

navigator*

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Friday, March 1st, 2024

Black Americans on Trust in the Government, Civic Engagement, and the Biden Administration



Methodology

On February 20, 2024, GBAO conducted three online focus groups with Black Democrats, independents, and Republicans across demographics—including a mix across education and gender.



Strong and weak Democrats
in Georgia



Disaffected Democrats
under 40 in Virginia



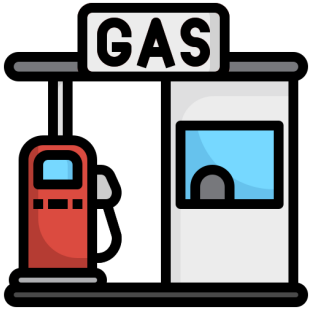
Black Americans in
Michigan, unfavorable
toward Biden, with some
skepticism toward
government

navigator*

Key Takeaways

- Some see improvement in their local economies.
- But views on the country are still dim.
- The government's impact on American's daily lives is largely viewed negatively, with abortion particularly salient.
- Voting is seen as necessary at best, pointless at worst.
- While most don't support Trump, enthusiasm about the Democratic Party is low.
- Awareness of Biden administration's record is thin, and many find aspects of it to be surprising or hard to believe.

Some See Improvement in Their Local Economies



Moderator: How is the economy doing in your local community?

"People are buying houses, and they're not cheap houses. The gas prices out here have been maintained pretty low... Lower than a lot of the other areas. Some of the food prices have come down some and any time I'm in stores people are just spending money." – GA woman, Democrat

"I feel that employment is doing well here... There's many jobs." – GA woman, Democrat

"Just the statistics and the numbers that I see on the news every day. There's a lot of big companies that are coming into my area that weren't here before and so that is really helping to boom the job market around here." – VA woman, Democrat

"Yes, the job market is getting better, but to be honest with you, for the pay and the hours that everyone's putting in, it's not being able to even itself out with the inflation. There are a lot of people that are really struggling to not only feed themselves but feed their families, put gas in their cars, pay their bills." – VA woman, Democrat

"I think in my community... what they are doing is going for better opportunities. Some of my friends are job hopping, so there's a lot of jobs out there and people are looking for jobs that pay better, that are fully remote." – VA man, Independent

"I feel like entrepreneurship is going well in my community." – MI woman, Democrat



navigator*

Views on the Country's Economy and Direction Are Dim



"I think [the country's economy] is doing terrible. I feel like [the government, whoever runs the economy] not working hard enough to improve the economy." – MI woman, Independent lean Democrat

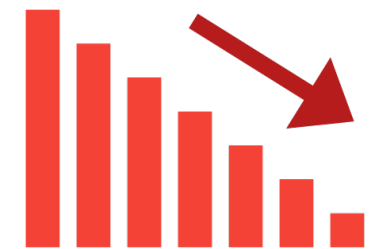
"I believe they're getting rid of the middle class so it's either going to be the have and the have-nots and that's going to cause a bunch of struggling by the housing market." – MI man, Republican

"[The economy is] doing terrible and I think so because they send all the money overseas instead of focusing on what we need over here." – MI man, Republican

"So, we have one of the most dysfunctional Congresses we've ever had. So, although we have jobs available because we continue to have these looming government shutdowns that just get saved in the eleventh hour by kicking the can down the road, those jobs don't stop inflation and inflation is not going to stop as long as our economy is 'uncertain' because we continue to have these looming government shutdowns." – VA man, Democrat

"I don't really think there's much going well in the economy or in America for me to pinpoint." – GA woman, Democrat

"I don't think much [is going well in the country]. The chaos is a lot. [In] the news and what's happening. There's so much discord, there's people are suffering on all levels and nobody really cares. Everyone is about themselves, and that's unfortunate and I feel bad about that. People talk the talk but no one's backing up what they're saying." – GA woman, Democrat



navigator*

The Government's Impact On American's Daily Lives Is Seen as Negative

Moderator: What is the government's role in your life?

