



# Engagious

**FPG** Focus Pointe  
Global

## **SWING VOTER PROJECT (SVP)**

REPORT FOR NOVEMBER 2019

DUBUQUE, IOWA

### OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH:

Engagious conducted a roundtable conversation in Dubuque, IA on November 4<sup>th</sup> with five swing voters: four who voted for President Obama in 2012 and President Trump in 2016, and one who voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 and Hillary Clinton in 2016. We explored questions and topics surrounding the president, Democrats running for president, and 2020 issues more broadly.

### DISCLAIMER:

The key findings in this report are based upon the opinions and feedback from five swing voters in one location. They are not a representative sample, nor should they be viewed as such.

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Example: "30% of female respondents disagreed with the Medicare statement" (according to research conducted by Engagious/FPG).



1

DESPITE FEELING THAT PRESIDENT TRUMP HASN'T MADE HEALTHCARE MORE AFFORDABLE, THESE SWING VOTERS ARE SKEPTICAL ABOUT ELIZABETH WARREN'S "HEALTHCARE FOR ALL" PLAN.

We asked respondents to rate on a zero to 10 scale (from “not at all satisfied” to “very satisfied”) President Trump’s efforts to ensure healthcare is affordable for them and their family. Obama-Trump voters scored this 4.5/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scored this 2.0/10, which suggests Democrats have an opening on the issue.

We shifted the conversation to ask about the concept of “Medicare for All.” Respondents rated on a scale from zero to 10 (from “no news at all” to “a large amount of news”) how much they have heard over the past several months about “Medicare for All.” Obama-Trump voters scored this 5.5/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scored this 6.0/10. We continued by asking them to tell us how much they support or oppose eliminating private health insurance and replacing it with “Medicare for All,” on a scale from zero to 10 (from “totally oppose” to “totally support”). Overall, they oppose this idea, with Obama-Trump voters scoring this 4.5/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scoring it 3.0/10.

Then, we showed them a headline that read:

**Elizabeth Warren Releases \$20.5 Trillion Plan to Pay for ‘Medicare for All’:** Ms. Warren would impose huge tax increases on businesses and billionaires to provide free health coverage for all Americans, but she says she would not raise taxes on the middle class.

Our Romney-Clinton voter told us, “it’s a lot of money,” and she was skeptical that businesses and billionaires would be OK with paying for everyone’s healthcare. The idea seemed “so far-fetched.” Obama-Trump voters disagreed with the idea of taxing businesses and billionaires to pay for everyone’s healthcare, calling it “a pipe dream” and “unachievable.” Someone has to pay for it, and they believe it’s going to be them. When businesses are taxed, they are going to raise their prices and anyone in the country who consumes goods — including the middle class — will pay more so businesses can cover those healthcare costs.



## 2

## SWING VOTERS, TROUBLED BY THE TRUMP-UKRAINE ALLEGATIONS, WOULD SUPPORT IMPEACHMENT.



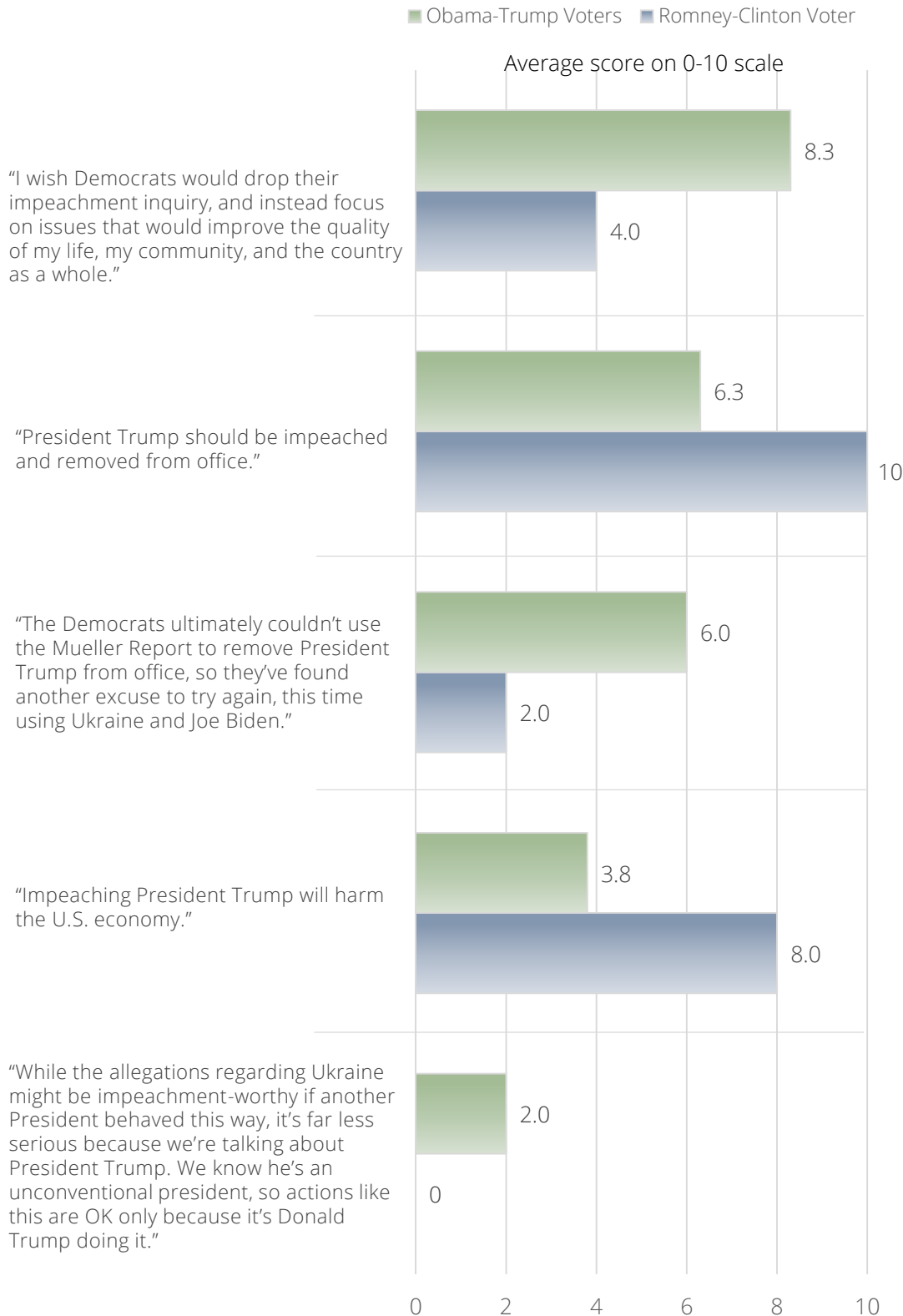
We read the following statement to respondents:

