



Protecting Progressive Priorities on Health Care and Stopping Trump's Medicare and Social Security Cuts

Welcome to NAVIGATOR – a project designed to better understand the American public's views on issues of the day and help advocates, elected officials, and other interested parties understand the language, imagery and messaging needed to make and win key policy arguments. This edition features findings from a national online survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted February 14-17, 2020. 200 additional interviews were conducted among political independents with no partisan lean.

Every month, we pick a few topics for exploration. The topics we select aren't meant to cover every issue area facing the progressive community, but rather to give actionable advice on how to talk about key issue areas. This month we focused on:

The Affordable Care Act turns 10: How can progressives speak to Americans' biggest concerns about health care today?

Health care remains an important issue for Americans with costs being the biggest concern. On the 10-year anniversary of the ACA, progressives can focus on elements of the law that tackle costs and provide patient protections.

Americans oppose cuts to Social Security and Medicare, but do they know the Trump administration has proposed them?

Most Americans say they would never approve of an elected official who backed cuts to Medicare and Social Security. But many appear unclear about Donald Trump's position on the issue.

The impeachment proceedings against Donald Trump have come to a close. How should progressives talk about the legacy of this historic moment?

Many Americans approve of Senate Democrats' decision to vote in favor of impeachment, while a majority continue to believe Trump has committed crimes during his term in office.

Health care remains an important issue across the board for Americans. Above all, costs are the biggest concern.

By wide margins, Americans continue to prefer Democrats in Congress to President Trump when it comes to health care issues. However, concerns loom over the president when it comes to the issue of health care. In a head-to-head comparison, 50% of Americans say they trust Democrats in Congress more to handle health care, as opposed to 36% who trust Trump more. Democrats in Congress are also trusted more to protect health care coverage for people with pre-existing conditions (55% Democrats to 31% Trump), to improve the quality of health care (52% to 34%), and to improve access to affordable long-term care (50% to 34%). Overall, President Trump earns a job performance rating of 45% approve to 53% disapprove in this month's survey – the highest approval rating for the president in Navigator's tracking since 2018.

The number one concern when it comes to health care in America today: cost.

In rating the overall quality of care received, 55% rate it positively (15% say it's excellent, 40% say it's good), while only 41% rate it negatively. However, one component of health care remains a pain point: when asked to rate the availability and affordability of health care in the United States today, the share giving a positive rating drops to 44%, and the majority (51%) feel negatively.

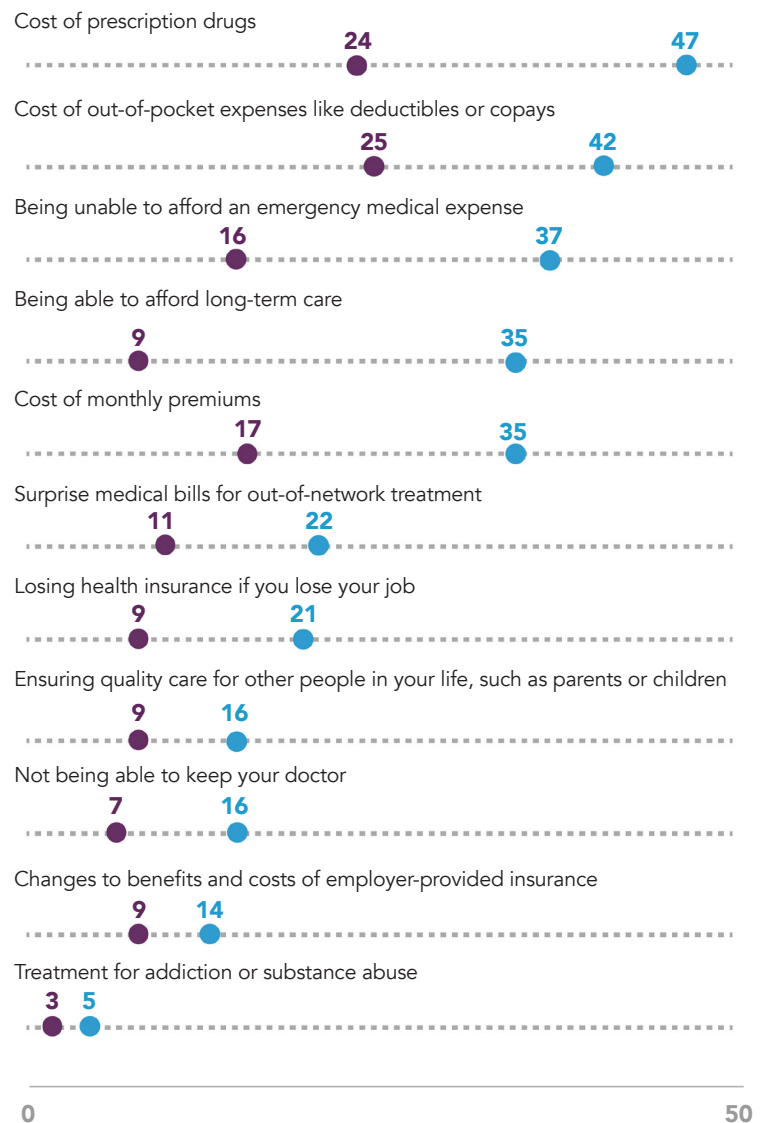
The importance of costs becomes especially clear when asking Americans what they personally worry about. On this question, the top five responses revolve around affordability. At the very top: the cost of prescription drugs (47%), the cost of out-of-pocket expenses (42%), and being unable to afford an emergency medical expense (37%). Concerns about costs extend across party lines, with 48% of Democrats, 42% of independents, and 48% of Republicans worried about prescription drug prices. When asked which issues they have actually struggled with over the past 12 months – a higher bar than “worry” – the same issues rise to the top again.