"I feel that the government should pass laws to keep us safe. In particular, these school shootings... So, I think they fail to keep us safe the way they say they are going to." – GA woman, Democrat

"I'm an entrepreneur, it's becoming harder to open up businesses. I come from a generation of multiple streams of income where it's harder for the younger generation to do now. So, if we have to look for those coming up behind us, it's hard for them. Then like someone else said, you've got politicians making promises and then not standing on them." – GA man, Democrat



"It's a source of extreme stress because it just feels like Congress is not here for us, that they're here for elections and winning and power and money and that's stressful." – VA woman, Independent lean Democrat

"I am disabled and I have been fighting with them for six years over social security disability and just the whole way that the entire process goes and the amount of information that should be readily available that you do not know until you find out the hard way is crazy." – VA man, Democrat

"I guess I could say the price of the food. I mean the price of the food should be cheaper than what it is... The price of the food shooting up, so I guess I don't know, that's something to do with the government." – MI man, Republican

"I feel like the government wants to cater more to the upper class instead of lower-class citizens." – MI woman, Independent lean Democrat

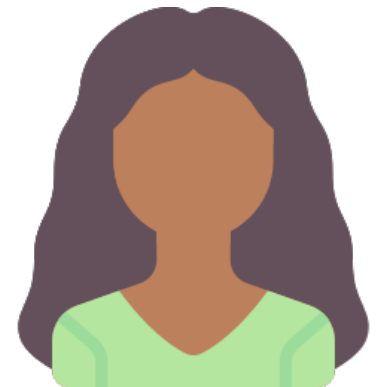
navigator*

Abortion Bans Are a Salient Example of the Government's Negative Impact



"Government tries to tell us what to do, especially women right now with our reproductive rights. There's so many things that they should be focused on and they're worried about what we are doing. So, it is not really giving like they're trying to help us, it's more so trying to control us." – GA woman, Democrat

"We're battling over the simplest of things that shouldn't even be a topic of discussion. There are states that are not allowing people to have abortions, where inflation is tearing everybody up." – VA woman, Democrat



navigator*

Positive Impact Can be Felt In Health Care and Financial Assistance



"I feel like something that I saw that they were doing recently, they're making it more easier for people that have jobs to get Michigan benefits." – MI woman, Independent

"Making medication more affordable. I think that's a huge plus for people who have severe issues." – MI man, Republican

"For me, I see both good and bad because right now my life is going good because of the government. It is because of the government and the health plans and the hospital plans that have covered my recovery. But I do agree, I also see the bad side of it for people without health insurance, people who can't get on government programs." – GA man, Democrat

"There are these programs that are set up to help people, but they make it impossible to get into these programs. And so the people that really need the help a lot of times don't get the help in many different facets from our government." – VA man, Democrat



navigator*

Few See the Government as Trustworthy

Moderator: How much do you personally trust the government to do what's right?



"I trust them enough. Enough to do what's right." – GA woman, Democrat

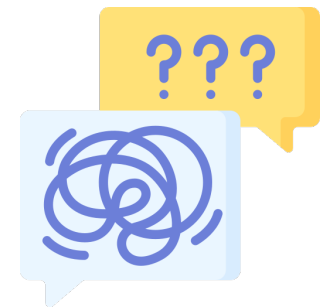
"Not at all." – MI woman, Democrat

"Wow, how much do I trust them to do what's right? If I base it on what I'm seeing, I don't trust them a lot. I see them doing a lot of finger pointing rather than being accountable for what their job is." – GA woman, Democrat

"I don't trust them at all... Just from what I see on the daily day of how Black people are treated by the police, how different communities are treated better than others, whether if you stay in the hood versus if you stay in a nicer neighborhood, how they treat situations and stuff like that." – VA man, Independent lean Democrat

"The government is pretty much saying, 'Oh, well we've got it.' You've been hollering that for years, we're not going to, I personally am not going to sit back and trust you to do your job because you've not shown me anything different." – VA woman, Democrat

"I don't have much trust in the government. I think it's not doing its job. The same things are happening. I think they don't focus on real issues facing Americans here in the US, like homelessness, like education." – VA man, Independent lean Democrat



navigator*

Far More Trust Their Neighbors and Local Community Leaders Than Any Elected or Government Official

Moderator: How much do you trust the following institutions and groups?

- Your member of Congress
- Congress—the entire Congress
- Your local community leaders
- Your neighbors
- The Supreme Court
- The CDC, the Centers for Disease Control
- The Democratic Party
- The Republican Party

“I trust my neighbors all the time. I have good neighbors.” – GA man, Democrat

“It’ll have to be basically my community leaders [that I trust the most] because I mean that’s the closest thing to me, but at the end of the day they still sit at the table with the Congress and the Supreme Court. They sit at the table with people that I don’t even know, that’s not even familiar with me, that’s not going through what I’m going through, not dealing with what I’m dealing with.” – MI man, Independent