The allegation against President Trump is that in a July 25 telephone call, he asked Ukrainian President Zelensky to “look into” allegations of wrongdoing by Joe Biden, a potential 2020 competitor, and Biden’s son Hunter. A week or more before the call, Trump had directed the withholding of \$391 million in military and security aid that Congress had approved to help Ukraine defend itself against Russia. (Ukraine’s leaders reportedly found out about the withholding of funds in early August; the money was ultimately dispersed to Ukraine on September 11.) President Trump, in that July 25 call and through other actions, was allegedly using the power of his office to solicit interference from a foreign country in the 2020 U.S. election.

Respondents found these allegations troubling; on a scale from zero to 10 (from “not at all troubling” to “very troubling”), Obama-Trump voters scored this 6.8/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scored this 10/10.



Then, respondents rated some other statements about their feelings on impeachment on a scale from zero to 10 (from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”). While there is support for impeachment among swing voters, Obama-Trump voters more strongly "wish Democrats would drop their impeachment inquiry, and instead focus on issues that would improve the quality of my life, my community, and the country as a whole."





Dubuque swing voters were uncertain whether President Trump would be immediately removed from office and replaced with Vice President Pence if the House of Representatives votes to impeach him. Among Obama-Trump voters, one said that would happen, two said it wouldn't, and one didn't know. Our Romney-Clinton voter didn't know.

We asked what emotion they would feel if, after a Senate trial, they heard the news that President Trump was being removed from office and Vice President Pence was becoming President.

Obama-Trump voters listed:

- Disappointment (1)
- Curious (if the evidence was weighed correctly or if impeachment was part of an agenda) (1)
- Good (1)
- Satisfaction, ultimately (after initial disappointment and personal embarrassment for having voted for him) (1)

Our Romney-Clinton voter offered:

- Embarrassment for the country and how other countries would see us (1)

Swing voters are split over the best-case scenario for Republicans to hold on to the White House after the 2020 election if President Trump is impeached.

Best-case scenario for Republicans to hold on to the White House if Trump is impeached.	# of Obama-Trump Voters	# of Romney-Clinton Voters
President Trump is impeached by the House but NOT removed from office by the Senate and runs for re-election.	2	1
Vice President Pence becomes President after the Senate removes President Trump from office, and Pence runs for election in 2020 for a full four-year term.	2	0



Also, we told them to assume for a moment a majority in the House of Representatives votes to impeach President Trump. We asked them what statement comes closest to their feeling about how Senators Grassley and Ernst should react when it comes to the Senate trial:

Feeling about how Senators Grassly and Ernst should react when it comes to the Senate trial.	# of Obama-Trump Voters	# of Romney-Clinton Voters
No matter what evidence is presented at the trial, they should vote to acquit President Trump.	0	0
They should weigh the evidence carefully, and if they do not think the evidence demonstrates the President committed "high crimes and misdemeanors," they should vote to acquit the President.	1	0
They should weigh the evidence carefully, and if they think the evidence demonstrates the President committed "high crimes and misdemeanors," they should vote to remove the President from office.	3	1
No matter what evidence is presented at the trial, they should vote to remove President Trump from office.	0	0

## 3

## SOME OBAMA-TRUMP VOTERS ARE SHIFTING AWAY FROM PRESIDENT TRUMP.

If another presidential election were being held tomorrow between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, two Obama-Trump voters would vote for the president again, while two would support Hillary Clinton. Our Romney-Clinton voter would stick with Clinton.

