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FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Friday, November 1, 2024

Michiganders, Pennsylvanians,
Georgians on the Election



Methodology

On October 24, 2024, GBAO conducted three online focus groups with Democrats, independents, and Republicans across various demographics—including a mix across education, gender, race.



Democrats and independents
under 35 in Michigan



White soft partisans without a
college degree in Pennsylvania*



Soft partisan men of color voters in
Georgia*

*Participants self report to be independent or not strongly identifying with the Democratic or Republican Party

Key Takeaways

- Most are pessimistic about the country and the election.
- There is an expectation that the election will cause strife and maybe violence.
- Many expect unrest from “both sides.”
- Many find the details of election certification, the electoral college, or other reforms to be confusing.
- Refusing to certify the results seen as “toddler-like.” More hope for mutual respect and kindness.

Few See Much in the Country as Going Well

Moderator: Fill in the blank: I feel [BLANK] is going well in the country today.

"Honestly, it feels really hard to come up with anything [going well in the country]." – MI woman, weak Democrat

"Maybe specific aspects, maybe technological advances for medical stuff is pretty good, but outside of that there's not a ton of stuff." – MI man, weak Democrat

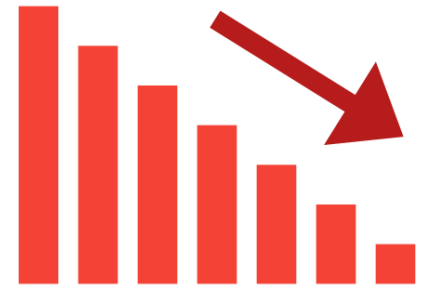
"Not much initially came to mind as well. I'm happy to hear I'm not the only one who felt that way." – MI man, weak Democrat

"I'd probably say recovery from COVID is better than other countries. Comparatively in that way." – PA man, independent lean Democrat

"It's hard to think [what is going well]. I mean, I guess employment rates are okay." – PA woman, independent lean Democrat

"So, I feel like I don't really have a good answer for that, but I guess the stock market, but that's essentially the only thing I can think of." – GA man, independent lean Democrat


"I know after the pandemic a lot of people lost their jobs and I'm just lucky, I've been at my job for four years, and I know how people who live overseas in London, Europe, maybe even in Africa, how the economy is not as good as the one in the United States." – GA man, independent



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The Country Continues to Feel Divided, and Political Anxiety Looms Large

Moderator: Fill in the blank: I feel [BLANK] is not going well in the country today.



"I mean, we're really good at division. Not that I think division's a good thing at all... I feel like **division among people on almost all sides is probably the strongest thing going amongst people at the moment.**" – PA man, independent lean Republican

"**My biggest fear is that, even if things start to improve and the policies are implemented to financially stabilize us and improve the economy and workforce, that the hatred will still be there and whatever side will be angry the other side won.**" – PA woman, weak Republican

"Well, from the division, I'm afraid that **we're going to have another civil war the way everything's going, the fighting, the anger.** I mean, everybody is angry no matter what side they're on." – PA woman, weak Democrat

"**My fear is to elect politicians who will completely ignore the Constitution,** because the only thing that separates America from other countries is the Constitution, the power of the Constitution here. If we lose that, if politicians can just go along with the president and not be able to just say no and just let him get away with everything. That's very dangerous." – GA man, independent

"I personally don't talk about politics with my friends and family because it's just sad that people don't actually want to have a conversation about issues sometimes." – MI woman, weak Democrat

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Most Are Confident About Election Security, But Some Have Doubts

Moderator: Thinking about the process of voting, how do you think the election will go?

"As far as my personal ballot, I feel confident, and I usually go to the voting place to get it done. I don't do the mail-in ballot just to make sure that my stuff is registered in real time... I just hope that there aren't stories that come up to say that something was rigged." – GA man, weak Democrat

"Still two big areas that I have concerns [about]. One is illegal voting because all I have to do is to lie. I go into the Secretary of State voter registration, I say I'm a US citizen. The process continues. Never have to prove that I am... The other one is folks that are older, and I've seen that happen in the voting booth where somebody is not helping them vote [and] are voting for them." – GA man, independent lean Republican

"Well, so far I've been hearing that there's problems with the voting in Pennsylvania itself. In Luzerne County, I know that they have an issue with mail-in ballots and the regular ballots were misprinted." – PA woman, weak Democrat

"I think they're giving [all] the accesses [to voting] that it is just more confusing. You got to count the mail-in votes, you got to count the early votes, you got to count... I think it'd just be vote on Election Day and that's it." – PA woman, independent lean Democrat

[Moderator: What do other people think about illegal voting and things like that? Are people concerned about things like that happening?] **"No, not really because they said it's less than 1%. I think America has one of the best electoral system[s] in the world... I don't think they don't want to take themselves through the risk of getting deported or getting arrested over just a vote."** – GA man, independent

"I don't have many questions about the legitimacy of the election, because this was litigated over and over in courts in 2020, and recounts all over the place. And it pretty much all checked out." – MI man, weak Democrat

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Many Worry About Post-Election Tensions Or Violence

Moderator: How concerned are you about political violence as a result of the election?

