides to agree, but I don’t think we’ve seen any progress there.” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“I feel like maybe I was a little too optimistic. I had this notion that everything was going to be better, the things that Trump tried to implement would be reversed. I don’t really see any of the changes that were promised.” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

Better off than four years ago?



Americans as a whole said they felt worse off than they were 4 years ago by a 20-point margin, with 3 in 10 saying they felt about the same. Only 1 in 3 of those who voted for Biden in 2020 said they felt better off since then; similar proportions felt worse off (31%) or about the same (36%). Six in ten 2020 Trump voters said they felt worse off than they were 4 years ago.

As noted above, few of the uncommitted voters in our groups felt that the economy was improving for them. While some were prepared to excuse him on the grounds of covid or other circumstances, others were now looking back and reassessing their view of the Trump presidency.

“I feel like he promised a narrowing of the gap from the middle class to the higher class, but I feel that gap actually extended and it became worse.”

[2020 Biden, Nevada]

“Everyone is saying that when Trump was in office we were better off financially.” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“I was raised to be a die-hard Democrat and it never dawned on me until Trump ran against Hillary that maybe there’s something better. So I took that chance and was eventually let down, and then I thought I’m getting back on the bandwagon with Biden, and then Biden let me down.” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“I’m remorseful. I should have given Trump a better chance.” [2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

A second Biden term?

Most regretted Biden's decision to run for a second term, and some were surprised by it. However, others argued that running for office is what politicians do: 'Being an elected official is all he's ever done. He ran for the US Senate, then vice-president, then president. That's all he knows;' 'Because it's Trump, he wasn't going to go down without a fight.'

Hopes for a second Biden term were even lower than for the first. Some hoped he might go further on student loans or take action on housing or other living costs, but there seemed to be little expectation in these groups.

The most often expressed fears were that things would carry on as they were with no improvement, that the border "chaos" would continue, that the US would be drawn further into foreign wars, and that Biden himself might not see out another term. Biden's age and health were a major concern for all our focus groups, whatever their political background.

“I don't see anything being different. I don't want to be mean but if he wins a second term I think he would just die in office.” [Biden 2020, Pennsylvania]

“I see us getting ready to go to war. The fact that we keep escalating things with Russia is really scary to me.” [2020 Trump, Nevada]

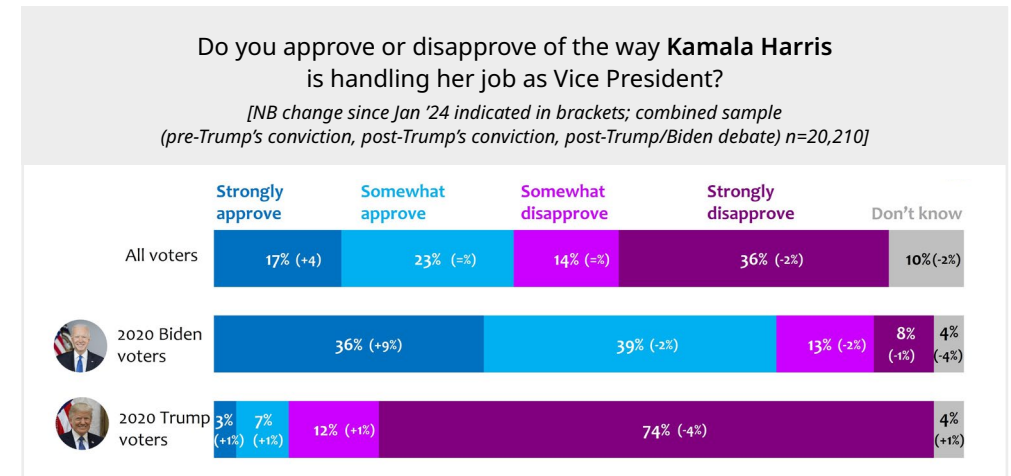
“The State of the Union was on a prompter and he still messed up reading it. He was saying words that aren't words. The decline was already showing.”

[2020 Biden, Nevada]

“I don't think he has a say in anything, really. He's like the frontman for whoever's actually running the party. He can barely keep a sentence together.”

[2020 Biden, Nevada]

Approval ratings for Vice President Kamala Harris were no better than for President Biden, with 40% having a positive view of her performance and 50% a negative one in our combined polls.



In our focus groups, most participants did not feel she had made much of an impact in her position and often felt she was largely anonymous (though some argued that this was the case for most vice presidents). Some knew she had been given responsibility for the border, but with little apparent success.

“She would be the first female president which is unique in and of itself, but at the same time, what’s her platform? Like, what is she bringing to the table?”
[2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

“She’s nowhere to be seen, really. She’s been on TV about twice in four years, that I’ve seen.”
[2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

“I think I heard more from Michelle Obama when she was First Lady than I’ve ever heard from Harris.”
[2020 Biden, Nevada]

A number of participants – including African Americans – felt she had been selected because of her race and gender, which some resented. At the same time, some felt she was criticised more heavily because she was a woman of colour.

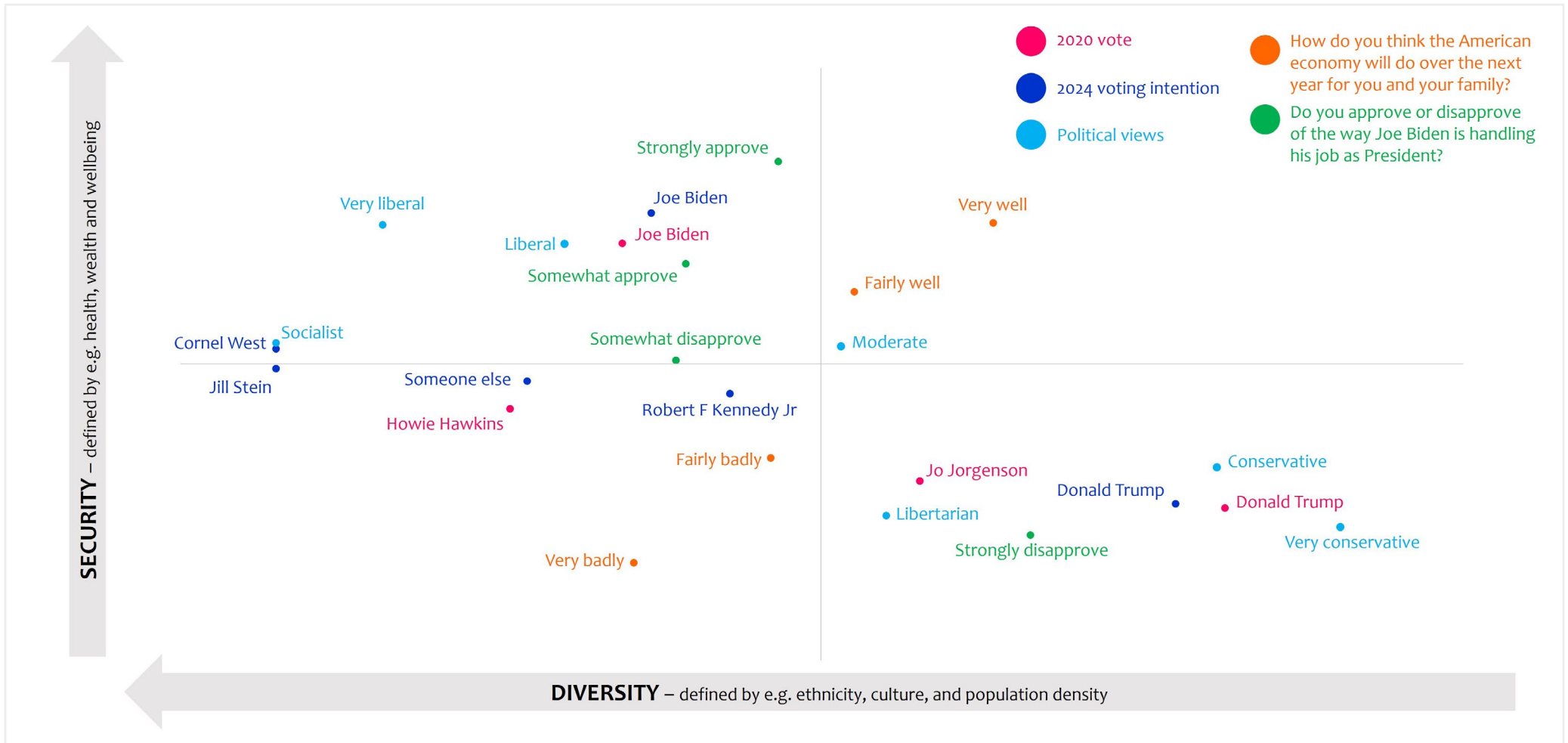
“You basically wanted the black vote. So then we’re expecting you to do something that’s geared towards the very people you were out to target.”
[2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“He is trying to manipulate my vote as a black woman. And bringing Kamala Harris who wasn’t super-qualified to be the VP – when he did that, I was like ‘I’m not voting for him’.” [2020 Trump, Atlanta]

