

To: Interested Parties

From: GBAO

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## While the Economy Rebounds, Partisans Lament Hyperpartisanship, Yet Are Otherwise Worlds Apart

With COVID in more Americans' rear-view mirror and re-opening and recovery underway, many of our focus group participants feel optimistic about their own financial situation. The pervasive voter concerns of political division and hyperpartisanship, however, are consistent with our past waves of Navigator qualitative and quantitative research. Participants aspire to move beyond these divisions, juggling multiple news outlets to help get what they see as the full picture. Even so, Democrats worry about voter suppression, while Republicans worry about election fraud. And no matter the topic, our participants view the political parties and some of the top issues of the day through the lens of their own views on racial equality and justice.

### On Economic Optimism & Concerns About Partisanship, Most Participants Agree

- **Many are feeling positive about their own economic situation.** Many of our respondents—including Democrats, Republicans, and those who had been on Unemployment Insurance within the past year—say their own situation has turned a corner. According to one, “As a one-man consulting firm, I just feel the energy coming back into the business environment. So you can really feel things revving up again... So you feel this energy coming and building. I'm really excited about that.”



*“I'm good. I mean, **things are humming along where I live.** In terms of COVID it seems to be turning the corner. So we'll say things are getting back to normal. So I don't really have any complaints.” – GA man, Biden voter*

*“As a one-man consulting firm, **I just feel the energy coming back** into the business environment... So you can really feel things revving up again. And about half of my clients are from outside the US. They're revving up a little bit again, too. So you feel this energy coming and building. **I'm really excited about that.**” – OH man, Biden voter*

*“**I'm doing a lot better now.** Last year with the whole pandemic situation... I have a mother that's in the nursing home, and so I hadn't seen her for over a year. But now since a lot of things have been lifted, I've had the opportunity to see her now. And I also work from home as well, and **so my life has definitely improved.**” – OH woman, Biden voter*

*“**Blessed. I have hope that things will continue going in the upward direction.** Hit a hiccup [as] of recent, but then the hiccup is covered by other things that are very positive and I believe everything will just end up working out all right for our circumstances.” – AZ man, Trump voter*

*“**Oh, personally, I think things are going better.** I would say, well, I just recently retired and I retired early. So I'm looking forward to traveling at some point. I'm just getting my feet wet with retirement. So I would say that process is going well. We are also selling a cabin. Prices are high in Arizona, so I think that contributes to me feeling good right now. And maybe repurchase when the market cools down. So, personally pretty good.” – AZ woman, Trump voter*



- **The transition from pandemic to recovery colors views on Unemployment Insurance.** Voters generally see Unemployment Insurance as an “essential” program “to provide support when people need it.” And while some also wonder about the current need for the federal bonus, citing “help wanted” signs, others explain people “haven’t returned to those jobs because you’re still putting them in a dangerous environment, on a wage they can’t live off of.” As one Ohio man bluntly puts it, many workers on Unemployment are “making crap wages.”
- **Besides the economy, many lament our deep societal divisions.** It’s not new to find voters deeply worried about our divisions. But early in our groups specifically allude to disagreements on race as an example of our country’s challenges. As one white woman from Georgia notes, “There’s such resentment and polarization, because one group is extreme, wants change, and they understandably want it now. But this other group of people that have lived in this mindset, it’s taking them longer than one group wants to accept, that we all need to revisit our mindset and see the world differently than we’ve always looked at it.”
- **Participants develop news strategies to gather different perspectives.** Voters see partisanship and division pervading news media as well. To address this, many volunteer seeking different news sources, to “hear what everybody’s spin is on the same scenario” because “there’s going to be some lean here and there.”



*“I listen to a little bit of everything, and I try not to get too much of anything... I don't just listen to one channel. I kind of like to hear what everybody's spin is on the same scenario. So to me, it's sort of interesting. This channel, in particular, like say Fox versus CNN, CNBC, MSNBC, they all have their own little take on things. And I just find it interesting that we're all seeing the same basic numbers and yet they have very different takeaways.” – AZ woman, Trump voter*

*“And I try to use multiple sources because you can get different information. I try to not just look at one thing, look at multiple stories and then I try to draw my own conclusion, because I know that there's going to be some lean here and there, but I try to get what I need from it to draw my own conclusion.” – OH woman, Biden voter*

## Despite Aspirations For Unity, Partisans Are Worlds Apart

- **Both parties' visions are viewed through the lens of race.** Democrats describe their own party's vision with "a focus on helping out minorities" creating a world with "a lot more equality." However Trump voters view the Democratic Party differently. In one exchange, a woman explains she thinks the party wants to "pick winners and losers in society and benefit their favorite groups" (she later speaks in detail about white job applicants facing discrimination). Another Trump voter in the group—a Black man—responds that the Democratic Party is not doing enough for Black Americans.