"I think if Trump loses, there's going to be another January 6th again. And I just think that it's going to be scary." – PA woman, independent

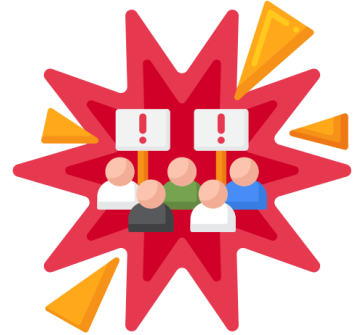
"If [Trump] doesn't get elected, I'd be more fearful of the public outcry. It seems like the Republicans are more willing to do crazier stuff." – PA man, independent closer to Democrat

"I think specifically Trump does a lot of things that people don't like to hear. About violence and things. And then his supporters will say, well, he meant it in a different way. But people do actually take him seriously. **And when you insinuate violence people will do violent things if they have a devotion.**" – MI man, weak Democrat

"But I think my fear is just the same... **Just my fear is going to exist irrespective of the outcome of this election, which is everybody coming at each other.**" – MI man, weak Democrat

"Considering that it was violent last time- I'm not going to put it past them because it happened once. What's stopping them from making it happen twice?" – GA man, independent lean Democrat

"I think that's [political violence] always a possibility. I think it's something that Congress should take very seriously this time." – GA man, independent lean Democrat



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There Is an Expectation That the Election Will Both Take Time and Be Contentious

“I am not as concerned that there will actually be violence while it could happen, it's a possibility. I think what I am most concerned about is the polarization, the personality cults that form around our candidates. It's just weird, cultish kind of political following that I feel like are rising out of this.” – MI man, weak Democrat

“I would assume that there's going to be some sort of recount. There's going to be some sort of like, ‘Oh, it was the early mail-in ballots, it was this, it was that.’ I just feel like we're so divided that irrespective of what's going to happen, these swing states are going to be under fire.” – MI man, weak Democrat

“I don't really doubt the legitimacy of how votes are counted or anything like that. I guess the fear of them saying that it was a stolen election again is very real because we saw how it all went the last time.” – MI woman, weak Democrat

“I think it'll go smoothly. If there are any states or that are won very narrowly, I know that's going to be contested and they're probably going to want a hand count. But I think overall it'll go smoothly.” – GA man, independent lean Democrat

“I don't think it's going to be something that is going to take any shorter than it has before. I don't know if it'll take longer, but I don't see the process of it being expedited by any metric.” – PA man, independent

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There Is Some Division as to Which Side—If Any—Is More Likely to Contest the Results

“Well, I just think both sides have got more extreme on both sides. I think January 6th is an example of political violence. I think we've seen riots where we've seen groups of mobs and people who might've started peacefully and that didn't end peacefully in multiple situations.” – MI man, weak Democrat

“My concern is that there's people in Congress already saying that they're going to refuse to certify the results. How can you say that before the results are even here? I feel like they're already laying their cards on the table. Right? And it's mostly coming from the Republican side from what I can see.” – MI woman, weak Democrat

“This might sound extreme, but I'm worried that even if Kamala wins, that there's going to be a civil war. That the Republicans won't accept the election results if they don't win and it's going to lead to an all-out war.” – MI woman, weak Democrat



“There's just the extreme ones on each side. You have AOC on the Democrat side, and then you have Marjorie [Taylor] Greene or whatever on the Republican side where it's just going to be a few who are going to do that [contest results].” – PA man, independent lean Democrat



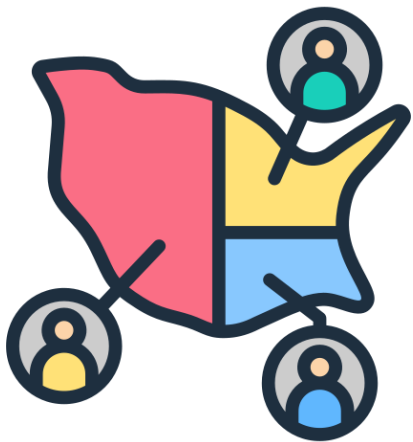
“Well, you've got members of Congress that are in love with Biden and Kamala and it's a love-hate relationship. You see a lot of them don't like Trump. Are they going to say, 'We're not doing this for Trump. We're going to make sure Kamala is going to get in. Is this going to be something like that if he gets elected?' And just vice versa. If Kamala gets in and there's people in Congress who don't like her, are they going to say, 'Well, no, we're not going to certify them because we don't like her, and we don't like her ways.'” – PA woman, weak Democrat