“I feel like she’s being judged harder than any other vice president because she’s a black woman. Does anyone know what other vice presidents have ever done? Because I don’t. But they’re expecting her to come in and do all this stuff.” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

Alternative Democrat candidates suggested by the groups included Bernie Sanders, Pete Buttigieg, Gavin Newsom, Hillary Clinton and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, but each had their own downside and none commanded substantial support.

“If they had a fresh Democrat who was more middle of the road, Donald Trump would probably get his ass kicked. But the fact of the matter is that they’re running Joe Biden again, it’s their fault and they’re going to have to live with it.” [2020 Trump, Nevada]



Our political map shows how different issues, attributes, personalities and opinions interact with one another. Each point shows where we are most likely to find people with that characteristic or opinion; the closer the plot points are to each other the more closely related they are.

Here we see how political views and voting patterns are distributed throughout the electorate, with conservatives and Trump voters most likely to be found in the less diverse, less

prosperous and more rural bottom right quadrant. Biden voters are most likely to appear in the more prosperous, diverse, urban and liberal-leaning top left. We also see that economic optimism cuts across this pattern, with those expecting the economy to do well for them in their families most likely to be found in the better off, less diverse top right quadrant, and those expecting things to go less well most likely to appear in the more urban and diverse but less prosperous bottom left.

Trump

The continuing appeal

As in his 2016 and 2020 campaigns, those to whom Donald Trump had some appeal spoke about his background as a non-politician, his outspokenness, his practical business approach and what they regarded as his strength as a leader. As previously, they were all too aware of his flaws but felt that they were outweighed by the positives.

For many, including some who had switched from Trump to Biden in 2020, the new administration's record lent new perspective to the Trump presidency.

“We’re realising we can’t get ahead under Biden’s administration but we feel like we were thriving before the pandemic and we want to get back to that, and people are willing to overlook the erratic behaviour.” [2020 Biden, Nevada]

“He said things that others wouldn’t have the cojones to say and I liked it.” [2020 Trump, Atlanta]

“The idea of things being made in America and making America a strong unit again and keeping the money in America and a strong power. People hadn’t heard that in a long time.” [2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

“Biden is kind of people pleasing and pandering but we know Trump will get in there and push to get stuff done. But we also know he’s like a garbage person, so do we want that man as our leader?” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“Biden is kind of timid, he seems like a pushover, but Trump is very exuberant. You can’t tell him what to do.” [2020 Trump, Nevada]

“I can overlook him saying he’s going to grab someone by the whatsit if he’s going to put a little bit more money in my pocket.” [2020 Trump, Atlanta]

“I know truck drivers who say the economy was great when he was in office. Things were flowing. Much as people don’t want to admit it because of his character, he was a better president.” [2020 Trump, Atlanta]

Trump and minority voters

We asked our groups why they thought Trump was polling better than most recent Republicans among minority voters. There was a widespread view that as party loyalties eroded, especially in minority communities, voters would look more to the policies and candidates that seemed best suited to their own circumstances, especially on the economy. Similarly, if most presidents were older white men, some of which may have harboured racist views in private, people might as well choose the one who seemed likely to do the best job for them. Stimulus cheques, celebrity endorsements, “machismo” and a firm stance on illegal migration were also thought to have played a part in raising Trump’s appeal to minority voters.

“I hate to say it, but I think a lot of it was to do with the stimulus cheques he put out during covid.”

[2020 Trump, Pennsylvania]

“A lot of musicians, performers, athletes support Trump, even boxers.”

[2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

“Groceries were affordable, gas was \$2.99, for \$700 you could pay your rent twice and feed your family. Not anymore. Most black people will say it’s more than that because they don’t like to admit it’s about the money.”

[2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“We don’t have the party loyalty anymore. Now, everyone’s doing what’s best for them. Everything’s so bad right now, we’re looking for someone who’s actually going to do something.”

[2020 Trump, Atlanta]

“Before he left office he pardoned a lot of black artists and got a lot of love.”

[2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“I think black people know a lot of white people are inherently racist anyway. Trump might say racist things but he still helped HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] get funding. He does stuff for our community. You’ve had all these white men as president, how many of them were innately racist? So it’s easy for me to vote for someone who at least showed me who they are and then I can take the pros and cons and make my decision.”

[2020 Trump, Atlanta]

“A lot of my family came from Mexico and now say they would welcome Trump. I think they look past his comments and see the economy growing and have hope that he will bring some change compared to what Biden is doing.”

[2020 Biden, Nevada]

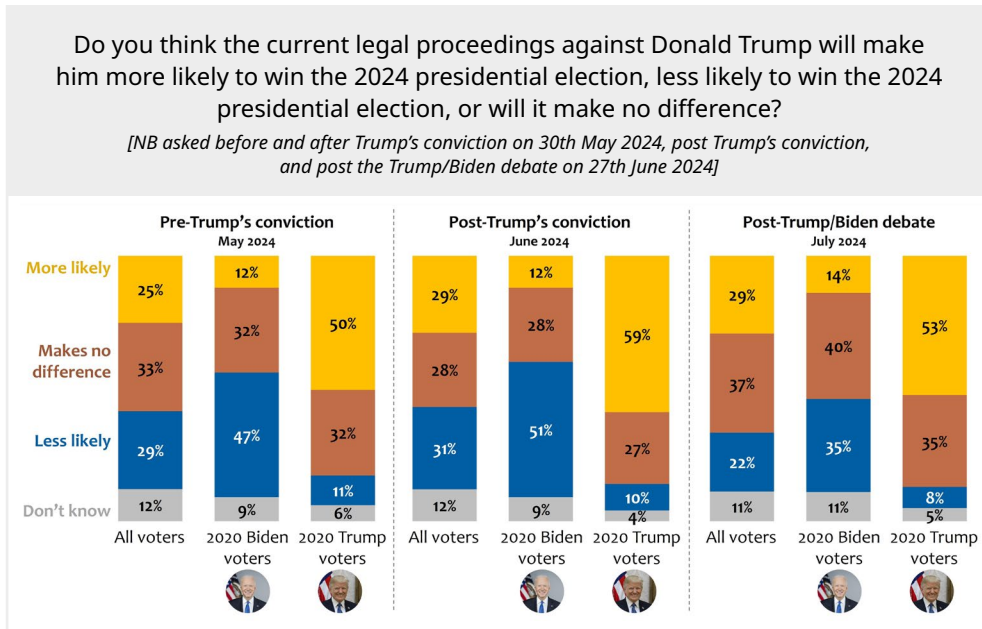
“Trump is saying certain boundaries need to be put in place, so the people who want to come here and grow and build our country are the ones that make it through.”

