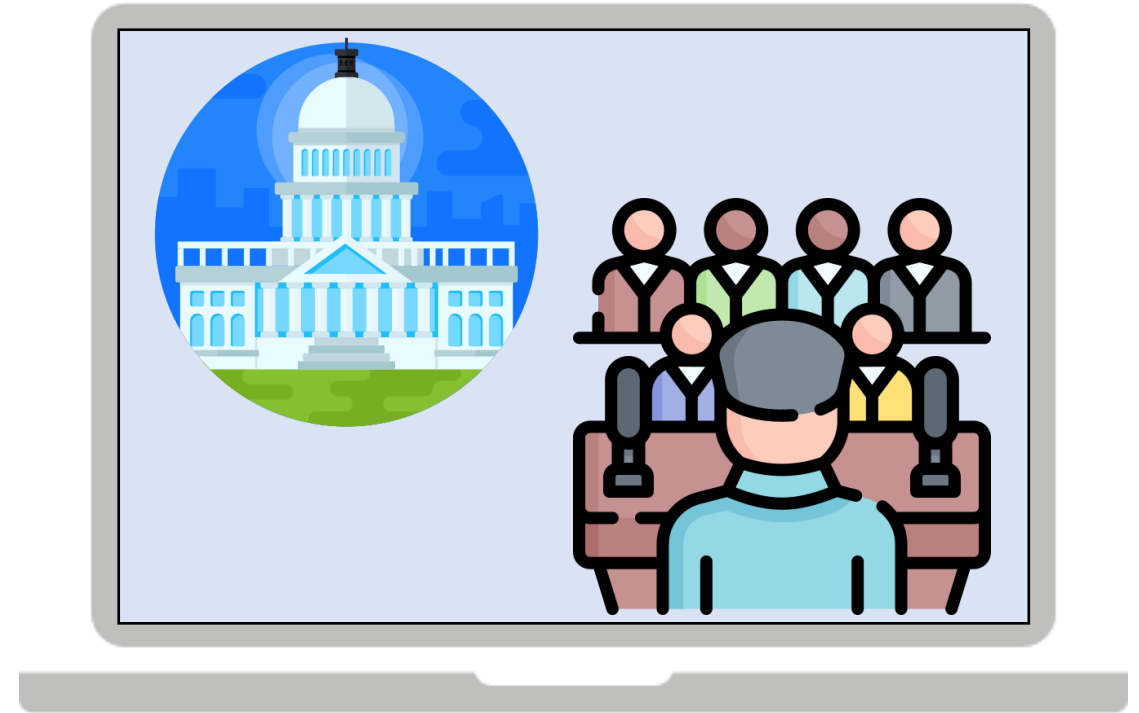


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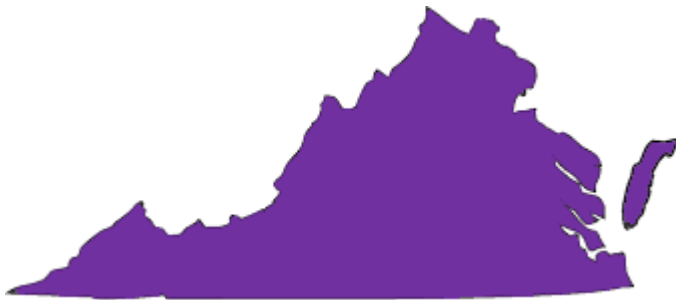
Friday, January 27, 2023

Independents on the New
Congress



Methodology

On January 18, 2023, GBAO conducted three focus groups online with independents who varied across demographics—age, education, and race.



Independents who closely follow national politics across the state of Virginia



Independents who are less engaged with national politics in the La Crosse/Eau Claire region of Wisconsin



Independents with mixed levels of following national politics in Tarrant County, Texas

Key Takeaways

- The mood is still “grim,” with worries about America facing “the end times.”
- Awareness of the new Republican House majority’s priorities is mostly thin.
- Many proposed investigations sound like “tit for tat” or “revenge” and are not in line with voters’ priorities.
- Although some priorities and investigations either sound confusing or economic-driven.
- Cuts to Social Security and Medicare seen as a deeply problematic component of House Republicans’ legislative agenda.