Hypothetically, if the U.S. Constitution didn't prevent presidents from serving a third term, and former President Obama became the Democratic nominee to challenge President Trump's re-election, again, two Obama-Trump voters would abandon President Trump and vote for President Obama, while two would stick with him. Our Romney-Clinton voter would vote for President Obama.

Obama-Trump voters who would stick with President Trump say he's "fearless" and "tells it like it is." They also said he has done more for the working class in this country, and he's focused more on the economic development of this country, than President Obama. For those who would vote for President Obama in a Trump-Obama matchup, they think President Trump is "too radical" and don't like that he lies and calls people names. In their view, President Obama acted more "presidential" and is a "better-spoken man."

Notably, these swing voters don't expect Trump to win. We asked, "Imagine I gave you \$100, and told you to place a \$100 bet on the outcome of the 2020 election. Which candidate or party do you expect to win in November 2020, and how confident are you in your expectation?" Zero means you are totally confident the Democratic nominee will win, and 10 means you are totally confident President Trump will win. Obama-Trump voters scored this 4.0/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scored this 5.0/10.

We followed this up by asking, "I want you to think for a moment about an adult in your life you can talk to about anything, including politics, and do so comfortably, without feeling at all awkward. On a scale from zero to 10, how likely are you to recommend that person vote for President Trump in 2020? Zero means not at all likely, and 10 means very likely." Interestingly, Obama-Trump voters scored this 3.8/10, indicating that, on average, they are more likely to not recommend they vote for President Trump in 2020. Our Romney-Clinton voter scored this 5.0/10.



Obama-Trump voters like this about the president:

- He effectively communicates his message (1)
- He’s assertive and unshaken—he stands his ground, even with so much opposition (1)
- He’s standing up for our country, working to improve trade deals and getting other countries to pay toward our military expenses overseas so we’re not carrying the load (1)
- His stand on illegal immigration—we shouldn’t tolerate it (1)

Our Romney-Clinton voter offered:

- He’s a businessman, not a politician (1)

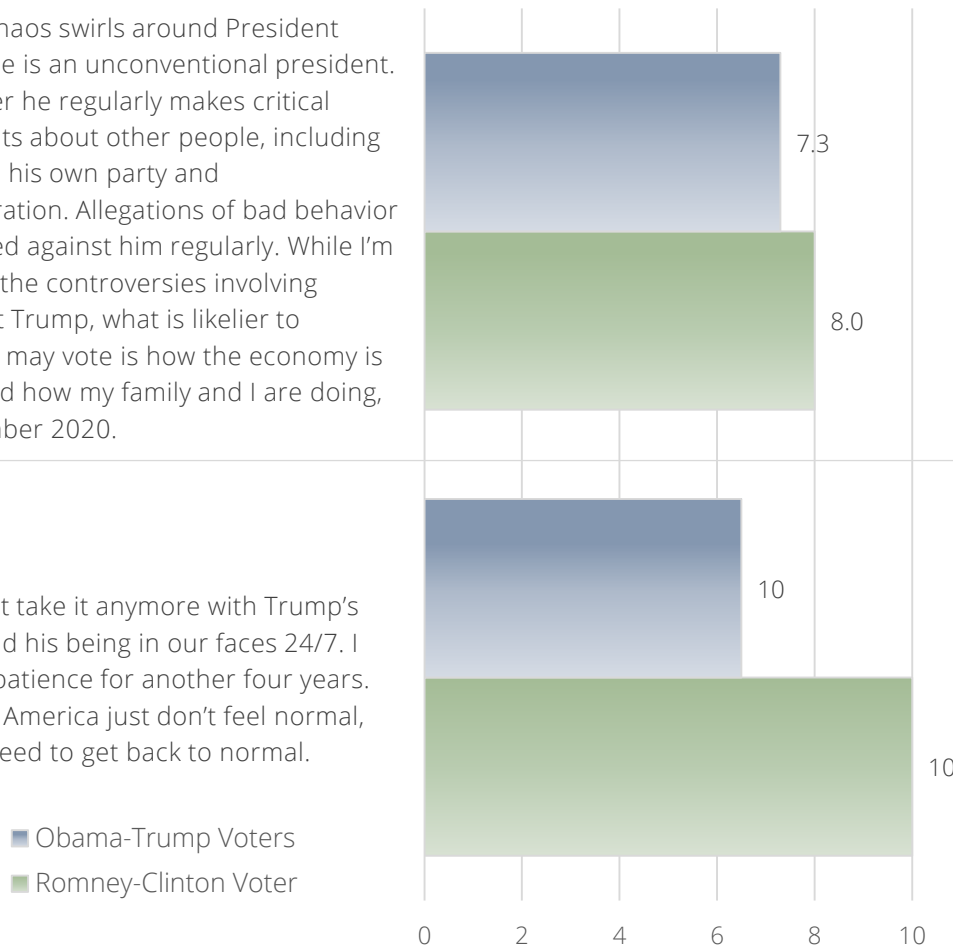
The state of our economy in November 2020 will have a significant impact on whether swing voters decide to re-elect the president. They indicated that without the economic progress under this president, they would be satisfied “to get back to normal.”