[2020 Trump, Nevada]

“It’s not just people feeling warmer towards Trump, they are also finally having some frustration with the Democratic party because they promise to be there for the poor people, immigrants, but things have only gotten worse.”

[2020 Biden, Nevada]

The convictions



Before Trump's convictions in New York on 30 May, 25% of voters said they thought the legal proceedings against Trump would make him more likely to win the 2024 presidential election. After the conviction, this rose to 29%. This number remained static after the Biden-Trump debate, with the proportion saying the convictions would make no difference rising to a high of 37% and the proportion thinking they would make Trump less likely to win falling to a low of 22%.



Following the convictions, we asked whether the verdicts made any difference to people's likelihood of voting for him in the presidential election. Overall, Americans were more likely to say it made no difference (42%) than that it made them more (21%) or less (36%) likely to support him.

However, only 8% of 2020 Trump voters said the convictions made them less inclined to vote for him again. Nearly half (48%) said the verdicts made them more likely to support him, while a further 44% said they made no difference.

In our focus groups, a few said Trump's conviction made it harder for them to consider voting for him in November. The fact of his being a felon, that he was convicted by a jury, the consequences for America's reputation abroad and the unfairness of his running for president while other felons cannot vote were all mentioned.

“When the constitution was written no-one could foresee anything like this happening. How am I supposed to take a presidential debate seriously?”

[2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

“If he becomes president again, I feel like it will lower the standard and make more room for these types of candidates to pop up, and it will snowball.”

[2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“I have a close cousin who unfortunately is a felon and it's very hard for him to find a job and stuff like that. But this man can run for president. If he becomes president then that should open doors for felons.”

[2020 Biden, Nevada]

“He's the face of our country, and the world will think we the people voted for that. Everyone sees he's a felon and they'll be like, 'are you serious? You guys voted for that?'”

[2020 Biden, Nevada]

However, for most of those considering voting for Trump, his conviction made little or no difference. Having never seen Trump as a flawless individual, they continued to weigh his pros and cons against the pros and cons of a second Biden term, and still found Trump the lesser of two evils.

“I'm not a fan of his behaviour and a lot of the terrible things he's done. But from a business standpoint he does a fantastic job. He said things people didn't want to hear but it was the truth and people had to hear it. I like somebody who's going to tell me how it is instead of making things all soft and pretty.”

[2020 Trump, Pennsylvania]

“We've all got stuff going on, and he's going to pull through just like he's pulled through everything else and come out on top.”

[2020 Trump, Pennsylvania]

“Do you go with who you've seen do better before, or what you see is the disaster that is now? I don't think either of those characters is good.”

[2020 Trump, Pennsylvania]

Some said the convictions had actually made them more sympathetic towards Trump or had done so among people they knew – usually because of what they saw as the political nature of the charges, his continuing capacity to overcome adversity, or his newfound relatability as someone with experience of the criminal justice system.

“They’re picking and choosing who they want to prosecute. Biden’s been caught doing stuff, Hillary had those emails, but they weren’t prosecuted.”

[2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“For me, it would matter if I felt he had been convicted of a legitimate crime. But it’s like, he’s supposed to be this terrible person and this is the only thing you can get him on?”

[2020 Trump, Nevada]

“So many people are against his ability to run, they’re trying to impede him. It makes you wonder, what’s the agenda?”

[2020 Trump, Nevada]

“What annoyed me was that they spent millions and millions of dollars to prove he hid \$130,000.”

[2020 Trump, Pennsylvania]

“It’s almost a mirror of what the African American community goes through. We do something, we’re always prosecuted to the highest standard.”

[2020 Trump, Atlanta]

“He’s cool now.”

[2020 Trump, Atlanta]

A second Trump term?

Those who liked the idea hoped a second Trump term would bring firmer border control; less involvement in overseas conflicts; a stronger economy, lower inflation, interest rates and debt; and a drive towards greater energy production.

“He said he was going to build a wall. Build it. There’s no reason why thousands of people should be coming in every day.”

[2020 Trump, Pennsylvania]

“We wouldn’t be running directly into World War Three. And he’s not going to go and fund other countries when we’re broke.”

[2020 Trump, Atlanta]

“Money circulation will be a lot better because he is a businessman and he knows numbers. He knows how to make the most out of whatever he’s handed.”

[2020 Trump, Atlanta]

“He’s going to drill, so we could try to bring those prices down on gas.”

[2020 Biden, Atlanta]

Fears of a second Trump term included an erosion of women's rights (including furthering the socially conservative Project 2025 agenda), the return of the "circus", and the idea that he would use the office to exact revenge on his political enemies.

“Many things are the same as 2016 but he's more vindictive. I have no doubt that he will try to go after his political enemies.” [2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

“I'd say women's rights will be over, especially with this Project 2025 thing.” [2020 Biden, Nevada]

“It feels like the circus is going to start back up.” [2020 Biden, Nevada]



There were very mixed views about the idea that a re-elected Trump posed a danger to American democracy. Some said they did fear a newly elected President Trump would misuse the powers of the office or that they expected to see civil unrest (which some thought at least as likely if Trump lost). However, those considering voting for Trump thought these fears were wildly overblown and that constitutional checks and balances would prevent Trump from abusing power even if he wanted to (which they doubted).

“It will be like 6 January 2.0 but worse. It will be like war in our streets.” [Biden 2020, Philadelphia]

“The more he talks, it feels like we're sliding towards dystopia because it feels like he's going to get re-elected and he's going to ride roughshod over the constitution.” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“Then why didn't he declare martial law after January 6, or even before that? Because there are checks and balances to prevent him from doing it.” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“He knows the January 6 thing was a disgrace, but it wasn't an insurrection. It was a disgrace. It was made into a bigger deal to serve an agenda.” [2020 Trump, Nevada]