Most Voters Still Feel Pessimistic About the Country's Political and Economic Climate



"Well, I am a biblical person. I read the Bible... **And in the Bible, it does [tell] tales about how things will happen towards the end times. And as expected, it is happening the way the scripture says it is. So that's what I mean by expected.**" – TX man

"... I guess for me, I think about things, specifically, the economy, and so while it seems like it's really not getting that much better, there's still a bunch of layoffs all the time. Inflation specifically is really rampant right now... **I think about eggs being crazy expensive and just the price increases in the last year.**" – WI man

"**I just think that we're just in a whirlwind of awfulness right now, and I'm hoping that it comes to an end soon.**" – WI woman

"From the economy to the violence going on, those are two of my biggest concerns. Yeah, it's just uncertain as to what's to come. And then of course with the different illnesses, it's like, okay, waiting for the other shoe to drop, kind of." – VA woman

"The economy is horrible. I mean, yes, **they've been saying we aren't in a recession. However, all the signs point to it...** So it's there. All the economic indicators are there. And so more and more of us are afraid of whether we're going to lose our jobs and what is that going to do to our families or our homes, everything. And so it's a lot." – VA woman

"Yeah, I'm with what everybody else is saying, but I'd put politics up there also. Very frustrated. **Feel that both parties are just out there swinging at each other, and everybody could care less about the common man. And that's frightening...** That's missing the whole point of America." – VA man

Three focus groups were conducted January 18, 2023, with independents varied across demographics—age, gender, and race—in VA, WI, and TX. The Virginia group was of high-engagement voters, the Wisconsin group with lower-engagement voters, and the Texas group with voters reflecting a mix of engagement. For more info, visit navigatorresearch.org

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Few Can Say Much About the New Republican Majority's Priorities, but Most Heard About the Failed Speaker Vote

Moderator: What have you heard about the new House of Representatives? What have they been doing?

"I mean, [I] saw them try to vote 15 times just to elect a speaker. I saw that and I'm just like, **well, are they going to get anything done? I have my doubts.**" – WI woman

"I'm not sure what their **priorities are right now**, and that's partly because as I had said, I hadn't followed it as closely." – WI man

"I'm not really sure too much of what **they're up to**, what big things they're tackling. I feel like they're getting assigned to joining House committees right now and stuff like that, but I don't really know day-to-day operations." – WI man



"The only real thing that I've seen is the fight for **McCarthy to become the House Speaker**. That is the only thing they seem to have been focused on for the last few weeks." – VA woman

"**Honestly, I haven't really been hearing anything.** I've been ignoring it all. It gets tiring, [tired] of the back and forth and everything." – TX woman

Many Have Awareness and Strong Negative Reactions to Marjorie Taylor Greene and George Santos

Marjorie Taylor Greene

"Extreme." – VA woman

"Whackadoodle." – VA woman

"She opens her mouth and vomits out whatever she thinks her people want to hear whether it's true or not." – VA man

"She loves President Trump, or she loved him. **And she is a big denier of the election** being correct, and she raised a lot of stuff about that. **And she was behind a lot of the January 6th stuff.**" – WI woman

"I don't have nothing nice to say, I won't say anything at all." – TX woman

"**She's kind of a maverick, a bit outspoken.** Certainly not afraid to express her opinions... she's probably pretty far right. But does tend to stand for American values in the end." – TX man

George Santos

"Whackadoodle." – VA woman

"Fluffed his resume and still got elected and now they're trying to decide whether he gets to stay and meanwhile, appoint him to committees. So doesn't make a lot of sense." – VA woman

"New York congressman just newly elected that lied on his resume about a lot of things." – WI woman

"I know I've heard his name come up a lot. I haven't really researched him myself, but I mean, I usually hear about him in a **more negative light.**" – TX woman

"**I don't have a good first impression of him at all.** I mean, it seems like he's told a lot of lies to get where he's at, and they're not little lies either... it's something about his mom dying or being sick or when it happened. **These are lies that, it's like a no-no. These are lies you don't tell and I'm supposed to still trust you,** so I'm not a huge fan of him thus far, from the little bit that I know." – TX woman

