

To: Interested Parties

From: GBAO

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## From "Relief" To "Uncertain" To "Better Than I Had Thought" – Assessments Of President Biden's First 100 Days

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Partisans in our three online focus groups (two of Democrats, one of Republicans) view their sense of the country through the lens of their own political affiliation. Democrats, whether hoping for a more progressive party or one more moderate, express unequivocal relief to have President Biden at the helm. While Republicans aspire to be "hopeful," they are unsurprisingly more nervous, anxious, and uncertain about a Democratic presidency.

Yet a discussion of Biden's agenda illustrates an opportunity. All three groups are animated by a discussion of help for home care workers. Other efforts—like withdrawal from Afghanistan and investment in infrastructure—further make participants more favorable toward the President. Even pay-fors like a wealth tax or an increase in the corporate tax rate find support. The knowledge gaps may be party-driven, but providing more information reveals the potential for bipartisan consensus.

On some topics, however, our respondents remain divided. For example, Democrats tear up recalling their joy while getting vaccinated, while none of our Republican participants had received the shot, or planned to. In our groups two days after the Chauvin verdict, Democrats—unprompted—raise the topic of race and policing. Republicans, however, do not.

### Views of the country driven by views of Biden and Trump.

- **For partisans, the country and the presidency are one and the same.** Democrats express relief, optimism, and hope when asked about the country, while Republicans say they are anxious, apathetic, and skeptical. Democrats say they see jobs coming back, while Republicans say they've seen friends lose jobs. This mirrors our [most recent](#) Navigator quantitative survey, where 74% of Democrats rate the country as "headed in the right direction" vs 83% of Republicans who say it is "off on the wrong track."



- **Descriptions of Biden’s record are nearly identical to those of the country.** A similar open-ended question asking respondents to describe how President Biden is doing so far elicits nearly identical reactions. And while Republicans are naturally more negative toward Biden, it’s noteworthy that few could mention specific examples of a policy or moment with which they disagree; as we see below, Republicans seem more likely to have knowledge gaps. Democrats say they feel “proud,” “cautiously optimistic,” and “motivated.” Republicans feel “unsure,” “negative,” “nervous,” and “disappointed.”
- **Participants agree Biden is “quieter” than Trump but disagree on whether that’s a positive.** One of the most striking differences between our two Democratic groups and our Republican group is the personal characterization of the current and former presidents. Democrats again express relief they don’t “have to doom scroll,” and that “everything just calmed down.” Republicans feel markedly differently about the two temperaments.

“I don’t feel like I have to doom scroll through my feed to see what the next thing is.” (FL man)

“He’s not on Twitter, ranting and all that.” (FL woman)

“Almost immediately as soon as he took office, **everything just kind of calmed down** and everyone’s like, “Okay, we have a normal person there.” I think that everybody, whether you like Trump or not, he’s not a normal person, and he wasn’t a normal president.” (NV man)

“He’s been awfully quiet... I’m almost having a PTSD reaction... He doesn’t tweet. [Moderator: Is this a good thing or a not so good thing?] It feels like it might be a not good thing, but I’m not sure if that’s just comparatively. I felt like we were bombarded every day throughout the day with news of new policies and new things and things that were being changed and things that were being overthrown and how badly people didn’t like them and how many people it was hurting. And so I expected him to come in with the white hat and go to work.” (TX woman)

“I guess I was thinking too, that he would come in and be more presidential and more of a standup guy that would be taking charge. And I don’t feel like he takes charge of anything... **More authoritative, more sure of himself, decision-making,** motivated to make changes that are actually going to be helping people. And I haven’t been seeing any of that at all.” (TX woman)



- **Vaccines and stimulus checks are the most salient early Biden accomplishments.** As a [March Navigator](#) survey found, vaccines and stimulus checks are considered top-tier components of the American Rescue Plan. Similarly, vaccines and checks are the most-repeated Biden accomplishments. Some Democrats, like one Florida man, explicitly connect the two, “He passed the stimulus plan... and he did 100 million shots in the first 90 days, which goes hand in hand with the recovery. We’ve got to get past COVID to recover the economy. So I think those two things [are] combined.”
- **Chiefly Democrats recall other efforts on climate or pandemic relief, while Republicans are likely to have knowledge gaps.** Several mention the Child Tax Credit, SNAP, Unemployment Insurance, eviction relief, and the Paris Climate Accord as recent President Biden accomplishments. However, Democrats are far more likely to recall these efforts than are Republicans. Several in our Republican group lament a perceived lack of action on small business relief, student loan relief, and help for seniors. “I’m not following this as closely as I did a few months ago,” one admits.

Discussing President Biden’s agenda in detail reveals an opportunity for bipartisanship.