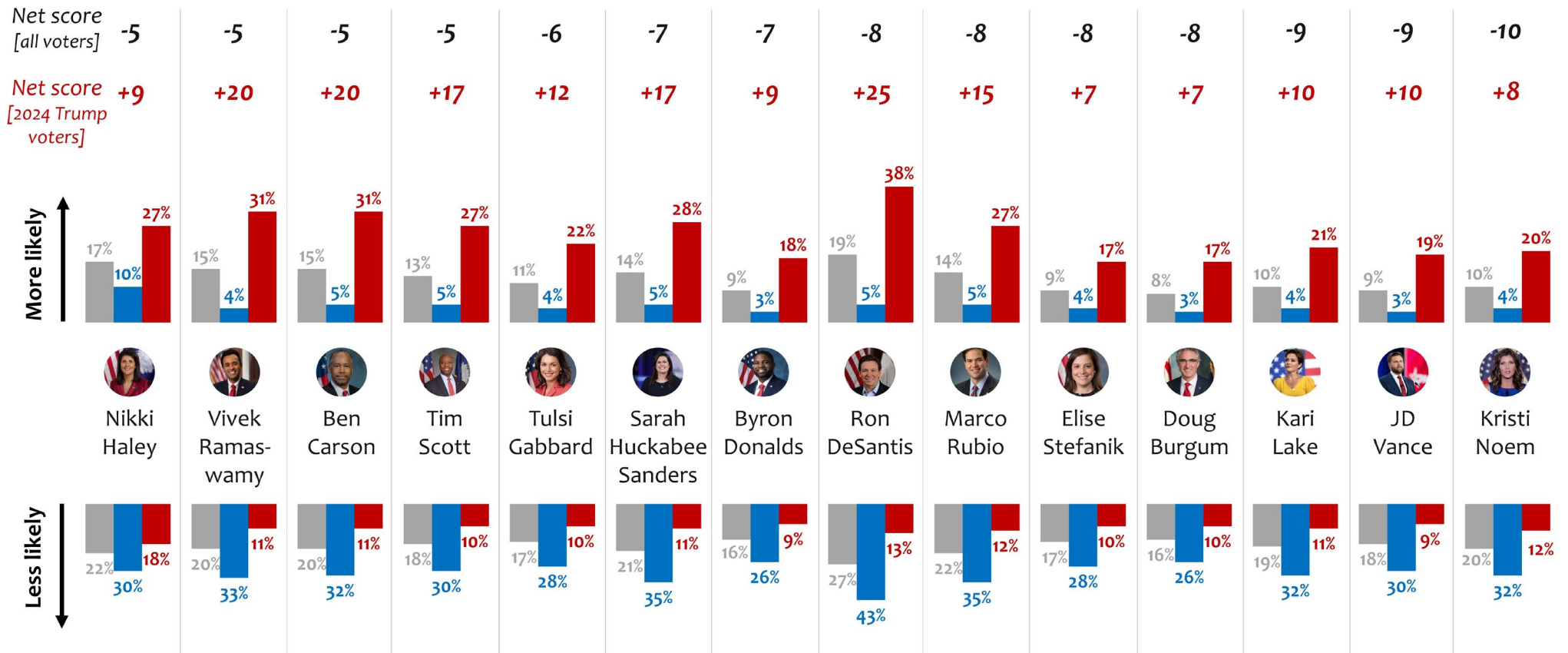
“Republicans don't riot. That's a Democrat thing.” [2020 Trump, Nevada]

Running mates

All of the following have been mentioned as potential Republican nominees for Vice President, to run alongside Donald Trump.
For each please say if they would make you more or less likely to vote for the Republican Presidential ticket.

[NB Net score = % more likely - % less likely]

● All voters ● 2024 Biden voters ● 2024 Trump voters



We asked respondents whether a selection of potential vice-presidential nominees to run alongside Donald Trump would make them more or less inclined to vote for the Republican ticket in November. For voters overall, each name produced a net “less likely” result due to strongly negative net scores among Democrats – though 1 in 10 likely Biden voters said they would be more likely to vote for Trump if Nikki Haley were on the ticket.

Among likely Trump voters, the biggest net attractions were Ron DeSantis, Tim Scott, Sarah Huckerbee Sanders and Marco Rubio.

However, it was clear from the groups that most potential Trump voters had given the matter no thought and that the identity of the running mate would make little if any difference to their voting decision, barring an obviously terrible candidate. There were positive mentions of Haley but some felt that “if after all the things she said about him, if she kissed the ring and kowtowed I’d think she has no character.” Several thought Trump would be wise to pick a woman, and minority voters would clearly be on the alert for any signs of patronising tokenism.

“He’d be smart to get a strong woman in there. I def think he’s going to try to redeem himself with a female.” [2020 Trump, Pennsylvania]

“I don’t think an African American vice president is going to help because it would be almost like an Uncle Tom syndrome. It’s going to make people feel, oh, you’re just playing this card to get our vote.” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“I don’t think it matters. You don’t bet on a sports team because of their third-string quarterback.” [2020 Biden, Nevada]

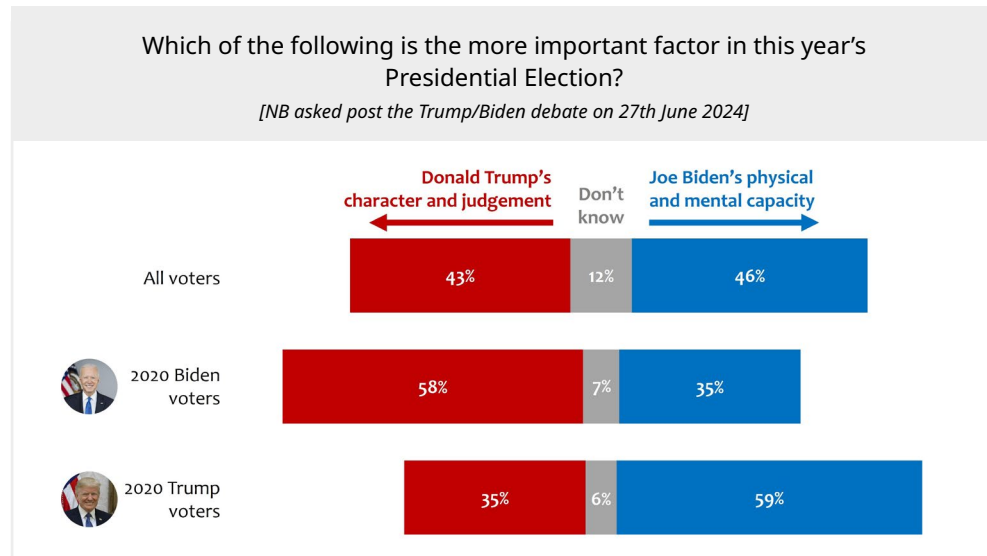
“When you’re looking at Trump, all you see is Trump.” [2020 Biden, Nevada]