Progressives making their case on health care should remember: while there are many ways to approach improvements to the health care system, Americans' biggest challenges are costs, costs, and costs.

Cost rises to the top of both worries and personal struggles for Americans on health care.

Which of the following do you worry about most?

Have you personally struggled with any in the past 12 months?



From personal to political: Americans want leaders in Washington to focus on reducing costs, but pre-existing conditions protections remain important too.

Navigator also asked respondents to identify which goals leaders in Washington should consider in changing the health care system. Once again, the dominant theme was cost, including lowering the cost of prescription drugs (57%), reducing out-of-pocket costs (49%), and others.

Beyond cost, coverage for pre-existing conditions also remains a top concern for Americans (46%).

When asked to rate the importance of that same list of policy priorities for respondents' personal health care situations, those related to cost rose to the top, including reducing out-of-pocket costs (52%), lowering the cost of prescription drugs (50%), and reducing premiums and deductibles (49%).

The "Affordable Care Act" is rising in favorability.

The "Affordable Care Act" has a net +23 favorability rating (54% favorable-31% unfavorable), which represents a 22-point increase since last tested in June 2019 (46%-45%). However, when described instead as "Obamacare," while still favorable, net favorability drops to +5 (48%-43%). The gap between the two framings is especially large among independents (+21 for "Affordable Care Act" and -9 for "Obamacare") and Republicans (-40 and -72).

■ Which of the following do you think are the most important goals as leaders in Washington consider changes to our health care system?

■ As our leaders in Washington consider changes to our health care system, which of the following do you think are the most important priorities for your personal health care situation?

Lowering the cost of prescription drugs



Reducing out-of-pocket costs



Protecting coverage for people with pre-existing conditions



Reducing premiums and deductibles



Improving the quality of health care



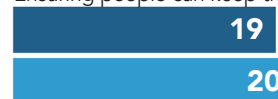
Expanding health care coverage to more people



Reducing the cost of long-term care



Ensuring people can keep their current doctors



Allowing people to stay on their parents' insurance until age 26



Improving access to quality maternity care



The ACA at 10 years: Americans are especially glad for the parts of the health care law that prevent abuse by insurance companies and protect patients.

Ten years on, the Affordable Care Act is popular.

The ACA was first signed into law March 23, 2010, a milestone in the history of the American health care system that extended coverage to more than 20 million Americans. In the years since its passage, conservatives have tried to undermine the program, voting at least 70 times to repeal it. But the Affordable Care Act is more popular than ever, with a majority (54%) rating it favorably, while only a third (31%) rate it unfavorably (Navigator's findings are similar to those released last week by [Kaiser Family Foundation](#), showing the ACA at 55% favorable to 37% unfavorable, the law's all-time best rating in their tracking).

Progressives should focus in particular on the Affordable Care Act's protections for people with pre-existing conditions and protections against insurance companies.

In advance of the ACA's 10-year anniversary, Navigator tested nine key elements of the law to determine how their broad favorability is, as well as how much each has been helpful to Americans and their families. With all nine, majorities viewed each part of the law favorably and found each to be personally helpful. In fact, each element was more popular than the law as a whole. Among the most popular elements were coverage for pre-existing conditions (62% very favorable); the requirement for insurance to cover prescription drugs, mammograms, and dental care for children (57%); and the elimination of lifetime limits on coverage for patients who get sick (56%).