Respondents told us how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements about President Trump, on a zero to 10 scale. Zero means they totally disagreed, and 10 means they totally agreed.

Average score on 0-10 scale

A lot of chaos swirls around President Trump. He is an unconventional president. On Twitter he regularly makes critical statements about other people, including people in his own party and administration. Allegations of bad behavior are leveled against him regularly. While I’m aware of the controversies involving president Trump, what is likelier to influence my vote is how the economy is doing, and how my family and I are doing, in November 2020.

I just can’t take it anymore with Trump’s antics, and his being in our faces 24/7. I have no patience for another four years. Things in America just don’t feel normal, and we need to get back to normal.







Swing voters feel the following emotions when they watch President Trump on TV or their device. Obama-Trump voters listed:

- Good (about having a strong leader) (1)
- Empowered (1)
- Embarrassment (1)
- My blood pressure increases (too many lies) (1)

Our Romney-Clinton voter offered:

- Frustration (1)

If swing voters were advising the president's Democratic challenger and were asked to come up with a phrase built upon "Make America \_\_\_\_\_ Again," they would choose:

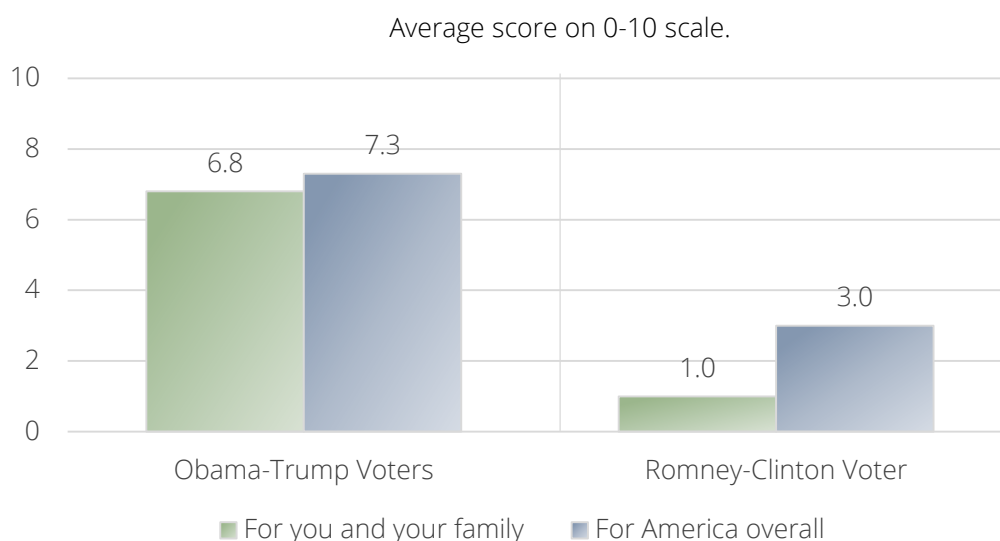
- Strong (2)
- Stable (1)
- Humble (1)
- Honest (1)

## 4

## OBAMA-TRUMP VOTERS THINK THE ECONOMY HAS DONE WELL, BUT THEY'RE BECOMING INCREASINGLY PESSIMISTIC AND FEAR A RECESSION.

With the unemployment rate at 3.6% nationally, near the lowest it has been in five decades, and the stock market hovering near an all-time high, two Obama-Trump voters would say the economy is “booming.” They cited low unemployment, increasing wages, the stock market at an all-time high, and, generally, people seem to be living better.

Swing voters rated on a scale from zero to 10 how the economy has performed since Donald Trump became president (from “gotten much worse” to “gotten much better”).



Two Obama-Trump voters have seen a noticeable increase in wages since Donald Trump became president, although only one attributes that to him. The others don't blame President Trump for not getting an increase in wages because, “it would be hard to attribute that to any president.”

The president could become vulnerable on the economy because Obama-Trump voters' sense of economic optimism is waning. When asked how likely it is that the U.S. economy will enter a recession sometime in the next year (from “no chance it will enter a recession” to “it's already in recession”), they scored it 7.0/10, while our Romney-Clinton voter scored it 6.0/10.

They also indicated they have become less confident in President Trump's handling of the economy over the last several months. On a zero to 10 scale (from “less confident” to “more confident”), Obama-Trump voters scored this 4.8/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scored this 3.0/10. Obama-Trump voters told us the president has allowed the trade issue with China to linger, and it hasn't been resolved in a timely manner. Also, the economy could be heading toward a recession and the Federal Reserve doesn't have the tools to stop that from happening with the way our monetary policy is now.



We told respondents to assume for a moment that an economic recession occurs before the next election, and we asked them to rate on a zero to 10 scale how that would affect their view of President Trump (from “my support for him will erode substantially” to “my support for him will grow substantially”). Notably, both groups indicated their support would erode, with Obama-Trump voters scoring this 2.0/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scoring this 4.0/10.