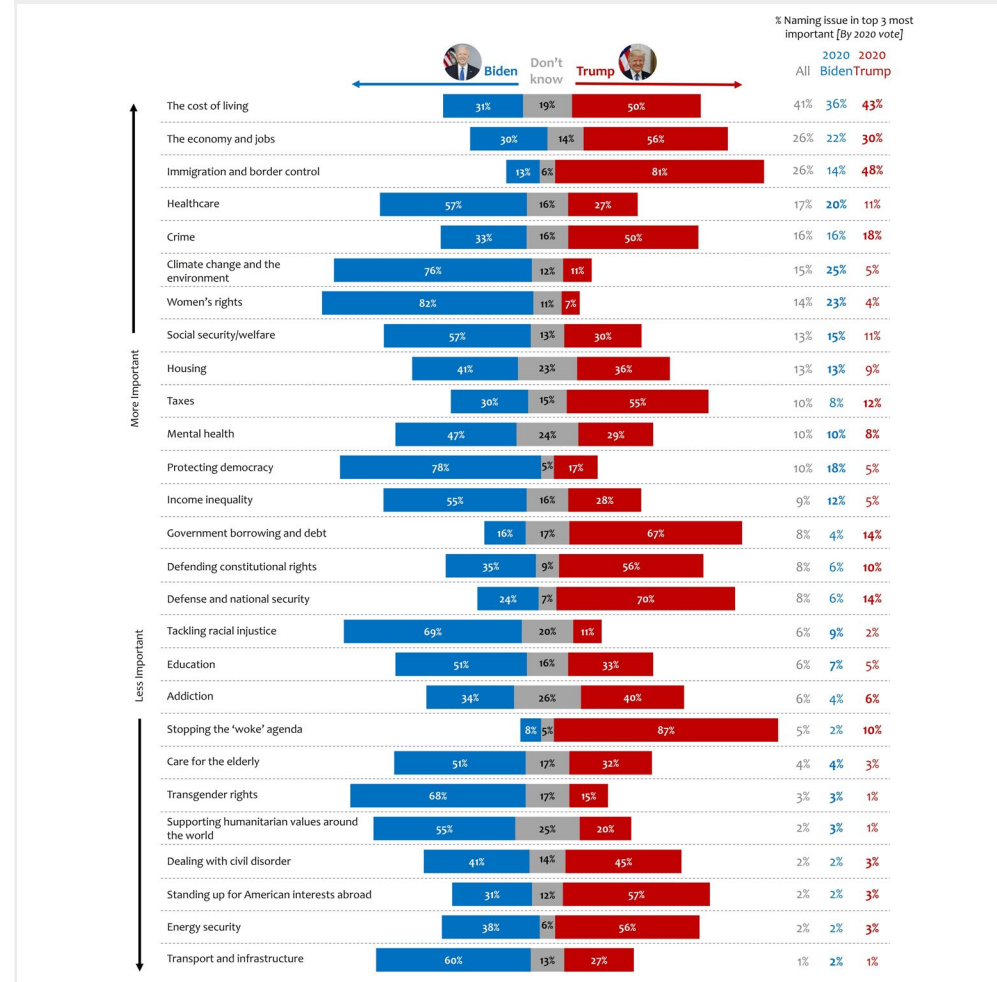
The choice

Fitness for office

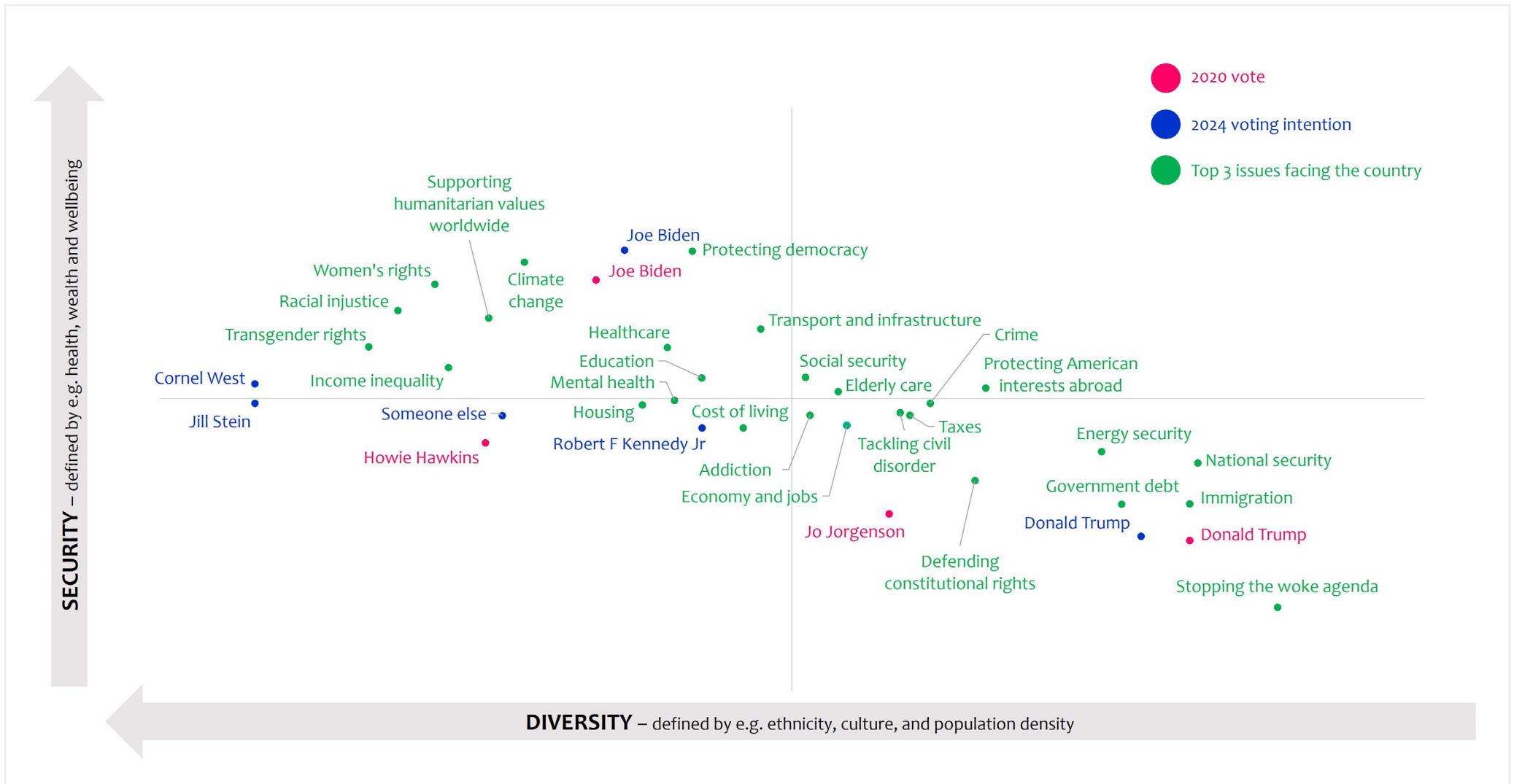
86% of Americans said they had either watched the Biden-Trump CNN debate live, or had read or heard about it afterwards. In our post-debate poll we asked which people thought was the more important factor in the presidential election – Donald Trump’s character and judgment, or Joe Biden’s physical and mental capacity. Overall, voters chose the latter by a 3-point margin. The proportion of 2020 Trump voters saying his character and judgment were the bigger factor (35%) was identical to the proportion of 2020 Biden voters who said the president’s physical and mental capacity mattered more.



Which three of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the US at the moment? [Those name each issue in top 3]: Who do you think would do a better job on each of the following issues if they were president after the next election – Joe Biden or Donald Trump?



We asked people which three issues were the most important issues facing the United States, and then asked who they thought would do a better job on each of the issues they named – Joe Biden or Donald Trump. Trump led on 4 of the 5 top issues – the cost of living, the economy and jobs, immigration and border control, and crime – while Biden led on healthcare.