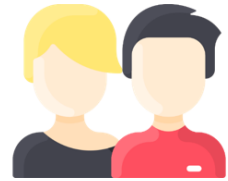
*"When I look at the actions of the Democrats, just since the beginning of the year, they passed the anti-Asian hate law. They have not passed one for Black people. They have not passed police abuse reform. They just unanimously voted for Juneteenth to be a federal holiday. Who cares about it? I don't care about that... I think that both parties are doing exactly what they want to do... But politicians all come from the same background in education and most of their experience and it is not the mainstream experience of the people on this panel right now. So they're doing what they have been doing forever and that's taking care of themselves." – OH man, Black, Indep/GOP, Trump voter*

- **The Republican vision is described as either a meritocracy or a dystopia.** Republicans describe their own party's vision as removing "quotas for this, that" since "white people are the new boogeyman in society." An Arizona man describes his party's vision as "more universal prosperity." However Democrats paint a bleak picture, using phrases like "Klan marches," "Handmaid's Tale," or a country where "people who don't matter would be put somewhere else."
- **For Republicans, the Big Lie underscores their worries about media bias, even if few think the election could be overturned.** Few Republicans seem convinced the election results could be changed by an investigation into allegations of fraud. Yet this doesn't change their desire to "get to the bottom of it" or "make sure everything is on the up-and-up." In particular, several cite worries about media bias, as in "they wanted so badly for Biden to win they didn't do their due diligence."
- **Worries about anti-Trump media bias pre-date the election.** Republicans note their worries about anti-Trump media bias are nothing new. Several Trump voters recall mainstream outlets regularly criticizing Trump, calling it "a lot of Trump bashing" that "got old really fast." The lack of trust in the media seemingly makes it easier for Trump voters to think The Big Lie might in fact contain some truth.
- **This means Republicans view recent voter suppression laws as needed for control and oversight of a flawed system.** Given their concerns about election fraud, Republicans are quite open to new legislation restricting voting access.

*"This is the response as a result of the flawed system. So these are the **attempts of putting controls in place to make sure that the process is more buttoned up**, shall I say?" – AZ woman, Trump voter*

*"Because you could still receive ballots and those can be harvested for a certain political candidate in one way. So let's say you're automatically registered to vote via driver's license and then you select to have it sent to you by mail, you could have somebody who doesn't plan on intending to vote or wants to sell their vote, **they can manipulate the system and give it to a certain political party so they can take advantage of it.**" – AZ man, Trump voter*

*"I don't think they're trying to make it harder for people to vote. **They're just trying to make it more secure** so that one person gets one vote and you don't have people collecting blank ballots and voting or harvesting votes. I think those state legislatures are just trying to make it more secure with more integrity to the voting process." – OH woman, Trump voter*

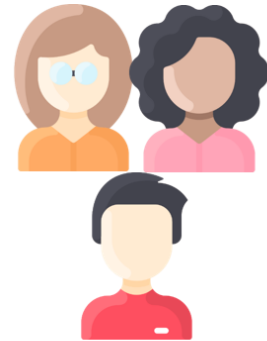


- **Even if neither Democrats nor Republicans think it is currently too hard or too easy to vote.** Very few partisans of any kind think of voting as either too easy or hard. Several speak of the new COVID developments of absentee voting, and vote by mail as being “great” and making it so “anyone who wants to vote should not have any excuse for not doing so.”
- **Meanwhile Democrats in Georgia see voter suppression as motivated clearly by partisanship or race.** Democrats in Georgia are unified in how they view the motivation of voter suppression laws. As one woman explains, “They are literally targeting African Americans because the statistics have proven that Georgia won, became a blue state, because of African Americans...This is them doing Jim Crow. This is what Jim Crow is based off of. They’re just not saying it’s Black people, but the way they’re doing it is majority Black people.”
- **Despite confusion over the meaning of Critical Race Theory it evokes discussion of a real debate over teaching race in schools.** There is no clear consensus on the meaning of Critical Race Theory. Both Democrats and Republicans suggest it’s likely taught “somewhere” and perhaps in a “more subtle” way. One Arizona Trump voter explains, “it’s probably not going to be a bold lesson plan that says, ‘Critical Race Theory,’ but it would be how you teach historical things.”
- **Democrats want to see a more robust, complete teaching of race.** Rather than dismiss Critical Race Theory as a made-up distraction, Democrats see it as an opportunity to have a conversation about updating our teaching of American history. In Georgia the conversation was particularly rich, with white voters saying their own views had changed and lamenting the teaching of just “George Washington and the white guys beating the British.” One Black Biden voter describes the debate very succinctly: “They don’t want to teach that because they don’t want to be held responsible.”

*"It's teaching the reality versus our misconception. What I grew up with going to school was the white bread, Wonder bread little society versus the reality, which I have learned a lot more of in these past couple of years. And that's what... they don't want to change, the history books." – GA woman, Biden voter*

*"And they don't want to teach that because they don't want to be held responsible. And they know if they teach it, they'll have to pay African Americans reparations." – GA woman, Biden voter*

*"I've heard the phrase. I know that it involves the way they teach race relations and history to kids in school. It's become a politicized issue, obviously. Right versus left. The right doesn't want to teach it. And I can't for the life of me figure out why because, to me, it's truth. So it was the history of America built on the backs of slave labor. And I mean, we kind of know underneath that it happened. But why they're so afraid of all the little details that they don't want to come out, I don't know. They just want to teach George Washington and the white guys beating the British, but they don't want to teach all the other stuff." – GA man, Biden voter*



Georgia voters

- **No Republican volunteers support for a legislative ban of Critical Race Theory or of specific facts.** Even as Republicans show clear suspicion of new developments in how race is taught in schools, not one supports legislation banning the teaching of facts about race. "Why would we not teach all the facts?" one asks.

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## Methodology

On June 16, 2021, GBAO conducted three focus groups online: One of mixed partisans in Ohio who had received Unemployment Insurance within the past year, one of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents in Georgia, and one of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents in Arizona. Participants across groups varied across demographics—age, education, and race/ethnicity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable onto the population at large. Some quotes have been lightly edited for clarity and brevity.