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Most Are Confused About the Specifics of the Electoral College And the Certification of Results

"I would have a question on how they can win the popular vote and then lose the Electoral College... They should be correlative. The Electoral College, the popular vote should be correlative." – PA woman, weak Republican

"I would feel like if my candidate lost through popular vote versus Electoral College, I'd feel like the system had let me down more so than anything else. And vice versa. If my candidate went through electoral votes versus popular, I'd feel like the system doesn't work..." – PA man, independent

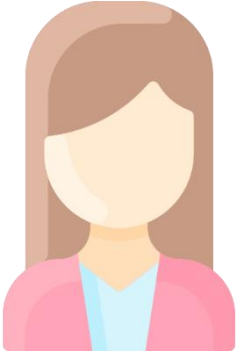


"I'm still trying to understand fully. I know there's a populist and electoral vote. I kind of don't understand how that works fully though." – GA man, weak Democrat

"So in 2016 there [were] several congressmen that tried to decertify the election as well as a number of people in 2020. But in 2016 there were people in Congress putting their hands up saying, 'We cannot certify the election.'" – GA man, weak Democrat

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Refusing To Certify the Results Is Seen as “Toddler-Like”



“It reminds me of my toddler who is just like, if it's not my way then it's not okay and I'm going to throw a tantrum about it. If it's not the results that I want, then I'm going to refuse to agree with them.” – MI woman, weak Democrat

“I think that's BS. I think an elected official, their job is to, whatever the vote ends up being, however the votes are counted and such, their job is to be like, okay, that's how it happens. That's how it needs to go. I certify my vote. And I think that standing in the way of that is just not constitutional. I mean, I know they're allowed to do that. They did in 2020, but that's just my opinion. I feel like that infringes on the rights of the voter.” – PA man, independent

“It's okay. Just like support, **your team doesn't win every single time**. And that's why you have to respect the process. Yesterday was the first game of the NBA, my team lost. That's okay. But they'll win the next time. That's the decency about the whole process now.” – GA man, independent



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Many Are Fearful About The Future No Matter Who Wins the Presidency—for Very Different Reasons

“I think the biggest fear I have if Harris is elected, is, I already stated it before, is nothing really changes. Because from what I was understanding, and I could be misled on this, was she fully supported the Biden administration. And I feel like, and again, I could be misinformed, but I feel like things have been very hard since [then].” – PA man, independent

“[Trump is] going to go after the people that put him down, especially with the election from Biden winning, that he might go after Biden. He might go after Kamala. Who's to know? He might go after the immigrants that are here now. I mean, we don't know what he's going to do. He's a loose gun.” – PA woman, weak Democrat

“I fear that other countries won't respect that [Harris is] a female and would try to test her gangster. And that will unfortunately cause a war or retaliation that could lead up to further problems. Other than that, I don't really see an issue besides the fact that she's a female and she don't got that Queen Elizabeth status, so they will try her.” – GA man, independent lean Democrat

“I also just worry about our foreign relations [under Trump]. I don't know if [he's] still looking to get us out of the UN, but just the way he talks to other world leaders and other countries, I feel like we'll be a joke of a country if we're led by a felon.” – MI woman, weak Democrat

“I feel pessimistic, even with Kamala Harris presidency, even though I do think she's the better option. But one of my most specific fears, and this might be too specific, is that she caves to Democratic donors and gets rid of Lina Khan at the FTC.” – MI man, weak Democrat

“[Concerned about] the further demonization [by Trump] of groups of people in the country. Backpedaling on gay rights and women's rights and stuff of that nature.” – MI woman, weak Democrat

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Participants Believe Respect Is Missing From Current State of Politics and Elections

Moderator: What do you think we can do to improve the issues in politics and elections?

"I feel personally I can't change things on a huge scale, so it all comes back to what you can do for your community and getting involved in your own local political causes would be good too." – MI woman, weak Democrat

"I hope this doesn't sound cheesy. But obviously vote. People fought for our right to do that. I would say try to volunteer, not politically, but **just get out of your own head space and see what other people are dealing with as well**. I think that will just help bring our communities back together because politics aside, we're all just doing our best and should help each other out." – MI woman, weak Democrat

"Live day to day and just **be a good neighbor, be a good person**." – PA man, independent lean Democrat

"I feel like what I've tried to teach my children is go out and be, I know it's kind of like a cliché or old. **Be the change that you want to see**." – PA woman, weak Republican

"This would go regardless of what you believe in, just to treat everybody just with respect pretty much. And keep an open mind from opinion, from everyone. You don't have to entertain it, but there's no need to result in violence. **Just keeping respect for everybody**." – GA man, weak Democrat



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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 October 24, 2024, with younger Democrats in MI, and soft partisans in PA and GA. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

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