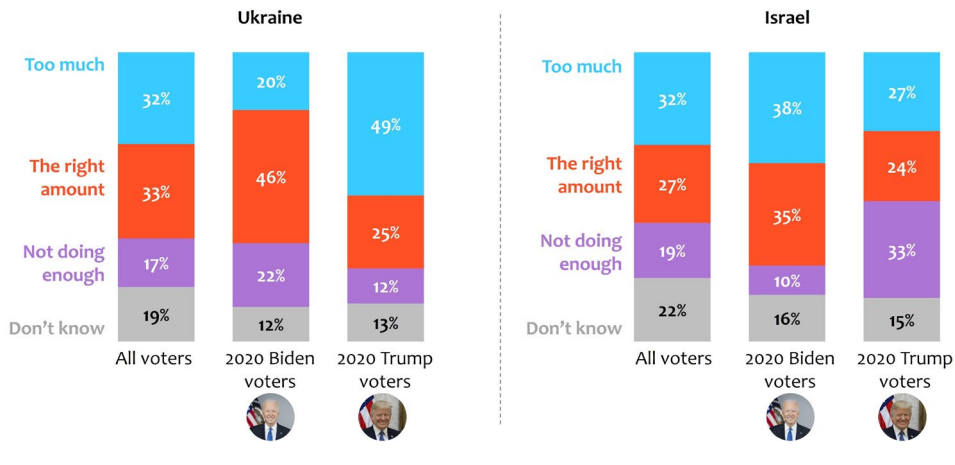


Here our political map shows where we are most likely to find voters saying a particular issue is among the most important facing the country. Those closest to the centre of the map, such as the cost of living and social security, are either universal concerns mentioned across the board, or are roughly equally likely to be named by different kinds of voters. However, we

can see clearly that issues including climate change, women's rights, racial injustice and transgender rights are most likely to be named by those in the more prosperous, urban, diverse and liberal top-left quadrant, while immigration, constitutional rights and energy security are most likely to be chosen in the less prosperous and diverse conservative-leaning bottom right.

Gaza and Ukraine

Thinking about the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza conflicts, do you think the US is doing too much, the right amount, or not enough to support Ukraine/Israel?

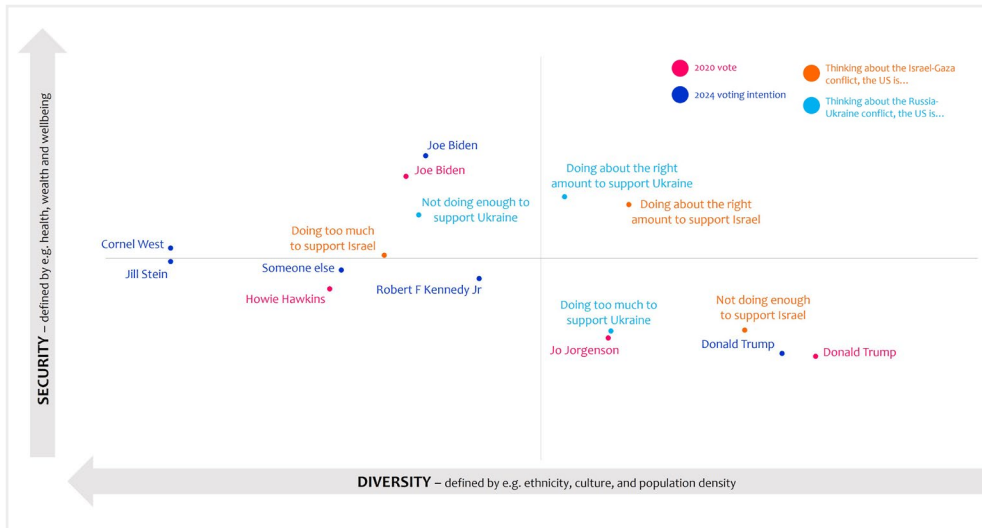


In our initial poll we asked respondents whether they thought the US was doing too much, too little or about the right amount to support Ukraine and, separately, Israel.

Overall, the numbers divided roughly equally in respect of the two countries: identical proportions (32%) said the US was doing too much in both cases, with around 3 in 10 saying they were doing the right amount to help and just under 1 in 5 saying the US was doing too little. However, this masks sharp differences in attitude towards the two conflicts between different types of voters.

2020 Trump voters were nearly two-and-a-half times as likely as 2020 Biden voters to say the US was doing too much to help Ukraine, while 2020 Biden voters were significantly more likely than 2020 Trump voters to say the US was doing too much to help Israel. 2020 Biden voters were nearly twice as likely to say the US was doing too much to help Israel as to say the same about Ukraine, while the reverse was true for 2020 Trump voters.

The oldest (65+) and youngest (18-24) voters were the most likely to say the US was not doing enough to support Ukraine. However, 39% of 18-24s said the US was doing too much to support Israel, more than any other age group.



Our political map shows how opinion on these issues is distributed within the electorate. In the Trump supporting right we are most likely to find both voters who think the US is doing too much to support Ukraine and not enough to support Israel, while the opposite views are most likely to be found close together in the more prosperous, more diverse, Biden-supporting top left quadrant.

In our groups, participants from different political backgrounds worried about the cost to America in terms of finances, political focus being drawn away from domestic issues, and even potential future military involvement.

“These two wars that are going on, I feel a lot of money is going out not only to Ukraine but to Israel. And in the meantime we have open borders and inflation, a lot of things to consider.” [2020 Trump, Nevada]

“I get that these are our allies. But at what point are you supposed to worry about your home?” [2020 Biden, Atlanta]

“The United States owes trillions of dollars in debt. What the hell are they doing putting money out of the country?” [2020 Trump, Nevada]

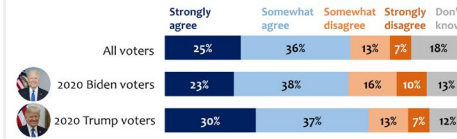
“I feel like he’s not trying to stop the wars, he’s trying to make them roll on more.” [2020 Trump, Nevada]



Third parties and the RFK factor

How far do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

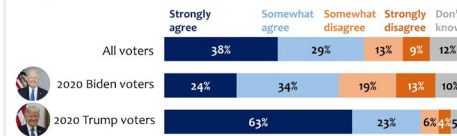
“Our food is unhealthy because Big Ag controls the Department of Agriculture. We have endless wars because military contractors control the Department of Defense, State Department, and intelligence agencies. The middle class is being decimated because Wall Street controls the Federal Reserve, Treasury, and SEC.”



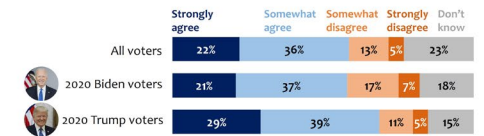
“It is time to end the imperial project and attend to all that has been neglected: the crumbling cities, the antiquated railways, the failing water systems, the decaying infrastructure, the ailing economy... Bring the troops home... Stop racking up unpayable debt to fight one war after another.”



“The border is out of control. Immigration is being administered by the cartels, not our government. Immigration is good for this country. It is unlawful, disorderly illegal immigration that harms migrants and undercuts American workers.”