When asked about the most significant problem with our economic system today, two – including our Romney-Clinton voter – indicated low wages, one said lack of loyalty between companies and employees, and two said “something else.” Notably, no one indicated it’s “too much regulation of large companies” or “too little regulation of large companies.” Also, we asked what the “most important responsibility” is for U.S. companies. Two said providing benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans to employees, two – including our Romney-Clinton voter – said providing employees with higher wages, and one said making money for shareholders. No one said “speaking out on social and political issues.”

During the roundtable discussion, we asked:

Some people say that compared to urban parts of America, rural areas have much greater difficulty accessing such items as high-speed internet, hospitals, and healthy food. On a scale from zero to 10 (from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”), how strongly do you agree or disagree that there is a gap between what urban and rural communities can access?

Swing voters agreed, with Obama-Trump voters scoring this 6.5/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scoring this 10/10. However, there is some disagreement between the two types of voters about how active the government should be in helping to close this urban-rural gap. We asked them to rate on a scale from zero to 10, from “government should not be involved at all” to “government should be actively involved.” Obama-Trump voters scored this 4.3/10, indicating slight disagreement, while our Romney-Clinton voter agreed (7.0/10).

## 5

## AS THE "TRADE WAR" DRAGS ON, THE PRESIDENT BECOMES MORE VULNERABLE ON THIS ISSUE.



President Trump's actions on trade will affect how respondents vote. From zero ("have no impact on my vote") to 10 ("have a significant impact on my vote"), Obama-Trump voters scored this at 6.8/10. Our Romney-Clinton voter scored this 3.0/10.

They also rated how much they support or oppose the tariffs the Trump Administration has placed on the imports of certain goods, on a scale from zero to 10 (from "totally oppose" to "totally support"). Swing voters aren't supportive of tariffs, with Obama-Trump voters scoring this 4.8/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scoring this 5.0/10.

Obama-Trump voters believe the Trump Administration's trade policies have been bad for Iowa farmers, scoring it 1.8/10 on a zero to 10 scale, from "very bad for Iowa farmers" to "very good for Iowa farmers." Our Romney-Clinton voter scored this 5.0/10. No one in our group has been helped or know someone who has been helped by the president's trade policies, but two know someone who has been harmed, with both citing relatives who are farmers.

Four of the five swing voters – including the Romney-Clinton voter – believe American consumers pay for the tariffs imposed on imported goods (as opposed to others). Three feel they're already paying higher prices for goods because of the tariffs imposed by the Trump Administration, including our Romney-Clinton voter.

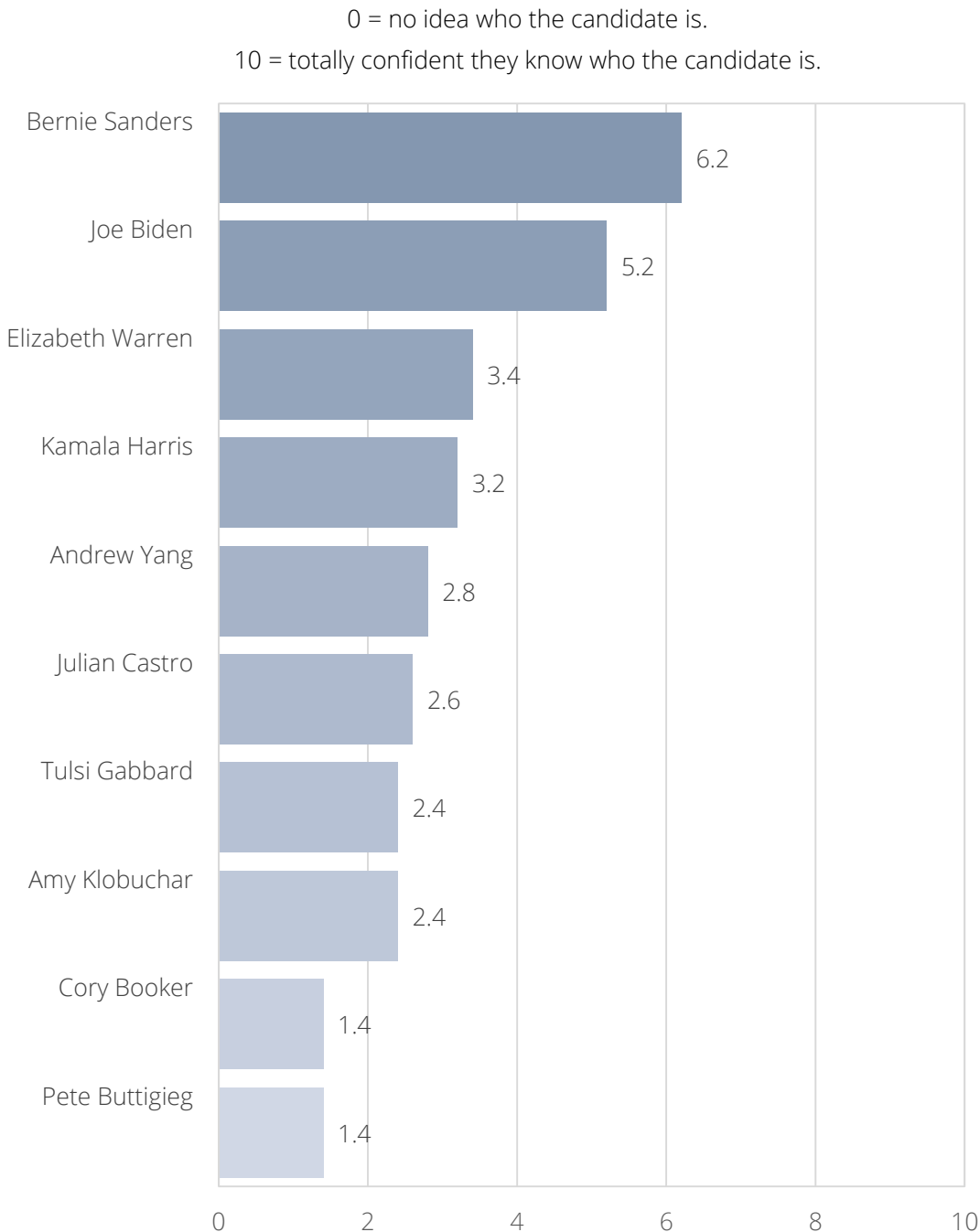
All five believe America's efforts to secure a fairer trade deal with China, to help American exporters and to protect our intellectual property, are worth the financial pain from higher prices on imports we buy from other countries. We told respondents to assume for a moment that a "trade war" with China causes prices to rise noticeably for them and their family, and asked how that would affect their view of President Trump on a zero to 10 scale (from "my support for him will erode substantially" to "my support for him will grow substantially"). Importantly, the president's support among Obama-Trump voters would significantly erode (3.0/10), and our Romney-Clinton voter shared that mindset (2.0/10). Swing voters are willing to bear some financial pain from higher prices on imports we buy from other countries to secure a fairer trade deal with China, but they'll punish President Trump if that happens. If he can secure a favorable trade deal for the American people, it would work to his advantage politically.