- **His record and proposals on infrastructure, guns, Afghanistan, and climate strike many as important.** Reading participants a short list of presidential accomplishments and priorities shows an opportunity to bring voters together. Several Republicans respond positively to withdrawal from Afghanistan; as one woman explains, “It should have happened a long time ago.” And progressives in Nevada explain the President’s actions on climate and guns are important.

*“I was playing world police. I mean, going in and trying to democratize these countries that don’t necessarily want us there... So I trust if Biden wants to do that, then I trust him.” (FL man and veteran)*

- **Helping home care workers as part of the American Jobs Plan animates all three groups.** No position tested is simultaneously both new and widely supported like help for home care workers. One Texas Republican participant is himself a wound care specialist who visits people’s homes and says, “It would be nice to get a real raise.” Others explain the job is “difficult” and that taking “care of them a little better” might help workers be more “attentive.”

*“I think it’s good to give them better money or whatever it is, because personally, my grandfather had a couple of home health aids, and they were just not very attentive. I think if you take care of them a little better, hopefully they will be a bit more excited to do their job and do it well.” (FL man)*

*“I think we found out the lowest paid workers were the most important to us when we needed them. And where else are we going to put it? It really is part of the infrastructure of our lives and what we’re doing.” (FL woman)*

*“That’s what I do. I’m a wound care specialist. I go to people’s homes, but I haven’t heard about that... That’d be nice to get a real raise.” (TX man)*

*“I think it’s interesting that not a lot of us knew about that in an infrastructure bill.” (NV woman)*

*“I haven’t heard of that either, but yeah, that’s really good. It’s a very difficult job, and it’s easy to kind of ignore in the mainstream, so it’s good that someone’s focusing on that.” (NV man)*



- **Pay-fors are also popular—even with Republicans.** Tax pay-fors are widely popular, even with our Republican participants in Texas. The same group that explains “Republicans are not for high taxes” also shows openness to closing “up a lot of the loopholes that are set out [for] the higher incomes and large corporations” or say “I don’t make \$400,000 a year. If they can afford it, tax them.” One Texas woman notes she doesn’t think a corporate tax rate increase “would be so bad,” and then says it “sounds better” once hearing additional context (that the rate was once in the 50% range and was in the 30% range until very recently). Democrats in both groups call these pay-fors “no-brainers” that they “absolutely” support.

- **Learning about Biden’s agenda elicits new positive views.** Participants cite the new information about Biden’s agenda for feeling “he’s actually doing a little better than I thought” or for giving him “an extra point.” Progressives in our Nevada group tend to be more engaged; one woman explains Biden’s record on vaccines and new jobs “was good to hear... but it didn’t change my opinion. I had a high opinion already. So I just continue to have it.”
- **Most assume politicians oppose because of politics, not policy.** Few see reflexive Republican opposition to the President’s agenda stemming from true policy differences. Even Republicans say, “they’re doing it out of spite” or “this all sounds like common-sense stuff that almost anyone could have put into policy... It’s like their job to keep ‘othering’ each other.” This is not a new conversation for our Democratic participants, who are quick to offer solutions like ending the filibuster, protecting voting rights, and voting in the midterms. Democrats of all stripes see Biden having no choice other than to “go it alone.”

*“The obvious answer is to end the filibuster. However, should Republicans come into power at a later date... that’s going to cause real problems for the Democratic side.” (FL man)*

*“So in my mind, if you guys don't want to hop on the train now, then the train's leaving. And we're all on the train together, and you guys can stay in the past, but we're going into the future, and trying to change the world to make it what it should and could be.” (NV man)*

**Most see the pandemic as in the rear-view mirror, but vaccines are still divisive.**

- **Participants generally see their own situation as on the mend.** While noted earlier respondents view the country based on their views of the President, more view their own situation positively irrespective of party. Several Democrats note their businesses have picked up, while Republicans say things have gone well in their own household or local community.
- **COVID, therefore, seems (almost) in the rear-view mirror.** One Florida woman notes the difference between last year, when daily she “prayed that God will bring me back home safely without sickness” and now, when “things are getting better.” Texas Republicans also recall the “worst” was when “hundreds of thousands of people were dying.”

- Yet a vaccine discussion immediately divides along party lines.** In both Democratic groups, all but one respondent had received their vaccine. In our Republican group, not one had. One respondent explains it's "a personal choice," while others explain their reasoning and suspicions about the vaccine. Democrats, by contrast, recall crying as they received their shot, with one woman admitting, "I cry just thinking about it... I can't even talk about it now."