What may be driving the popularity of the law is the large number of Americans who say the law has been directly helpful for themselves and their families. A majority (at least 59%) of Americans report that each element tested has been "very" or "somewhat" helpful to them or their family, including again: coverage for pre-existing conditions (49% very helpful); coverage of certain things like prescription drugs, mammograms, and dental care for children (47%); and elimination of lifetime limits on coverage for patients who get sick (41%).

Americans are highly favorable towards features of the ACA -- and find personal helpfulness in the benefits they provide.

Very Favorable Very Helpful

Health insurance companies can't deny coverage, discriminate, or charge more for patients who have a pre-existing condition



Health insurance plans are required to offer coverage for certain things, such as prescription drugs, mammograms, and dental care for children



Health insurance companies can no longer put lifetime limits on coverage for patients who get sick



Health insurance companies are prevented from charging women more than men because they need coverage for things like prenatal care, childbirth, and prescription birth control



Health insurance companies are required to spend at least 80% of health insurance premiums from consumers on improving health care for consumers, instead of continuing to divert it to advertising and CEO bonuses



Health insurance plans are required to cover the cost of mental health services, including treatment for substance use disorders like opioid abuse



Young adults are able to stay on their parents' family health insurance until age 26



Tax credits are provided for low- and middle-income Americans who don't get health insurance through their jobs to help them buy health insurance



Medicaid has been expanded to cover an additional 17 million Americans



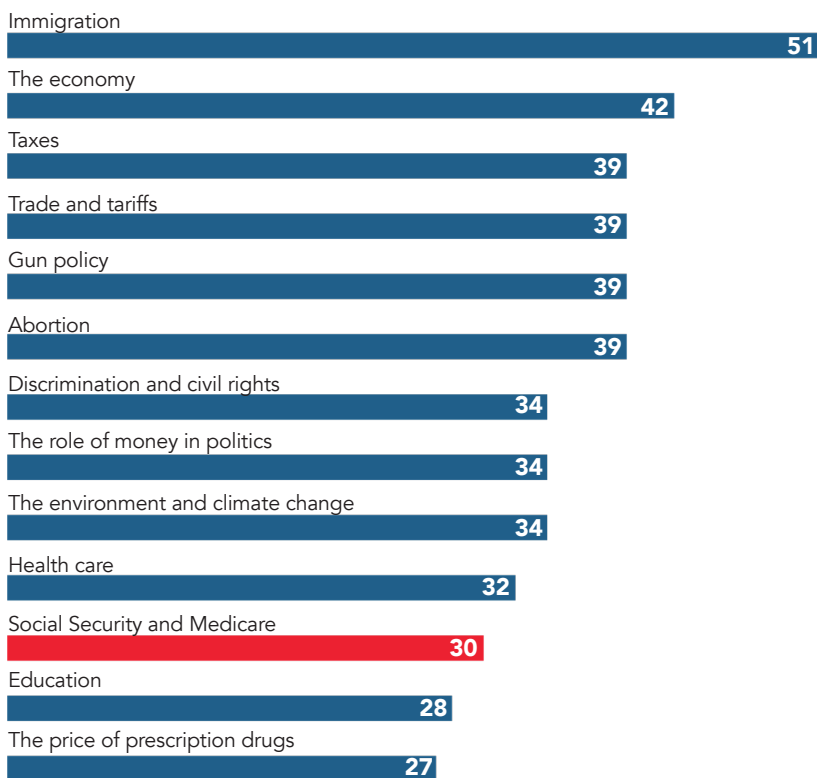
0 65

Cutting Medicare and Social Security is a major concern – even a “deal breaker” – for most Americans. But many are not very familiar with the Trump administration’s position on the issue

A vast majority of Americans are favorable towards Social Security and Medicare, with 83% favorable towards Social Security (49% very favorable) and 80% favorable towards Medicare (48% very favorable). And yet, when asked how well they understand Trump and his administration’s position on Social Security and Medicare, only 30% of Americans say they know “very well” what President Trump’s position is on the issue. In contrast, 51% feel like they know his position on immigration very well. In other words, progressives have a window to shape the conversation around Trump’s approach to Medicare and Social Security by highlighting efforts to cut these very popular programs.

Cutting Medicare and Social Security is a deal-breaker for many Americans. Navigator asked respondents to indicate whether they found a series of policy positions to be “deal-breakers” for approving of an elected official. The biggest deal-breaker position was supporting cuts to Social Security and Medicare, with 50% rating it as a deal-breaker, including 66% of Democrats and 50% of independents. Another 29% of Americans say this position would cause “major concerns.”

