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FOCUS GROUP REPORT

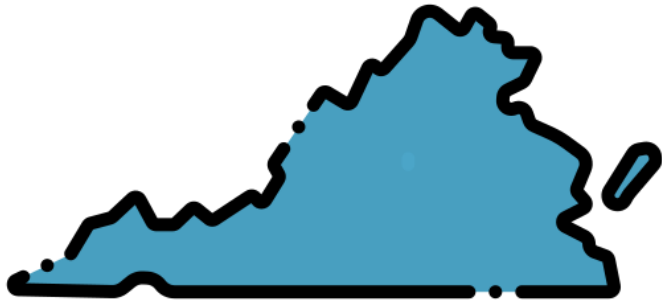
Thursday, July 20, 2023

Democrats, Republicans, and
Independents on the Supreme
Court



Methodology

On July 12, 2023, GBAO conducted three focus groups online with Democrats, Republicans, and Independents who varied across demographics.



Young progressive and liberal Democrats under 35 in Virginia



Republicans in Minnesota



Independents in Nevada

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Key Takeaways

- Participants are pessimistic about the state of the country.
- Views of the Supreme Court largely negative, with words like “self-serving,” “untrustworthy,” and “biased” used to describe the Court.
- Some awareness of recent decisions on affirmative action, student loans, and LGBTQ+ rights; but knowledge of other cases is thin.
- Democrats and Independents are more supportive of term limits than Republicans.
- The ethical behavior of conservative Justices and lack of accountability raise red flags across partisan lines.
- Many call for the creation of binding ethics rules for Justices.

Participants Feel Little is Going Well in the Country

Moderator: Fill in the blank for me. I feel **blank** is going well in the country today.

"I got to be honest, **nothing**... Because what comes to mind first, tends to be the negative things. When I listen to the radio... it's almost always like the negatives, so that's really what's on top of my mind. So that's why, given the five seconds I had to come up with a word, it was just nothing." – VA woman, liberal

"I said [nothing], because I couldn't really think of an area where the country's thriving at the moment... I think if anything we're regressing as a country, so yeah, nothing came to mind." – VA woman, liberal

"I was trying to be positive like what can I be positive about? I cannot come up with a word [for] what's going well, because there's a lot of things I disagree with that's going on right now." – MN Republican man

"I think **unaffordability** is going well." – NV man, Independent

"**Not much**... I just watch TV, the news and it just seems you don't see much positivity. You see a lot of negative things, a lot of hateful people. That's just how I feel. **You see more negativity than positive for sure.**" – NV man, Independent-leaning Republican



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Some Point to Political Engagement, Technological Innovation, and Inclusivity as Positive Trends

“Technological innovation... In this country, [we] have a pretty robust higher education system for those who can afford it, and levels of research and levels of innovation, I think these things still exponentially grow... I think that innovations in medicine, innovations in technology [are] still very robust in this country. The problem is being able to afford access.” – NV man, Independent-leaning Democrat

“Honestly, I'm kind [of] with everyone else, there's not a whole lot going well. I do think that we are becoming more inclusive of different lifestyles, and I feel that's going well in the country... I guess we're getting more progressive. Some things I don't necessarily agree with, but I know in general it's a lot better than it was 20 years ago.” – NV woman, Independent-leaning Republican

“I think people are able to voice their opinions and perhaps not scared how others might take it. I think there's a lot of openness right now. I don't know if it's good or bad, but people can share about themselves freely.” – MN Republican woman

“I'd say, engagement... Maybe it's partly me getting older, but I just feel like people in general, especially younger people, are more engaged in politics, whether it's positive or negative. I feel like everyone has an opinion about something, which I think is a good thing. I think it's good that people are more engaged, I'd say, more engaged than 10 years ago.” – VA man, liberal



“I think, because of what's going on around us, people are seeing that through engagement, or seeing that there are problems around us, they feel the need to change something. I look at the most recent example of Threads coming out. So engagement with people seeing that there is a problem in the market of Twitter, and they create something... I think people are using engagement for innovation.” – VA man, liberal

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Democracy Encompasses Fair Elections, Bipartisanship, and Addressing Challenges Such as Voter Suppression

Moderator: What is democracy?