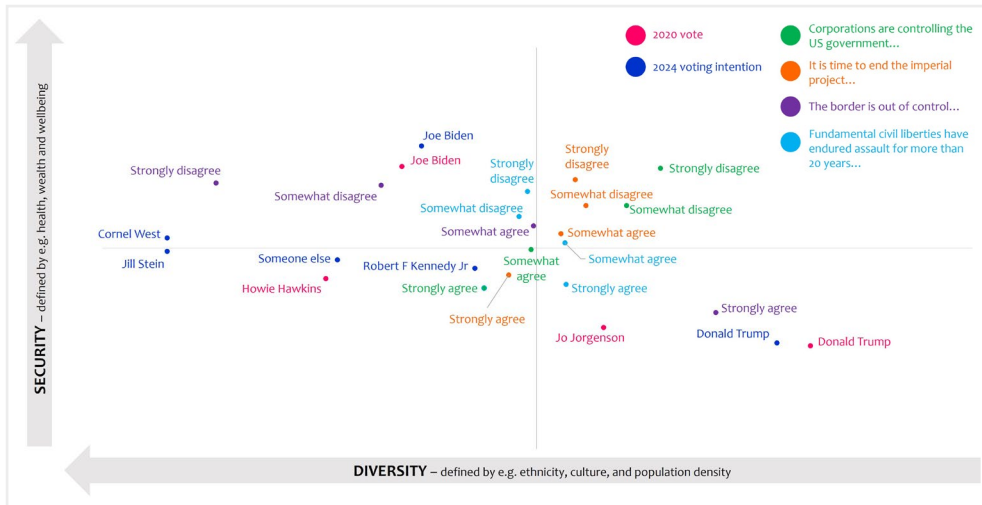


“Fundamental civil liberties have endured constant assault for more than 20 years, starting with the Bush/Cheney War on Terror, and accelerating in the era of Covid lockdowns.”



We took a selection of statements from the Robert F. Kennedy’s campaign website and – without saying what they were – asked how strongly people agreed or disagreed with each one. In three out of four cases – criticising “big ag”, military contractors and Wall Street; blaming overseas military commitments for neglected domestic priorities, and railing against the erosion of civil liberties in America – we found similar levels of agreement between former Biden and Trump voters, though slightly higher in the Trump camp.

The exception was a statement that “the border is out of control” and that illegal immigration harms migrants and undercuts American workers, which was backed by 58% of 2020 Biden voters and 86% of 2020 Trump voters.



Once again our political map shows how these RFK messages are received in different parts of the electorate. Those who strongly agree with his statements on civil liberties and border control are most likely to be found in the Trump-backing bottom right quadrant, while attacks on the “imperial project” and corporations controlling US government agencies are most likely to appear in the more diverse bottom left. Notably, agreement is strongest in the less prosperous bottom half of the political map.

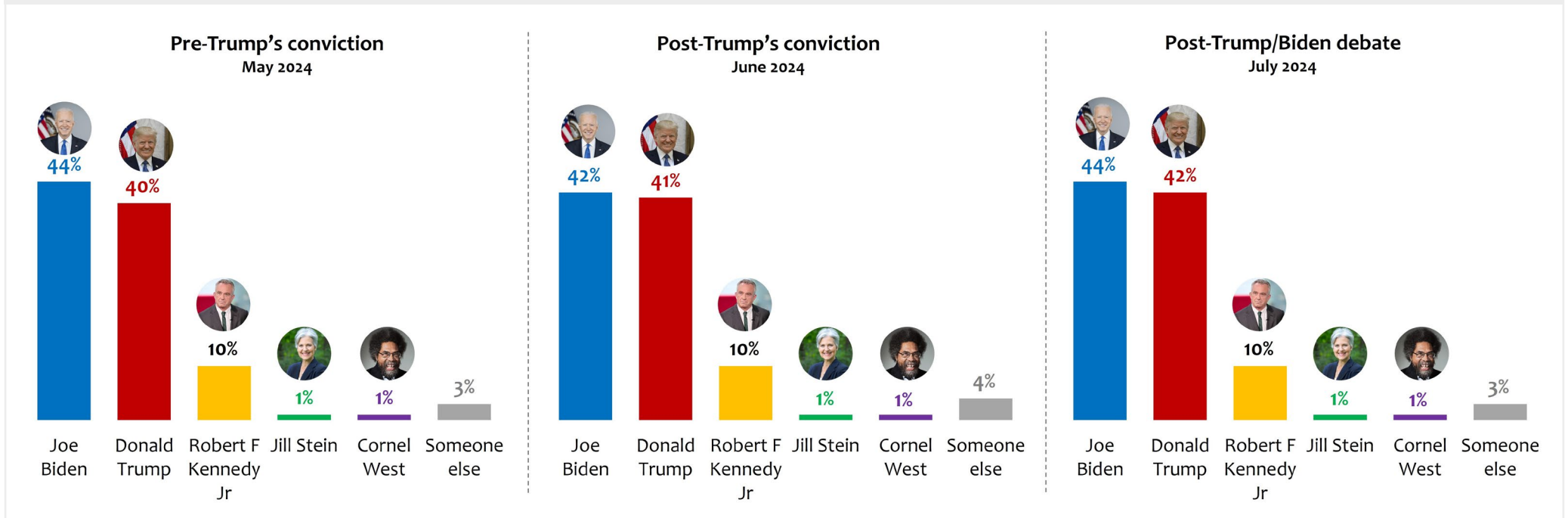
Several participants in our groups said one or more third-party candidates had caught their attention and that they intended to find out more about them. However, they often worried that they were less well-known than they deserved to be, that this meant they were not viable and their vote would therefore be better used elsewhere. A few were prepared to stick to their guns, saying that actually voting for different candidates was the only way to register support for these parties and to achieve change in the longer term.

- “ I would take any of them over the current choices to tell you the truth. I just don’t think any of them have a viable shot.” [2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]
- “ I would just hate for it to go to waste, which is where the third-party thought process always goes.” [2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]
- “ I’d like to see what’s up with Kennedy. I’d like to see how far that would go. I’d love to vote for Kennedy if it actually meant something but because there’s not enough money in it, they don’t get enough publicity, so nobody’s going to vote for him, so there’s no point voting for him, I guess.” [2020 Biden, Nevada]
- “ I think people forget they have a choice of other candidates and I think people need to focus on that to see any sort of substantial change in this country.” [2020 Biden, Pennsylvania]

The decision

If the presidential election were held today, who would you vote for if the candidates were...?

[NB among registered voters pre Trump's conviction on 30th May 2024, post Trump's conviction, and post the Trump/Biden debate on 27th June 2024]



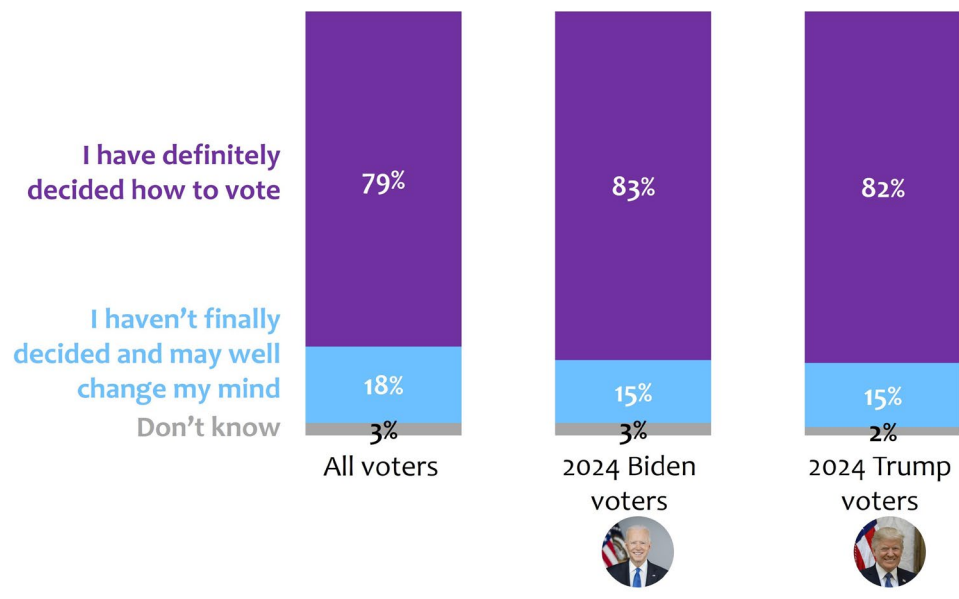
In our 10,000-sample pre-conviction poll, we found Biden 4 points ahead of Trump among registered voters, with Kennedy third on 10%. In our 5,000-sample survey taken in the days after the conviction, this lead narrowed to 1 point, with Biden ahead by 42% to 41% and the main third-party candidates unchanged. In our third survey, taken after the 27 June TV debate, Biden led by 2 points among registered voters.