“[I trust] the Supreme Court [the least] just because of their corruption. When I think of Clarence Thomas and his corruption.” – VA man, Democrat

navigator*

For Several, Involvements Abroad Evoke an Internal Conflict With Democrats

“We were already feeling some type of way about the Ukrainian war and helping them so much financially. I think that because still going on, from what I believe, I don't think that's ended either, it's just being eclipsed by the Palestinian and Israeli war. I think this war has put a really big stain on Biden's presidency. I really don't want to vote for him again, but it doesn't seem like the Democrats are having a different candidate.” – GA woman, Democrat

“My trust for the Democratic Party has definitely gone down in the last couple of months, particularly since October 7th, and just their reaction and not listening to the majority of their voters on the issue of what's taking place in Palestine. And I'm someone who's voted Democrat my whole life.” – VA man, Independent lean Democrat

“Only thing I see is [the Democratic Party sending] the money over to wars and over the other countries and I mean what about right in our main field? We got a war right here. I don't see them doing nothing. We need to hurry up and remove that and try something else.” – MI man, Independent

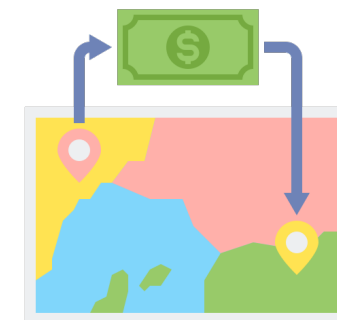
navigator*

Government Skeptics Have Heightened Suspicions About the Democratic Party and Other Institutions

[Moderator: Why'd you call out the Democratic Party as on that list the institution you have the least trust in?] "Because they send all the money overseas and they give all the money to the immigrants instead of focusing on what's going on in the United States." – MI man, Republican

"I didn't know until I had my first kid that in order for them to go to school, they have to have certain shots to get inside school... because I was anti, I don't want my babies injected with anything. But then after doing certain research on a lot of things, which was a lot of research, I was okay with some of them." – MI woman, Independent

"I believe [the Democratic Party] is using modern day sterilization by allowing kids to push this sex change... Definitely they're pushing for it." – MI man, Republican



navigator*

Many See Voting as a Right or Responsibility Fought for By Others

"I [personally see] it as a duty because I think about when we talked about ancestors and those who didn't have the opportunity to vote and I think about the future, that I take it more as a responsibility. So, it's something that I must do, that I need to do. So that's why, just like feeding my kids, it's my duty and responsibility to take care of them, it's the same with voting." – GA man, Democrat

"It's a privilege also for us to do that. Based on our ancestors not having this, we need to step up to the plate to get stuff done. So again, you can't sit back and say what's wrong if you don't exercise your duty to make a change." – GA woman, Democrat

"It's very important as people of color for us to exercise our right to vote because our ancestors weren't able to do so. Even my grandfather who just passed last year at 90, he wasn't always able to vote. He went off to war at 18 and couldn't vote. So, it's always been pushed that you have to vote because the people that came before you couldn't." – VA man, Democrat

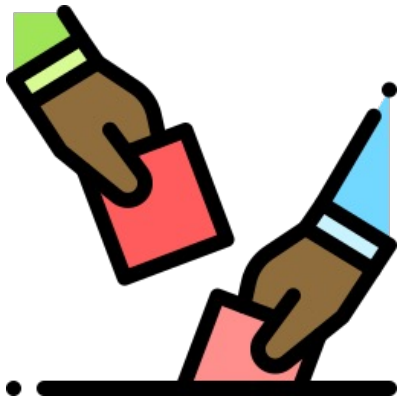
"I see it as a right. It's a right that I think we are all entitled to. It definitely isn't a privilege to a lot of people in this country because Republicans have done their best to prevent Black people from voting." – VA man, Democrat

"I think voting is everything. You're voting for your morals and your principles. I think without it, you shouldn't complain about whatever's going on, whatever decisions get passed. If you got a chance to go out there and influence others about your decision and your views, you should, if not, it's not really much to talk about... People died behind that." – MI man, Republican

navigator*

But Some Feel Ambivalent About Voting and Question Its Impact

"It's pointless either way. No matter who seems to win, it's the same issues every year. It doesn't seem to make a difference." – VA man, Independent lean Democrat



"I understand the importance of voting and I don't miss elections, but at the same time I've become incredibly disenfranchised with the system itself. Every election shouldn't be about saving democracy, and I feel like that's the message we have these days that like, 'Oh, you have to vote to save democracy.' Well, if I have to do that every election, then we don't have a strong democracy." – VA man, Independent lean Democrat