"I think [of] fair elections, being able to elect the official that we want, rather than it being chosen for us." – VA woman, liberal

"I believe voter suppression is definitely undemocratic and it has occurred a lot in the south in a lot of the swing states. That's a huge, huge problem for democracy." – NV man, Independent

"To me, it means that us, as citizens, so voting citizens have power to create change, and for rights, and issues we want and need. And I think the issue with the democracy is a select few, through the power of our courts, and court system, and the highest levels, are not in majority with the voters, and our voting voice, and power." – VA man, liberal



"I think there's an intolerance on both sides and that makes democracy very tough to work. There's no accepting when one side loses. They challenge the votes, they do this, they do that. They have tantrums, basically, adult tantrums, protest. **Whatever happens in the elections, happens in the elections and that is democracy.**" – MN Republican man

"I think people, maybe when they talk about democracy, it's that they want to see folks elected that they've chosen, and that represent them well in many different ways..." – VA woman, progressive

"When I think of democracy, I think of both sides of the aisle. I think of Republicans, and I think of Democrats, and I think of being able to vote and being able to have the freedoms that we do..." – MN Republican woman

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Few Have Positive Words for the Supreme Court, Including Among Republicans

Moderator: Fill in the blank. I feel **blank** about the Supreme Court.

"Sad." – VA woman, liberal

"Unfair." – NV woman, Independent

"Indifferent." – MN Republican man

"Misrepresented." – VA man, liberal

"Scared." – VA woman, progressive

"Disappointed." – NV man, Independent-leaning Democrat

"Politicized." – NV man, Independent

"Uncertainty." – MN Republican woman

"Hopeless." – VA man, progressive

"Angry." – VA woman, liberal

"Non-trusting." – MN woman, Independent-leaning Republican

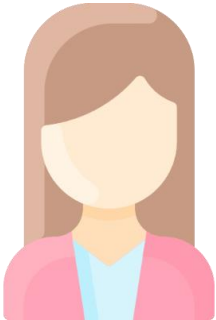
"Selfish." – NV woman, Independent-leaning Democrat



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Participants Feel the Supreme Court Has Too Much Power and is Untrustworthy

Moderator: What makes you use that word to describe the Supreme Court?



"I just feel like they have the power to change so many things that are out of our control, and it's a power control, and it's scary. And in regards to women's rights, and like LGBTQ+ [rights], there's just so much power there, that shouldn't be all in their hands." – VA woman, liberal

"I just feel that, in general, it's always going to be in one sway. It doesn't matter what the conversation is or how many valid points are brought up. **They go in with an agenda, and it's set, and it doesn't matter what anyone else says.**" – NV woman, Independent-leaning Republican

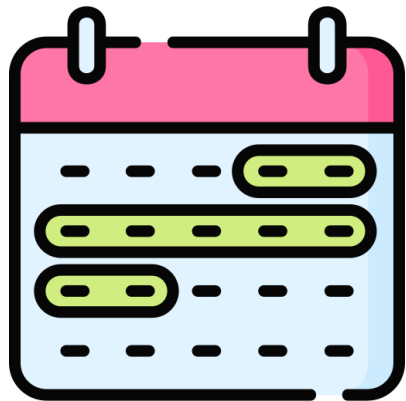
"Well, I expect the Supreme Court to uphold the laws of the land. They're the highest court. **And when you read about these judges and stuff that are taking trips illegally, well, what I would call illegally, to me it's like common sense, you don't do that in that position. And if they don't know that common sense, how can we trust them to rule our land?**" – MN woman, Independent-leaning Republican



"I just feel like the Supreme Court nowadays isn't a very good representation of the general population, and I think most people are pretty progressive. And the idea that, again, the binary system coming into play, that you have extremes, right? As justice is, it's unfair." – VA man, progressive