*"It's a personal choice." (TX woman)*

*"We have had friends that have passed away and that have had compromised immunities that were in the hospital for a while. **But I don't think that this is something that me getting a vaccine would really do anything to help other people, to help me in my close vicinity.** So we're not planning on getting it at this time." (TX woman)*

*"I guess it's **a pretty common problem that you have hearing loss...** there have been people that have permanently lost hearing as a side effect, which is a little concerning." (TX man)*

- The actual vaccine rates elicit both shock and elation.** Most respondents struggle to cite the percentage of adults who have received at least one shot. Republicans' guesses range from 7% to 20%, while Democratic guesses are closer to the current figures. The reveal of the real number causes shock and joy. "That's staggering," says one Texas woman, although another woman wonders if it's "exaggerated." A Florida woman says, "It makes me feel like our society is educated and trusts science," and a Nevada man calls it "an excellent track record."
- Democrats are not in disarray, even if some would like to see Biden "go farther."** In our two Democratic groups, we see next to no discontentment with President Biden. Our more moderate respondents and even our most progressive respondents all show pragmatism, and admit they recognize he "can only do so much" or has "a very tough road ahead."

*"That's really, besides the Trump thing, why I voted for him because I'm a moderate. And I think he's doing a good job at protecting, but he's got people on the far left, really pushing, pushing, pushing for some stuff. **I think he's doing a good job trying to stay a little, mostly in the middle.**" (FL man)*

*"I was willing to take that [minimum wage] off the table to get the economy package passed." (FL woman)*

*"That's [cutting child poverty in half] **a good start right there, because you have to start slow.**" (FL man)*



*"I know he **has to try and unite the country**, and I know our previous president was very much the opposite of trying to do that. And I know he has to do that, but I wish he would maybe speak out a little more on some things [that] happen. Like with the police brutality and the murders happening, maybe speak out a little more on that issue. **But I know he can only do so much, but still, I feel like he should be doing a little more when it comes to that.**" (NV man)*

*"I think he **was always going to be practical** because he comes from that time when Republicans and Democrats would sit down and negotiate and compromise just like you do in any relationship... He, to me, has the experience and track record of being able to actually work on both sides of the aisle and has extended that. **But he's got a very tough road ahead and I'm counting on his muscle memory from his time served on the Obama Administration where not to expect much support.**" (NV man)*

## Partisans continue to approach the topic of race very differently.

- **Democrats want to discuss race and policing, while Republicans wonder if it can be “ignored.”** Unprompted, many in our Democratic groups want to discuss the Chauvin verdict specifically, or race and policing more broadly. One Florida woman says the verdict makes her feel “more optimistic about society now.” And in Nevada some participants say the verdict makes them feel “encouraged” while another says the frequency of violence makes her “disappointed” with the country overall. However, our Republicans do not bring up the Chauvin trial at all. And when we discuss race or policing as part of the President’s accomplishments one woman wonders if racial lines can be “ignored,” since, she explains, “I don’t know that there’s anything policy-wise” that can be done. Another calls policing reform “icky” albeit “necessary.”

*“I’m just happy that he was found guilty of all three charges, and it just seemed, like I said, a step in the right direction... I just feel more optimistic about society now.” (FL woman)*

*“It feels like now there’s finally a dialogue going on, and it sucks that it took what it took to get us there. But at least we’re talking about it... It’s a high priority thing. And I just feel like it’s, there is a shooting and then we get all up in arms for a week about it and then everybody forgets, and it doesn’t feel like this is just being washed away with the next news cycle, which I think is good progress.” (FL man)*

*“I think a lot of us obviously don’t support racism, but I’m not sure that that’s necessarily the way to do it. [Moderator: What would be the way to do it?] Maybe just in general, ignoring all racial lines, ignoring... I don’t know that there’s anything policy wise.” (TX woman)*

*“[On policing reform] Another necessary but icky thing to go through.” (TX woman)*

*“Where we are in 2021, I would hope things would be better than they are. It seems like we are regressing in some areas... All of the racial killings, and just all of those things just seem to be things that were taking place years ago, and we’re experiencing it now.” (NV woman)*

*“I was pleased and encouraged with the verdict. And I used the word encouraged because I think we at least now have a pathway towards our voice as citizens being heard, and needed adjustments being made to our society so that the playing field can be leveled.” (NV man)*

- **Current polling confirms these party differences.** Our [current Navigator poll](#) explores the Chauvin verdict and policing reform quite deeply, finding similar party differences. A clear majority (71%) of Republicans yet only 29% of Democrats feel “discrimination against whites has become as big of a problem as discrimination against Black people and other minorities.” And while majorities across party lines agree with the Chauvin conviction, a majority of Republicans (67%) feel Biden has made race relations worse, compared to just 9% of Democrats.

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## Methodology

GBAO conducted online focus groups on April 22, 2021, with voters in three states: Florida (Democrats who think the party should move in a more moderate direction or stay in the same direction), Texas (Republicans with a household income of <\$75K and who are neither very unfavorable toward Biden nor very favorable toward Trump), and Nevada (Democrats who think the party should move in a more progressive direction). Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.