"There's always that sense of guilt as a person of color, sometimes at least that's what I felt about going to vote and people of color not having the chance to vote before. But I think it can be hard on a federal level just because of the electoral college, people feel like their vote is going out into the void. At least I feel that way. And it almost feels like it's already rigged for who the government wants to win." – VA woman, Independent lean Democrat

"Well, if you want change, you really can't complain about the way things are if you don't vote. You chose to say nothing and then complain. But... if you don't vote as a bloc, it's really hard to move the needle." – GA man, Democrat

navigator*

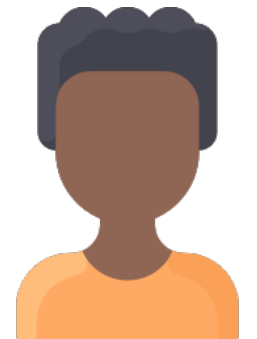
A Few See the Two Parties as the “Same”

“I feel like there's not much difference between the Democrats and the Republicans. I just feel like the Republicans are too extreme for my views, personally, to ever really consciously feel comfortable voting for them. But I feel like at this point the political parties are pretty much the same. For the Democrats, I feel like they say one thing and they do another anyway.” – GA woman, Democrat



“All of their [Democrats and Republicans] interests are the same. At the end of the day, there is something that they all care about, and they all answer above everything... Money.” – VA woman, Independent lean Democrat

“The lines are so blurred, and people are so extreme on every side you don't really seem to get an idea of who's who.” – VA man, Democrat



navigator*

Components of the Biden Administration's Record

- a) The Biden Administration announced it would forgive the student loans of millions of borrowers facing financial hardship. This is in addition to the 3.7 million borrowers who have already had their student loans forgiven.
- b) Gas prices have gone down about \$2 a gallon since their peak.
- c) The national unemployment rate is 3.7%, a historic low, and 353,000 jobs were added in January alone.
- d) The Black unemployment rate in 2023 was the lowest it's been since the 1970s.
- e) The bipartisan infrastructure bill passed, which invests in our roads, bridges, and railways, expands access to clean drinking water and high-speed internet, and creates millions of clean energy jobs.
- f) The Inflation Reduction Act passed, which caps insulin costs for seniors and allows Medicare to negotiate for lower prescription drug costs.
- g) The CHIPS Act passed, which boosts the manufacturing of semiconductors in the US.
- h) The current inflation rate is now 3.1%, down from its pandemic peak of 9.1% in 2022.

With a Few Exceptions, Awareness of Biden Administration's Record Are Thin and Seem Hard to Believe

"I mean the only thing I can really say is the student forgiveness loan because it's a lot of people that owe a lot of college debt, so that's the only thing I can say they did. But besides that, I can't really see nothing else." – MI man, Republican

"And then [with] the black unemployment rate, I don't see that's going down. It's a lot of people I know that's unemployed that had to do what they got to do to survive out there." – MI man, Republican

"I don't believe that [inflation is down] because [the] price of everything is up." – MI woman, Independent lean Democrat

"I forgot that the Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Bill were separate... Even though it didn't get a lot of attention, maybe not as much attention as it should have, that was a huge accomplishment." – GA man, Democrat

"I don't know so much about the Infrastructure Bill because I know Flint still doesn't have clean water, so I don't know what's going on with that." – GA woman, Democrat

"I know there's been a lot of talk about making diabetes medication affordable and student loan forgiveness while they still give them out..." – VA woman, Independent lean Democrat

"Yes, inflation is down from its peak, but prices are still much higher than they were in 2019 before the pandemic and wages are not going up at the same rate as inflation." – VA man, Democrat

"I need to see how the black unemployment rate, how am I going to give credit to this administration for that fact? Things don't happen in three, four years. Oftentimes when changes actually occur, it's because it's been years and years and years of other policies or other changes that were made many years ago that are now just starting to take effect." – VA woman, Democrat

navigator*

Student Loan Forgiveness Continues to Be a Disappointment



"They definitely aren't helping with student loans." – GA woman, Democrat

"The student loan things, it's great for the people who have gotten their student loans forgiven. I'm not one of them. There are millions of Americans who have not gotten their loans forgiven." – VA man, Democrat

"You can get rid of student loan debt for the amount of money that you've sent overseas." – MI man, Republican

navigator*

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 February 20, 2024 with Black Democrats, independents, and Republicans in GA, VA, and MI. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

For Press inquiries contact:

press@navigatorresearch.org

To learn more about
Navigator:

<http://navigatorresearch.org>

@NavigatorSurvey on Twitter

navigator*