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Democrats and Independents More Inclined to Support Term Limits Than Republicans



"I'm very, very pro [term limits]. The idea sounds great to me." – VA woman, liberal

"I'm totally for it. It almost seems like something that I would be like, 'why hasn't that been implemented already,' in my opinion... Almost every other kind of politician has a term limit. I'm not sure as to why specifically the justices wouldn't." – VA man, liberal

"I think [term limits] is the one single thing that could be done in our government to have the greatest impact on the inefficiency of our government, not only with the Supreme Court, but in terms of our senators and our Congress people, that they're [there] too long and they're too corrupt for a lifetime." – NV man, Independent

[Moderator: What do you think about this idea of term limits?] "I think that it's perfect. I think it should be two terms, just like the president. I think you have older people in there who have different morals, they grew up in a different time, they [have] different beliefs completely, they're not with the way of the times, I think. And I think it should definitely be updated more frequently, for sure." – NV man, Independent-leaning Republican

"Well, we have enough chaos already electing the people that we're electing already. That branch of government, I don't think we can afford to add that chaos to that branch of government." – MN Republican man

"I feel as long as they're mentally competent, that's fine [lifetime appointments]. But age does play a part in one's competency, and I think that needs to be looked at. I don't know that that's been a problem at all, but I think for the future." – MN woman, Independent-leaning Republican

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Most Participants View the Court as Having a Conservative Tilt and Feel That Ideology Determines How Decisions Go

Moderator: Whose views does the Supreme Court represent?

"Sometimes I think it's conservative because there's a majority conservative." – MN Republican man

"I would definitely say conservative, but I feel like it's not just general conservative. I feel like it's more of [an] old-fashioned kind of conservative. But that's just my general kind of feel." – VA man, liberal



"Just broadly, I think conservative. I think especially the social issues that are at play regarding race, sexual orientation, etc. Instead of more decisions like elections, fair elections and things like we're touching social issues instead of democratic issues..." – VA man, liberal

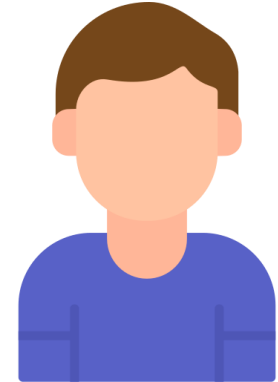
"I think they have a more conservative lean, conservative tilt. I think a lot of us feel that way as well... they definitely have a conservative skew to it. And that's just happened because more Supreme Court justices have died or retired during Republican's 10 years than Democrat's." – NV man, Independent

"It's almost like we don't have an opinion anymore. No matter what, we already know what the end result is going to be." – NV woman, Independent-leaning Republican

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Recent Supreme Court Decisions Have Young Democrats Feeling Scared for the Country's Future

"It almost feels like going back in time... but it almost feels like going back in time or rolling back progress that was made before I was born [with regards to the recent cases]." – VA man, liberal



"But with all that's being done to peel back all of the progress that has been made thus far, it feels like the exact opposite is being done... You're going back in time essentially. And if that's the case, then I am scared for the future because **the future is going to start looking dangerously like the past in all the worst possible ways...** So in a lot of these ways, with women's rights, with LGBTQ+ rights, with the affirmative action decision, all of these, it's like these, in some form of fashion, worked particularly for these communities but for our society at large. And now it's like, 'Okay, that's enough of that.' And now we're entering the world that existed prior to all of these programs or legislation. **And again, it's potentially dangerous. So that's scary for me.**" – VA woman, progressive

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Participants Feel Strongly on Affirmative Action, Student Loan Forgiveness, and LGBTQ+ Rights