## 6

## SWING VOTERS ARE NOT VERY FAMILIAR WITH THE DEMOCRATS RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT.

Respondents indicated with their dials their level of confidence in being able to identify unlabeled photos of each of the major Democrats running for president in 2020, on a zero to 10 scale. Zero means they had no idea who the candidate is, and 10 means they were totally confident they know who the candidate is.

The following chart shows the results, on average, in descending order:





Months after Democrats began announcing their candidacies for president and following four primary debates, swing voters indicated many of the candidates aren't recognizable to them. Notably, three of our swing voters get most of their news from Facebook. The other two get their news from CNN and local sources (newspaper and news radio), respectively. These are among the lowest scores for these candidates we have seen in months.

We also showed unlabeled photos of Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Adam Schiff to see how recognizable they are to swing voters. They are also not well-recognized with these swing voters rating them at 2.6/10 and 2.4/10, respectively.

There was no consensus in the group that any of the candidates "excites" them. An Obama-Trump voter told us he's, "as excited as I'm going to get" about Joe Biden; another cited Tom Steyer (who appeared in a video we showed them with clips from the October 15<sup>th</sup> debate). There was a clear lack of enthusiasm for most of the candidates, and they could not think of anyone not running who they would like to see run for president.

We followed this conversation by asking what a Democrat running for president would need to say or do to get them to vote for him or her, and not Trump, next year. Obama-Trump voters offered<sup>1</sup>:

- Provide a good solution to the trade issues we face
- Tax cuts for the middle class and lower class
- Discuss the bad things President Trump is doing right now and then say how you'll improve it
- Stop fighting unjust wars
- Stop spending money we don't have
- Say what you're going to do to empower organized labor

Our Romney-Clinton voter told us there's no way she's voting for President Trump. She expects to vote in the Iowa Democratic caucus in February 2020.

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<sup>1</sup>Two Obama-Trump voters provided two answers.

## 7

## THERE WAS NO CONSENSUS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR SWING VOTERS HEADING INTO 2020.



In the beginning of the roundtable discussion, we asked respondents to name their top issue of concern heading into 2020. They cited<sup>2</sup>:

- Veterans' benefits and how they're treated (1)
- The economy – how we're going to maintain or supersede what we've been doing (1)
- Immigration – it's a "problem" in some places (1)
- Building the wall isn't a good idea – it provides a false sense of security and it won't be helpful to our country (1)
- The two parties stop fighting each other "tooth and nail" and start fighting for the people to get things done in this country (1)
- The inability to settle our trade issues between the U.S. and China (assessing tariffs on both sides) (1)

Only one respondent – an Obama-Trump voter – feels the Democrats running for president are speaking about the national issues he cares most about.