Specific Knowledge of Other Members Is Thin



[Moderator: Lauren Boebert] "I've heard her name, but I'm not really familiar with her." – TX woman

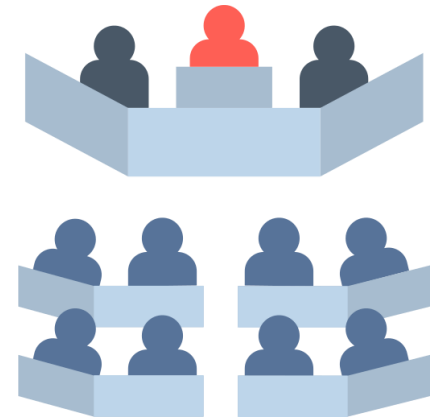
[Hakeem Jeffries] "I have no idea. I'm about to look." – TX man

[Moderator: Hakeem Jeffries?] "Not familiar." – VA woman

[Moderator: What's your sense of Derrick Van Orden] "I just think he's a little bit radical. He attended the January 6th riot. I don't know... And he's just a little more radical." – WI man

[Derrick Van Orden] "I haven't heard of him, but that doesn't sound like he's a good person, that's for sure." – WI man

"I haven't heard of [Derrick Van Orden] before either, so I don't have anything to say about it." – WI man



The Term “MAGA” Evokes a Sense of Blind Loyalty and Cultishness

“Angry, angry people... Zealot[s].” – VA man

“It stands for blind loyalty. I think of a cult in a way where you just pledge allegiance to an idea that is not necessarily proven in fact, but on emotion... An example would be the election was stolen.” – VA woman

“What Trump was saying about him being an anti-politician, that appealed to me. And now I think that if you say the word ‘MAGA,’ it has almost come to stand for the election was stolen and Trump is right, and I don't believe that's true at all.” – VA woman

“I don't know that I'd agree with them, but I think there is a principle there that is almost religious.” – VA man

“I think it's annoying more than anything. It's annoying to go back to that time period. I don't want to. Just the idea of all of the last five-ish years and just the drama.” – WI man

“Eye roll. It's just where they think that their way is going to make America great again, and it just seemed to make it more divided. I would love to believe in the message, it's just the way they tried to portray it was not the right way. The message was to try and make America great again, but when they make laws to go back towards before we are what we are now, removing women's rights, that's going backwards. That wasn't a great time. Civil rights being taken away wasn't a great time for people. May have been great for some people, but it wasn't great for the greater good.” – WI man

Most Assume Congress Won't Get Anything Done and Yearn For Members to Compromise

"... If they're going to disagree on everything, it just doesn't seem like anything is going to get passed." – WI man

"I don't see where they're going to come together and compromise." – WI man

"I think people are going to hunker down in their camps and just try to please their base, and I just wish they would be able to come up with a compromise. Not your idea, not my idea. Somewhere in between." – WI man



"Having the split does provide that balance of power that we need and it's going to force people to compromise, but that's what we need. We need more compromise in general." – VA woman

"Yeah, I'm thinking we're looking at a giant stalemate going forward... It's going to keep things from getting better. It's going to freeze the United States just where we are right now." – VA man

"I think in the end, it's probably a good thing for the country. We're not going to have any wasteful spending bills put through. In effect, a do-nothing Congress can be a good thing in light of what the past two years were like." – TX man

"I believe that it's a divided government. And whenever you have a divided government, it's almost near impossible to get anything passed... Nothing's going to happen." – TX man

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We Presented Respondents With a Series of Potential Investigations, Drawing on Republicans' Own Language