Affirmative action	Student loan debt forgiveness	LGBTQ+ Rights
<p>"I think it's insensitive... the idea of affirmative action is to truly create equality across all races and give everybody an opportunity. And not everybody can control their background, and so affirmative action was something we used to offset that." – VA man, progressive</p>	<p>"I just don't understand how the Supreme Court is the one deciding that. It seems like a financial issue that should be taken before the House Economic Committee or somebody who can actually figure out if the country can afford to do that. But it doesn't seem like something that the Supreme Court should be deciding." – VA woman, progressive</p>	<p>"It's upsetting, especially since it came out in Pride month. Very, very ironic... It opens the door for more forms of discrimination to come and removal of rights, etc. Yeah, just awful precedent." – VA woman, liberal</p>
<p>"[Admission should be] based on your ability and your knowledge and stuff like that, race doesn't play a part in getting into college." – MN woman, Independent-leaning Republican</p>	<p>"I certainly support the decision, and I think that the focus needs to be on reigning in these colleges and the amount of money that they are making, the amount that they're charging. I think that's the issue... But yeah, I don't think that John Q. Taxpayer should be on the hook for someone's graduate degree..." – MN Republican man</p>	<p>"I understand by that [decision] though that's very limited to the arts or something like that... so the cake. No, I agree with it. If I'm a business owner and don't want to do that, I think I have that right to do that, to make that decision that I don't want to..." – MN woman, Independent-leaning Republican</p>
<p>"I've always felt that affirmative action, as complex as the debates are, it's something that's been necessary... There could become a time in society where it is no longer necessary. But I don't think that time is yet. And I think that a very conservative court has pulled the plug prematurely on affirmative action." – NV man, Independent-leaning Democrat</p>	<p>"I am actually very surprised I agree with that decision... Am I going to get some of that money? It's something that really roils me. It's like, okay, I'm going to buy a car and take a loan out, but I don't have to pay for the car. No. There's no financial intelligence here. It really irritates me and I'm glad the Supreme Court ruled that way." – NV man, Independent</p>	<p>"How someone personally lives their lifestyle should not deter[mine] how they're treated. They should be treated equally in my eyes, whether you believe in their lifestyle or not." – NV woman, Independent-leaning Republican</p>

Awareness on Other Recent Decisions Mostly Thin

Gerrymandering

"I am indifferent because I don't know what gerrymandering is, so I'm like, 'I don't know. I don't even know.'" – MN Republican man

"I mean, it seems super subjective. What's a dissolve or whatever the term was? I mean, how is that parsed out? Yeah, in general, I agree that you shouldn't gerrymander to hurt a particular group of people... I don't know how one would police that, I guess." – MN Republican man

"Yeah, I did hear about this one, and I was kind of surprised because... How did they decide that this is an issue that they're going to be a little more progressive about? I have a little whiplash. I am happy if they can't dilute that vote, but yeah, a little surprised." – VA woman, progressive

"[Moderator: Are you surprised by the decision?] I would say, at the conservative nature of the court currently. I was surprised they came out [with] that decision, yeah." – NV man, Independent-leaning Democrat

EPA regulating wetlands

"I thought that was the EPA's job." – NV man, Independent

"I'm not happy to hear that. That's my first reaction, I think." – VA woman, progressive

"Gosh, I'm honestly not sure what to say. I feel like I know so little on that kind of topic. Yeah. I'm honestly not sure whether to say I'm one way for it or against that. I just know so little about it." – VA man, liberal

"If the EPA doesn't [regulate the wetlands], then what does the Supreme Court say?" – MN Republican man

"I have no idea. I haven't even heard that one. I'd like to hear a little more about it." – MN Republican woman

Across the Board, Justices' Ethical Behaviors are Extremely Concerning and More Extensive Than Participants Thought

Samuel Alito: One Justice flew on a private jet to a luxury fishing trip—including a \$1000 bottle of wine—all paid for by a billionaire, and then didn't disclose this in the yearly reports all Justices are required to file. The Justice said the first-class seat would have been empty if they did not use it. The billionaire's businesses were part of several cases before the Supreme Court.