When asked to name the one thing a presidential candidate could propose that would help them economically, they cited:

- Equal opportunity for people of color in the labor market
- Tax the super-rich more so the rest of us can pay less taxes
- Reduce income taxes for the middle and lower class people
- Reduce the burden of student loans
- Investments in infrastructure - empower the AFL-CIO to help us be more competitive (1)

Respondents rated the direction of our country and the direction of Iowa on a zero to 10 scale, from "totally wrong direction" to "totally right direction." Interestingly, swing voters on average scored the direction of Iowa (6.6/10) higher than the direction of the country (5.8/10). They told us the state is "very conservative" but still can be "very progressive" on some issues, providing a good balance both socially and economically. Also, they told us many people in Iowa are Catholic (morality is important to them) and it has older people with "more common sense," and, "a good idea of what's going on." They also said a lot of jobs are available in Iowa, which is "a positive thing."

<sup>2</sup>One Obama-Trump voter provided two answers.



Swing voters would ask Democratic candidates the following questions:

- Is there anything substantial you can do to help the lower class actually progress in society?
- What are you going to do about the trade wars going on?
- What is your stance on labor?
- How are you different from the Republicans?
- Why don't you get rid of the lobbyists?

Questions for President Trump included:

- Why did you run for president?
- Why do you always try to dominate a conversation, interrupting others and not allowing them to speak?
- Could you do more on tax breaks for the lower and middle class?
- Can you please calm down?

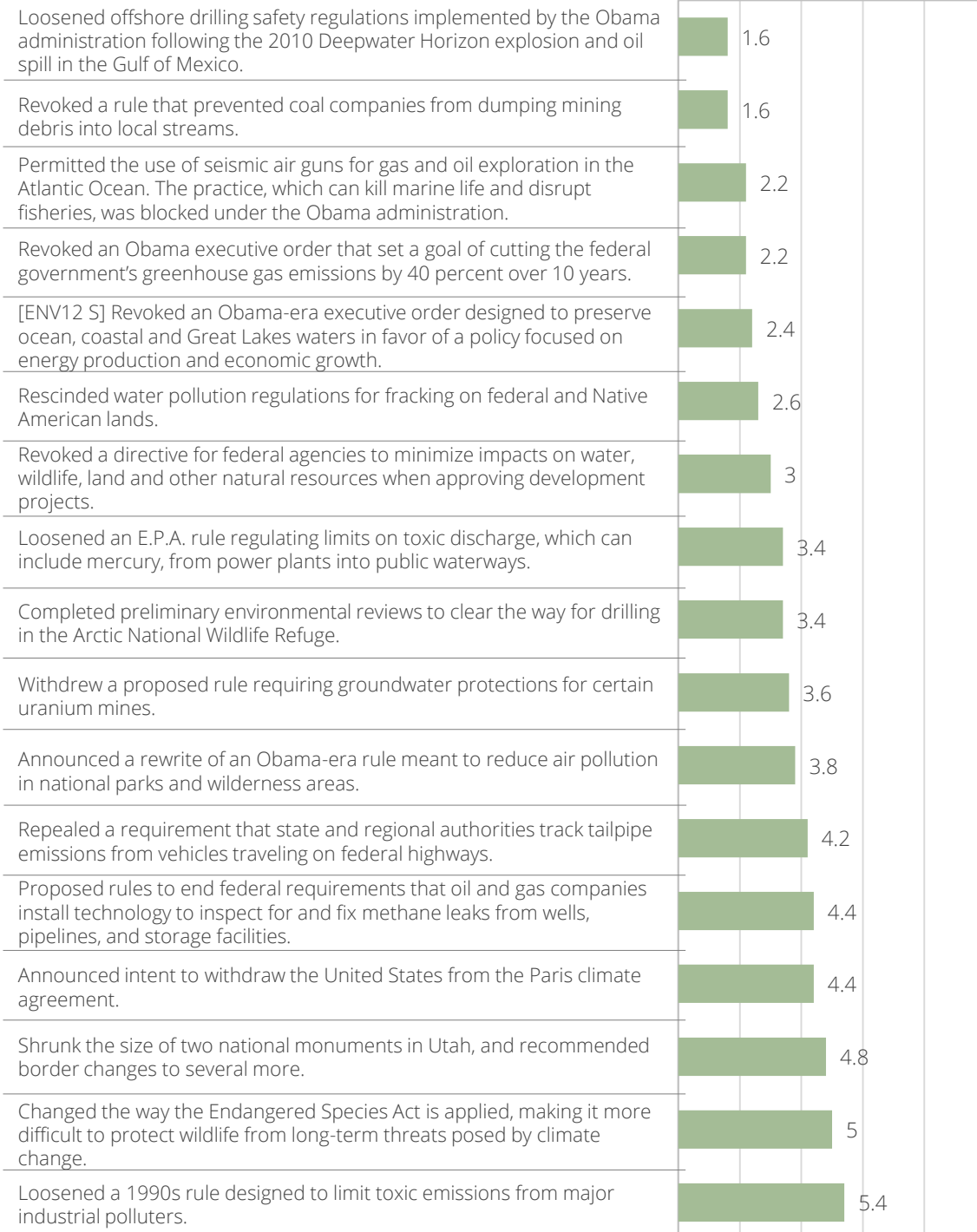


8

THE MORE SWING VOTERS LEARN THE SPECIFICS OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S EFFORTS TO LOOSEN ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS, THE LESS THEY SUPPORT THOSE EFFORTS.