Social Security and Medicare rank lower on a list of policies for which Americans feel they understand Trump’s position “very well.”



The Trump administration’s budget proposal is a recent example.

While the president has tweeted that he doesn’t plan to cut Medicare and Social Security, his actions speak louder. Navigator tested three specific ways to make the case that Trump was trying to cut Social Security and Medicare: quoting Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell making these intentions clear; quoting President Trump’s recent comments at the economic summit in Davos, Switzerland where he said such cuts would be on the table in a second term; and another citing specific cuts included in the latest Trump administration budget. By a clear margin, Americans say the last item – the proposed budget cuts – provides the strongest evidence that President Trump would pursue efforts to Medicare and Social Security.

Which is the strongest evidence that Trump and the Republican Party would pursue cuts to Medicare and Social Security?

■ Overall ■ Independents

The Trump administration’s initial proposed budget for this year includes a \$900 billion cut in spending on Medicaid, a \$24 billion cut in spending on Social Security, and a \$135 billion cut in spending on Medicare.



Asked recently whether cuts for programs like Medicare and Social Security would ever be on his plate, President Trump responded, “At some point, they will be.”



After President Trump’s tax law added to the national debt, Republican leader Sen. Mitch McConnell said, “At some point here, we’ll get serious about” changes to Medicare and Social Security in order to deal with the rising national debt.



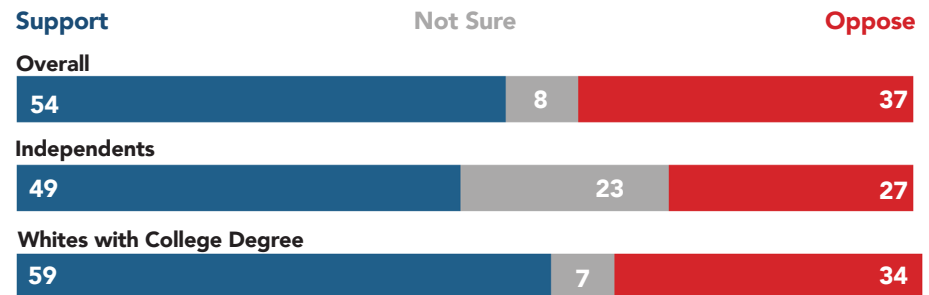
Even many Americans not sold on impeachment are favorable to Senators who voted for it.

While opinion on impeachment is evenly split, the majority of Americans still believe that Trump has committed a crime while president (55% believe he has and 38% believe he hasn't). On impeachment alone, forty-seven percent (47%) of Americans approve of the House passing articles of impeachment while 45% disapprove, and 47% of Americans likewise disapprove of his acquittal by the Senate compared to 45% who approve.

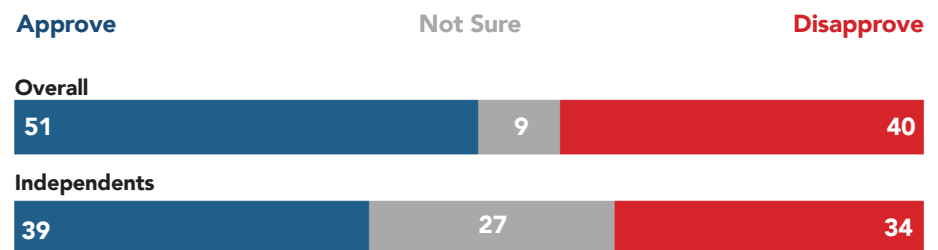
Despite divisions on impeachment, Americans approve of Senate Democrats' decision to vote in favor of conviction.

- Presented with a short description of Trump's alleged misconduct alongside a note that many Republicans called Trump's behavior "inappropriate," "wrong," or "not 'perfect'," Americans approve of Democrats voting in favor of impeachment by 51% to 40%.
- Yet when presented with a quote from Senator Mitt Romney justifying his vote to convict the President, a larger share of Americans (54%) characterize themselves as supportive of Romney's decision, while only 37% are opposed. The margin is significant among independents (49% support to 27% opposed) and white Americans with a college degree (59% to 34%).
- When asked who specifically they trust more on matters of impeachment – Mitt Romney or President Trump – Americans trust Romney more by an 8-point margin (45% to 37%).

Do you support or oppose Mitt Romney's decision to vote to convict President Donald Trump?