"I think that's very corrupt. I think truly to be impartial, you should have absolutely no contact with the person who's subject, especially if you're examining cases against that person." – VA man, progressive

"I think it was Clarence Thomas." – VA woman, progressive

"It for sure worries me, but doesn't surprise me... I think I know who it is." – VA woman, progressive

"It sounds like bribery a little bit to me... I think if you're a justice, you need to be completely unbiased, and you shouldn't be swayed in any way to go in any direction." – NV man, Independent-leaning Republican

"It's horrible, but at the same time, I feel like I've always acknowledged that it's been like this forever. If you have a ton of money, then you could almost do whatever you want, kind of." – MN Republican woman

"I think it's Clarence Thomas?" – MN Republican man

"That sounds very shady." – MN Republican woman

"I think it paints a bad picture, and I think saying the seat was an empty regardless is a really lame answer." – MN Republican man

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Participants Point to a Theme of Corruption Running Throughout Both Thomas Stories

Clarence Thomas: A different Justice went on a series of lavish vacations with a different billionaire, including staying on a private yacht. The billionaire also paid for the private school tuition of the Justice's nephew and bought the Justice's mother's house and allows her continue to live there rent-free. This Justice has not disclosed any of this income. The billionaire is a conservative activist who has Nazi memorabilia displayed in his home.

"I think it's **disgusting**." – NV man, Independent

"It sounds like a **textbook quid pro quo**." – NV man, Independent

"**Not trustworthy**." – MN Republican woman

"I think, as a justice, don't put yourself in that position where people would question your actions and stuff like that. You don't want to put yourself in that position where there could be questioning, and why not disclose? **Why did you keep it? He must have something to hide.**" – MN woman, Independent-leaning Republican

Clarence Thomas: One Justice has a spouse who is an activist with groups that have appeared before the Supreme Court, and who ran an organization receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars from undisclosed donors. This spouse also believes Trump won the 2020 election and tried to work with Trump's senior staff to overturn the election results.

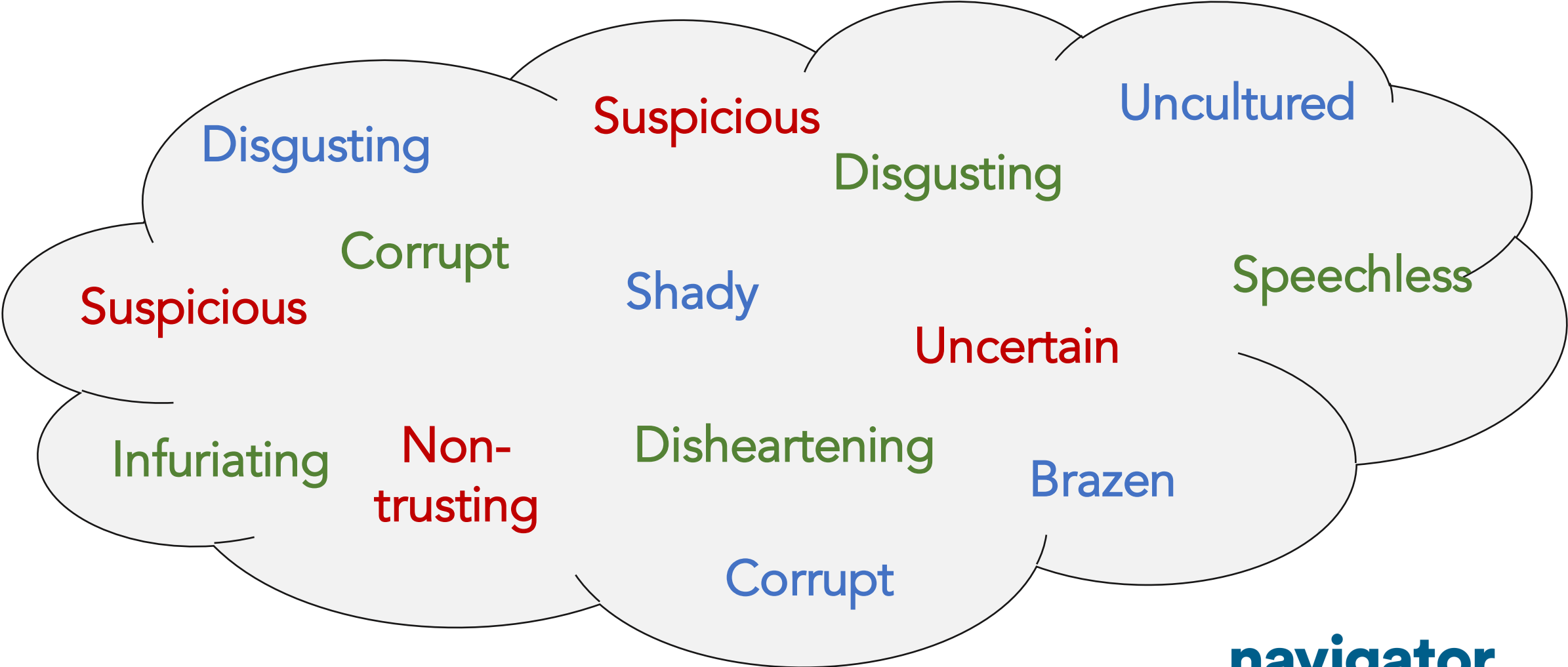
"It's on top of what seems like blatant corruption as well, right? I mean, **this is a legal form of bribery, so I don't know why we don't have more legislation around that.** Restrictions around that." – VA man, progressive