We showed a list of steps taken or proposed by the Trump Administration as it relates to the environment, and asked respondents to rate each on a zero to 10 scale (from "totally oppose" to "totally support"). The following chart shows them in ascending order, from most opposed to most supported:

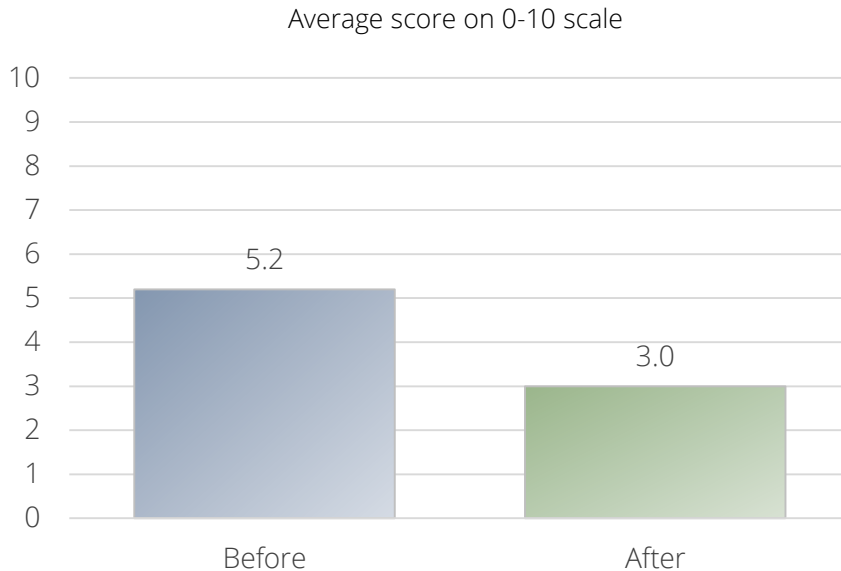
Average score on 0-10 scale





Before and after we read the 17 regulations the Trump Administration has rolled back or is looking to roll back, we asked:

The Trump Administration has rolled back, or is looking to roll back, a wide variety of regulations related to the environment. On a scale from zero to 10 (from “totally oppose” to “totally support”), how much do you support or oppose these efforts?



## 9

## SWING VOTERS BELIEVE THE WEATHER IN RECENT YEARS SEEMS “WEIRD.”

Respondents have heard very little over the past several months about the “Green New Deal.” On a zero to 10 scale, from “no news at all” to “a large amount of news,” Obama-Trump voters scored it 2.5/10 and our Romney-Clinton voter scored it 3.0/10.

On average, swing voters agree with the idea that “compared to when you were much younger, the weather in recent years seems weird.” On a zero to 10 scale (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”), Obama-Trump voters scored this 6.0/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scored this 8.0/10. They cited more severe fires and floods, the polar vortex, and a shift to basically two seasons now, winter and summer, with fall and spring having “dropped off,” leading to more extreme changes in weather.

They agreed less with the idea that “compared to when you were much younger, certain months seem warmer now,” with Obama-Trump voters scoring this 4.8/10, and our Romney-Clinton voter scoring this 3.0/10.



# 10 THERE WAS A MIXED REACTION TO WITHDRAWING FROM SYRIA.

During the discussion, we asked:

What was your initial reaction when you heard President Trump was withdrawing U.S. troops from Syria?

Initial reaction to hearing that President Trump is withdrawing U.S. troops from Syria.	# of Obama-Trump Voters	Romney-Clinton Voter
You had not heard that news until now	0	0
You didn't know the U.S. had troops in Syria, but think withdrawing is a good thing	0	0
You didn't know the U.S. had troops in Syria, but think withdrawing is a bad thing	1	1
You knew the U.S. had troops in Syria, and think withdrawing is a good thing	2	0
You knew the U.S. had troops in Syria, and think withdrawing is a bad thing	1	0

Three of our five swing voters believe withdrawing troops from Syria is “a bad thing,” whether they knew we had troops there or not. They told us it seems we’re supposed to be there and withdrawing looks like “retreat.” Also, those who helped us fight ISIS in the region are the ones getting “slaughtered” as a result of our withdrawal. Those who believe it’s “a good thing” for us to withdraw troops from Syria said the U.S. military is a big expense to the country and we have constraints that prevent us from being involved “everywhere in the world.” Also, we heard that our country is involved in too many wars, and if we could get our troops out of some of them, they would support that.

In addition, we were interested in finding out from respondents how important the state of the economy is compared to national security issues (North Korea, Iran, Russia, etc.) when they vote next year. We asked them to rate this question on a scale from zero to 10 (from “national security is far less important to you than the health of the economy” to “national security is far more important to you than the health of the economy”). Obama-Trump voters (5.0/10) believe these are equally important, on average, while our Romney-Clinton voter (8.0/10) believes national security issues are more important than the state of our economy.