- a) President Biden's handling of classified information and documents while he was Vice President
- b) Investigating the Secretary of Homeland Security and the immigration crisis at the border
- c) Whether Big Tech like Google or Facebook are silencing free speech
- d) The rise of China—including trade practices and its purchase of American farmland
- e) The creation and spread of COVID-19, such as China's involvement and the lab leak theory
- f) Hunter Biden's laptop and his business dealings
- g) The withdrawal from Afghanistan
- h) Education and woke ideology, like CRT
- i) The expansion and politicization of the IRS
- j) Energy production, like the ending of the Keystone Pipeline and other permits
- k) Investigation into massive government spending programs, like the Jobs Act or Inflation Reduction Act
- l) Investigate the investigators who have targeted so-called "domestic terrorists"—including parents and veterans

Congressional Investigations Seem Like a “Revenge List”

“They're more occupied with busy work than getting anything substantial done. **This is all a get-even list.**” – VA man



“... Payback is first and foremost on their mind.” – VA man



“**Most of them, to me, just seemed like a tit-for-tat kind of a thing.** When the Democrats went after Trump. Just a lot of this stuff has happened in the past and why would we waste resources on going back? A lot of this just seems like their own agenda and **it's just kind of a revenge thing, almost childish, selfish, their own agenda.**” – WI man

“I think it is [wanting] to get revenge. **I don't think, with the Republicans we have now, it's not about trying to get the economy back in shape, which they should be concentrating on. I do believe that it's revenge.** They want to get back at what was done to them or people they know in their party. They want to get back at the Democrats for what was done to their party.” – TX man



“It was focused on Biden. **I don't think that list was focused on actually helping [to bring] the country together.** It was just focused on, you focus on my guy, I'm focusing on your guy, type of thing. And to me, it really just didn't have anything to try to pull the country together to try to find any common ground.” – TX woman

Hunter Biden's Laptop Is the Most Egregious Example of "Tit for Tat" Investigations

[Moderator: Why is it a get-even list?] "Hunter Biden's classified information. Those are top of the get-even kind of things." – VA man



"I don't know how this improves the life of the average American, [investigating] Hunter Biden's laptop and his business dealings. They've been digging into this forever. I don't know how this would impact any of us." – WI man

There Is Openness to Investigating China, Immigration, Wasteful Spending, But List Broadly Not in Line With Voters' Priorities

"I think the rise of China, including trade practices and purchase of American farmlands, I think that's a very valid investigation. Because as I read one time, China has a hundred-year plan and we only have four-year plans, and that's why they're getting so ahead of us in minerals and lithium and things like that." – VA man

"... But some of these things are important, especially the China one. Why are you buying land in America? That's scary. Because I think Abbott just did something where they can't buy, did a law, they can't buy anything in Texas." – TX woman

"And then I picked... these things that they're calling the Jobs Act or Inflation Reduction Act, these are not, that's just the opposite. Everything that's in those spending bills is just the opposite of what the title of those bills are... And they're spending them on their own types of programs that have nothing to do with this." – TX woman

"Trying to figure out where the money's being allocated and the progress that's been made. What's happening with it? [Moderator: What do you think that investigation is going to find out?] The money's probably not being allocated [in] the most beneficial way for the average American." – WI man

"Yeah. I had a hard time caring too much about these. There's a few. I mentioned the ones that I think are important, but I don't think the money to investigate that should go to too many of these." – WI man

We Explored a Series of Republican Legislative Priorities and Actions

- a) Cuts to Medicare and Social Security, such as ending the Medicare guarantee
- b) Freeze all federal spending to 2022 levels, including for things like border agents or food programs for kids
- c) Stop financial support for Ukraine
- d) Set criminal penalties for doctors who perform abortions
- e) Weaken Congressional ethics rules that allow the bipartisan Office of Congressional Ethics to investigate members suspected of wrongdoing
- f) Repeal the Inflation Reduction Act, which allows Medicare to negotiate for lower drug prices
- g) Stop new funding for the IRS that would crack down on wealthy tax cheats

Many Are Confused By Investigations Into Domestic Terrorism, CRT, and the IRS

“... The education's a big thing with me with having two kids and with a bunch of cuts and stuff. The woke ideology is kind of a head scratcher to me with Republicans... don't know where that fits into an agenda. [Moderator: And what about CRT?] I didn't know what that meant either.” – WI man