"**What are they trying to hide? You need to be transparent and follow through, just like anyone else needs to do so.**" – MN Republican woman

"It's very concerning for sure. I haven't heard that one before. But **that doesn't sit easy, I don't think, with anybody knowing that election deniers or any of these highly political folks are having that kind of a sway on the supposedly independent justices.**" – NV man, Independent

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After Hearing More Information, Participants View Supreme Court as "Shady," "Corrupt," "Disheartening"



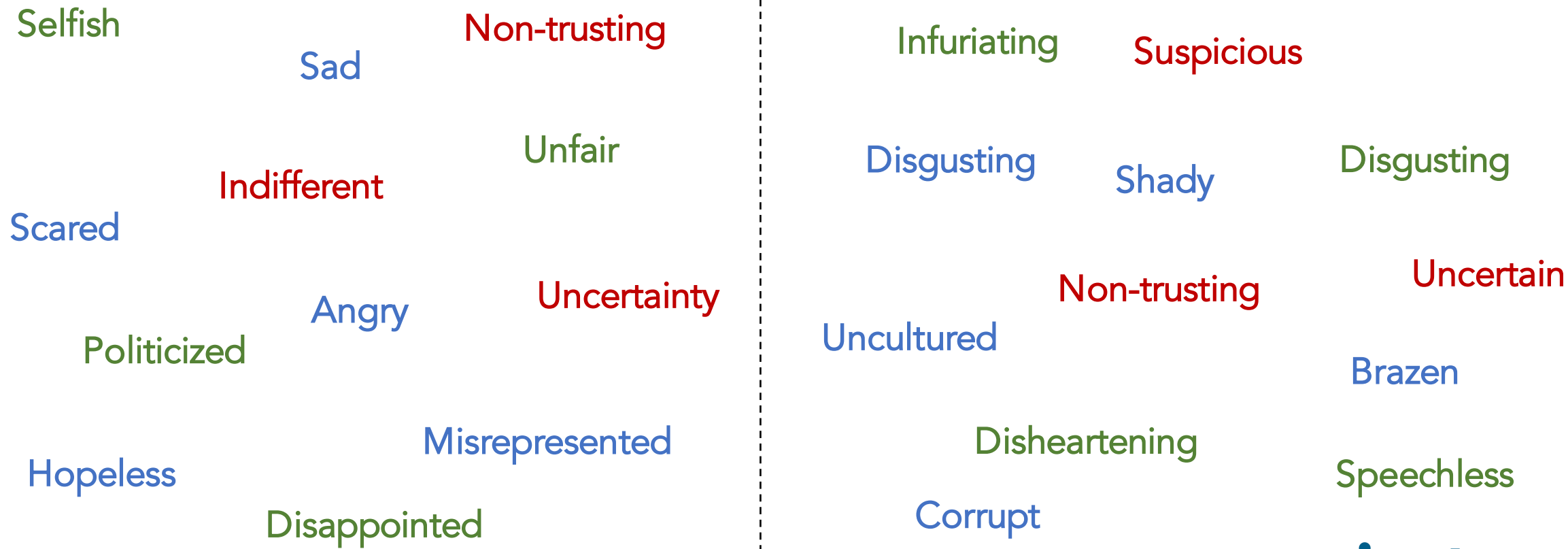
Three focus groups were conducted on July 12, 2023 among young progressive and liberal Democrats in Virginia, Republicans in Minnesota, and independents in Nevada. For more info, visit navigatorresearch.org.