Do you approve or disapprove of the Democrats voting in favor of convicting Donald Trump?



A Case Study on "Abuse of Power"

Past Navigator research has shown Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman to be one of the strongest witnesses to appear in the House's impeachment inquiry (65% of respondents in December found his testimony concerning). After describing Vindman and his brother's early firings from their roles on the National Security Council, 49% of Americans describe these firings as an "abuse of power" (including 45% of independents), while 35% did not (and only 22% of independents). Moreover, an additional 12% of Americans say the firings were "inappropriate" if not an abuse of power.



Bonus Points

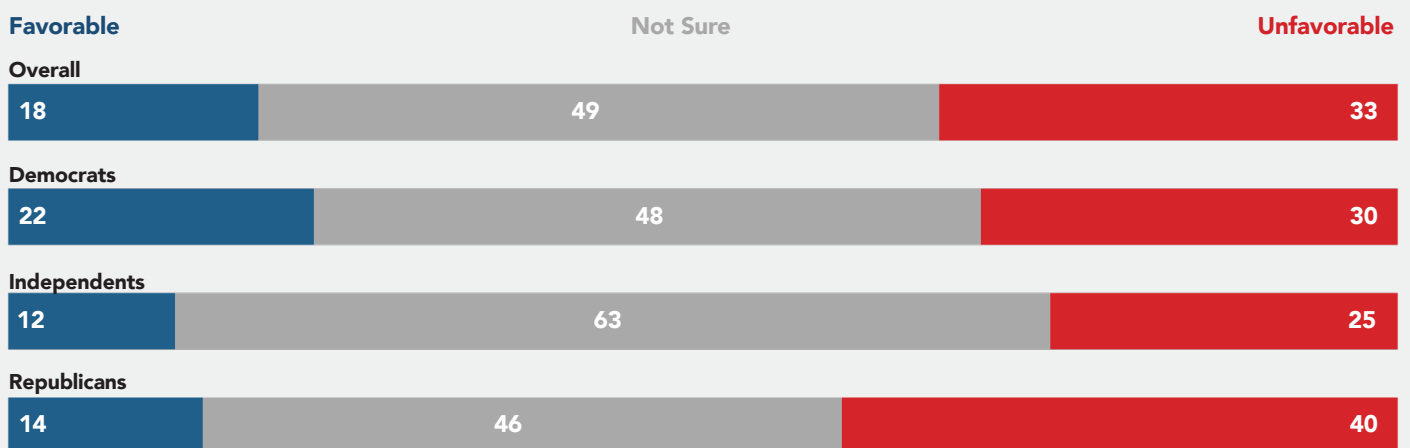
Democrats in Congress are more trusted to handle election security at a time when Americans are concerned about the possibility of foreign interference in the 2020 election.

- When asked if they trust Democrats in Congress or President Trump more to handle “preventing foreign interference in U.S. elections,” 46% of Americans choose Democrats and only 36% choose Trump, including a net of +15 for trust in Democrats among independents (37% Democrats in Congress, 22% Trump).
- A vast majority (82% of Americans) find the intentional spread of disinformation about presidential candidates on social media concerning, including 48% who find it “very concerning.”

John Bolton suffers from negative sentiment across partisan identities, in line with previous Navigator findings on support for him testifying in the Senate impeachment trial.

- When asked to rate the favorability of former National Security Advisor John Bolton in the most recent Navigator survey, Americans gave him a net -15, with only 18% favorable towards him and 33% unfavorable. Bolton’s unpopularity extends across party lines, with Democrats giving him a net -18, independents a net -13, and Republicans a net -26.
- However, by a margin of 48% to 28%, Americans support calling Bolton to testify about his knowledge of Trump’s misconduct, even though the impeachment trial is over. In January, 82% believed it to be important that John Bolton testify in the Senate impeachment trial (56% said it was very important).

Please indicate how favorable or unfavorable you are to John Bolton.



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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Andrea Purse, progressive strategist; Arkadi Gerney, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Delvone Michael, Working Families; Felicia Wong, Roosevelt Institute; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood.

To learn more about Navigator: <http://navigatorresearch.org/>

For press inquiries contact:

press@navigatorresearch.org

About the Study

Global Strategy Group conducted a public opinion survey among a sample of 1,000 registered voters conducted February 14-17, 2020. 200 additional interviews were conducted among political independents with no partisan lean. The survey was conducted online, recruiting respondents from multiple opt-in online panel vendors. Respondents were verified against a voter file and special care was taken to ensure the demographic composition of our sample matched that of the national registered voter population across a variety of demographic variables.