“... It just says, investigate the investigators who have targeted so-called domestic terrorists. So the investigators that are looking into domestic terrorists, they want to investigate them for some reason, but it doesn't really say what the reason would be for them to investigate the investigators.” – WI man



“... I don't know too much about it. I put the expansion [and] politicization of the IRS. I don't know too much about it, to be honest, but anything that deals with taxes piques my interest for sure.” – VA woman

[Moderator: Is there anything on this list that people are confused by?] “[Investigating] the domestic terrorists, including parents... Was there an event that happened where parents were involved? I don't know.” – TX woman

Across the Board, Cuts to Medicare and Social Security Are the Most Problematic

“You pay into [Social Security and Medicare] your entire life. You work, you pay into this, and for them to cut the benefits for yourself, I don't know why anybody would want to vote for that. And when you're older, you're retired, you're living on a fixed income, these people need that support.” – TX woman

“... People that are on Medicare and Social Security have it hard enough. It's hard enough for people who aren't on Social Security and Medicare to get by, and you're trying to cut [that for] people that are depending on you.” – TX man

“Well, I'm retired, so I live and die on Medicare and Social Security. That's hitting right at home.” – VA man

“I was just looking at it in a sense of [the] public health aspect of it. So thinking about access to health care, Medicare, and even though it doesn't necessarily benefit me now, just think about others being able to have access to health care, that particular population concerns me.” – VA woman

“My parents are getting pretty close to the point where they can collect Social Security, and that if it's not going to be there for them, you've got to worry about how they're going to support themselves. They've been paying in for 70 plus years, almost 65, 70 years. So they should be able to get all the money that they put in.” – WI man

“I don't think it's fair. Like mentioned, this is something that people contributed their whole professional careers, and to have the rules of the game changed, the final phase, I just don't see how that can be fair.” – WI man

Revoking Abortion Rights Still Tied to Republican Identity and Still at Odds With Voters' Views

"... There's a couple of different reasons that I said [things in the country are] awful. One of them being what **feels like kind of a war on women's rights with the abortion stuff.** And I feel like there's kind of a war on the LGBTQ community as well." – WI woman

"... The abortion thing I'd like to see left where it was before they messed with it." – WI woman

"... This election was kind of a weird one for me because there was only one way I could vote, and it all had to do with women's rights. There was no other option for me to vote. So it's never been like that before. It's never been cut and dry. I've usually split my votes, but to me, I couldn't in good conscience vote against rights for myself or any other female." – WI woman

"I think criminal penalties for doctors [that] perform abortions **should be a non-starter.**" – VA woman

"I know a lot of Republicans were very much against penalizing women who's had abortions. And I don't remember hearing anybody talk about penalizing doctors, **or maybe just more really fringe Republicans,** where it just didn't seem like it was a consensus opinion in the Republican Party." – WI man

"If a doctor performs a necessary abortion, if someone's raped or something, **they shouldn't be getting criminal penalties for that.**" – TX woman

Looking Ahead to 2024, Independents Are Not Happy With Their Options



“He [Donald Trump] needs to step aside and let somebody else run... We need younger faces, fresh voices. We need something different. We need somebody that's going to be more inspiring than a bunch of old guys running for office.” – VA woman

[Moderator: How many people say if it's Biden versus some other Republican that isn't Trump, I would vote for the other Republican?] “A third party.” – WI man

“Well, all of the views of the Republicans now... I mean, it used to be not so much different than each other, but it's like it's gone way, way extreme, and I just don't think I trust any of them. I don't know.” – WI woman

“I'd vote... I don't know. I'd write **Elvis Presley in there**. I don't know. Whatever the other one is.” – TX woman

“I **wouldn't vote for Trump, straight up, honestly**. If there was another Republican, I would have to know more about them first before I made that decision, to be honest.” – TX man



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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: Jessica Floyd, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

About the Study

GBAO conducted three online focus groups on January 18, 2023 with independents who closely follow national politics in state of Virginia, independents who are less engaged with national politics in the La Crosse/Eau Claire region of Wisconsin, and independents with mixed levels of following national politics in Tarrant County, Texas. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

For Press inquiries contact:

press@navigatorresearch.org

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