Negative Perception of the Court Solidified After Hearing About Allegations

Moderator: Fill in the blank. I feel **blank** about the Supreme Court.

Initial Word

After hearing allegations



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Generally, Participants Feel Like the Supreme Court Represents “Conservative,” “Wealthy,” “White” Views

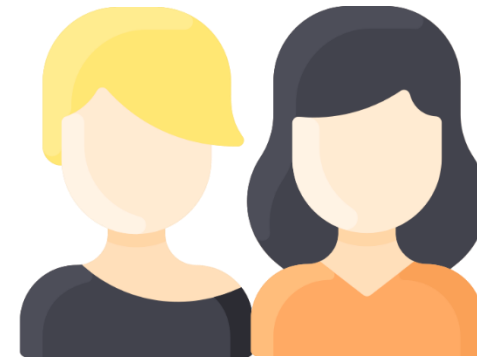
Moderator: Once again, how would you describe the Supreme Court after everything you’ve heard?

“I would say they just [represent] specifically wealthy and white conservatives.” – VA woman, progressive

“And extreme.” – VA woman, liberal

“[Moderator: Do you think Congress should investigate and hold public hearings on the [ethics allegations discussed?] Yes, it should be a fair system regardless of who you are [or] how much money you have.” – MN Republican woman

“I feel like they're a little out of touch with the overall general consensus of the country, and I think they have some work to do.” – NV man, Independent



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Participants Call for Transparency and Consequences for Supreme Court Justices' Ethical Violations

"I think that, regardless of what side you are on an issue, whether it's for your side or not, the code of conduct should be demanded." – MN Republican man

"Why isn't there ethics rules for them? That's my question." – MN Republican woman

"[Moderator: Has your mind changed about setting term limits now?] Yes. I feel like mine has." – MN Republican woman

"[Moderator: Has your mind changed about setting term limits now?] Well, now that I feel like there's a lot of, it sounds like there's corruption, [term limits] might not be a bad idea, although the whole election, like chaos, is going to be nuts, but I think that might be a good idea." – MN Republican woman

"And maybe a total reworking of how the Supreme Court is set up. And that's beyond my pay rate, but I'd be open to anything." – NV man, Independent-leaning Democrat

"There needs to be a process when people have ethical issues like that to get these people removed. That's disgusting." – NV man, Independent



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There is Little Trust in the Supreme Court to Impose Ethics Rules Upon Themselves

“Well, they're not doing very good following the rules, so I think somebody else has to oversee.” – MN woman, Independent-leaning Republican

“If they hold themselves accountable, it's likely not going to be done. So someone else would need to be the ones holding them accountable.” – NV woman, Independent-leaning Republican

“You can't police yourself. It should be an outside source.” - NV man, Independent

“I don't trust the Supreme Court to do it themselves... They'll hide something.” – VA man, liberal



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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 July 12, 2023 with young progressive and liberal Democrats in Virginia, Republicans in Minnesota, and independents in Nevada. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

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