In other words, Trump's position has if anything strengthened after his New York convictions on 30 May, but neither of these major events – the convictions or the Biden-Trump debate – produced changes in overall voting intention outside the margin of error.

Across the three surveys, we found Trump ahead among white and Hispanic registered voters (by 7 and 1 point respectively), and behind by 34 points among African Americans (54% to 20%). Trump led by 5 points among men and Biden by 4 points among women. Trump led in every age group up to 44.

Have you definitely decided how to vote in the presidential election, or might you change your mind?

[NB by 2024 voting intention; asked post the Trump/Biden debate on 27th June]

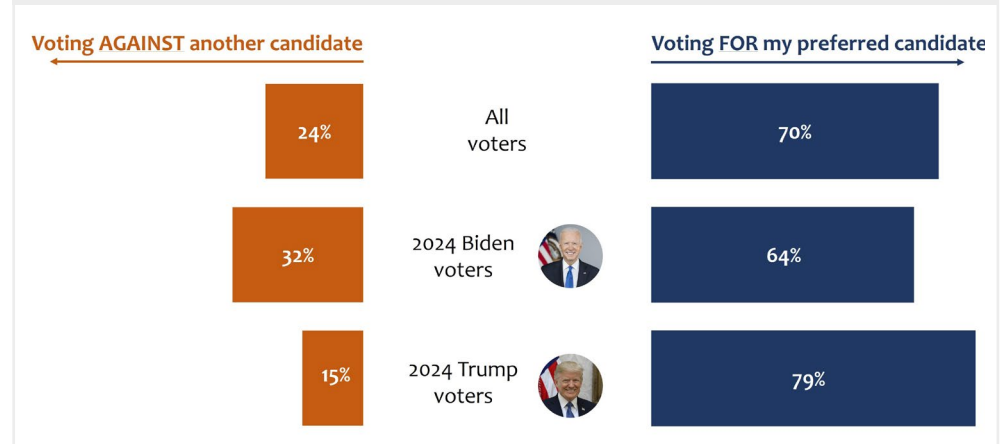


In our post-debate poll, around 8 in 10 voters said they had definitely decided how to vote, with just under 1 in 5 saying they may well change their mind before the election. Likely Trump and Biden supporters were almost equally likely to say they had finally decided; 15% of each said they may yet change their minds.

Women (20%), 18 to 24 year-olds (33%), 25 to 34s (22%) and independents (31%) were the most likely to say they may change their minds before November.

Would you say you were voting mostly for the candidate you mentioned, or against another candidate?

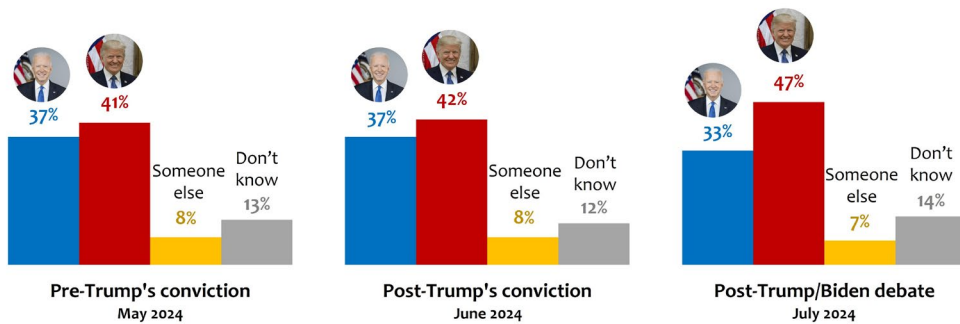
[NB asked to those naming a candidate in voting intention question; combined sample (pre-Trump's conviction, post-Trump's conviction, post-Trump/Biden debate) n=20,210]



In our three rounds of polling combined, nearly 8 in 10 of likely Trump voters said they were voting mostly for their candidate. Fewer than two thirds (64%) of likely Biden voters said the same, with 32% saying they were voting mostly against another candidate.

The next president will be sworn in on 20 January 2025. Regardless of who you might vote for, which of the following do you expect to take office as president?

[NB all voters pre Trump's conviction on 30th May 2024, post Trump's conviction, and post the Trump/Biden debate on 27th June 2024]



Expectations of a Trump victory strengthened over our three waves of polling. Before the convictions 41% expected Trump to win and 37% Biden. This 4-point margin widened to 5 points in our post-conviction poll, and to 14 points in our post-debate poll, in which 47% expected a Trump victory and 33% a Biden win.

Over the three surveys Republicans became slightly more optimistic (from 84% before the convictions to 87% after the debates), while Democrats became markedly less confident (from 74% before the convictions to 67% after the debates).



About Lord Ashcroft

LORD ASHCROFT KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. He is a former treasurer and deputy chairman of the UK Conservative Party. He is also honorary chairman and a former treasurer of the International Democrat Union. He is founder and chairman of the board of trustees of Crimestoppers, vice-patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, chairman of the trustees of Ashcroft Technology Academy, a senior fellow of the International Strategic Studies Association, former chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University and a former trustee of Imperial War Museums.

His political books include:

- Smell the Coffee: A Wake-Up Call for the Conservative Party
- Call Me Dave: The Unauthorised Biography of David Cameron
- Hopes and Fears: Trump, Clinton, the Voters and the Future
- Well, You Did Ask: Why the UK Voted to Leave the EU
- The Lost Majority: The 2017 Election, the Conservative Party, the Voters and the Future
- Jacob's Ladder: The Unauthorised Biography of Jacob Rees-Mogg
- Diagnosis of Defeat: Labour's Turn to Smell the Coffee
- Going for Broke: The Rise of Rishi Sunak
- Reunited Nation? American Politics Beyond the 2020 Election
- Red Knight: The Unauthorised Biography of Sir Keir Starmer

- First Lady: Intrigue at the Court of Carrie and Boris Johnson
- All To Play For: The Advance Of Rishi Sunak
- Red Queen? The Unauthorised Biography of Angela Rayner

His other books include:

- Victoria Cross Heroes, Volumes I and II
- Special Forces Heroes
- George Cross Heroes
- Special Ops Heroes
- Heroes of the Skies
- White Flag? An Examination of the UK's Defence Capability
- Unfair Game: An Exposé of South Africa's Captive-Bred Lion Industry
- Life Support: The State of the NHS in an Age of Pandemics
- In the Shadows: The Extraordinary Men and Women of the Intelligence Corps

