



Engagious

FPG Focus Pointe
Global

SWING VOTER PROJECT (SVP)

REPORT FOR MARCH 2020

EDINA, MINNESOTA

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH:

Engagious conducted a focus group in Edina, MN on March 9th with 11 swing voters: 10 who voted for President Obama in 2012 and then 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 11 swing voters in one location. They do not represent the views of all swing voters.

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





1

FOR EDINA SWING VOTERS, THE TOP ISSUES HEADING INTO ELECTION 2020 ARE THE COST OF HEALTHCARE, IMMIGRATION, AND CORONAVIRUS

In the beginning of the focus group, respondents named their top issue of concern heading into 2020:

- The cost of healthcare (5)
- Immigration (2)
- coronavirus (2)
- Gun violence, especially impacting kids in school (1)
- The national budget, especially military spending (it's too high) (1)

Respondents also named the one thing a presidential candidate could propose that would help them economically:

- Reduce healthcare costs, including premiums
- Reduce my taxes
- Keep the Trump tax plan in place
- Reduce military spending to help fund other things, such as healthcare and education
- Provide assistance with student loan debt (e.g., allow people to pay it off slowly)

Our swing voters rated the direction of our country and the direction of Minnesota on a zero to 10 scale (from “totally wrong direction” to “totally right direction”), giving the slight edge to Minnesota, 6.2/10 to 6.0/10. Those who are slightly positive about the direction of our country cited our economic progress and our handling of issues with other countries, including border issues, despite the tensions between Democrats and Republicans.

Swing voters would ask Joe Biden:

- What are you going to do differently from President Trump?
- What are you going to do to earn my vote?
- What are you going to do to make my life better than it is now? (“We’re not doing bad.”)
- How do you differentiate yourself from President Obama?
- What can you do to get the Democratic Party back together?

Questions for President Trump included:

- What has your greatest accomplishment been as president so far?
- Are you going to continue to be the same as you have been the last several years or are you going to do anything different?
- Why don't you seem more concerned about coronavirus?
- Why do you use Twitter?

2

EDINA SWING VOTERS FEEL THAT PRESIDENT TRUMP IS IN A STRONG POSITION TO TAKE ON JOE BIDEN OR BERNIE SANDERS IN THE GENERAL ELECTION, AND HE WOULD DEFEAT EACH ONE HANDILY IF THE ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY.

In a hypothetical matchup in the 2020 election between former Vice President Joe Biden and President Trump, the president would win over eight of our 11 swing voters. The president would also win over eight of our 11 swing voters in a hypothetical matchup in the 2020 election between Senator Bernie Sanders and President Trump.

Respondents completed a written exercise to tell us which candidate they would vote for and why in each of these two hypothetical scenarios.

FORMER VICE PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN VS. PRESIDENT TRUMP

Those who would choose President Trump say he has led us into a good economy and he's a good leader. He does what he says he's going to do and takes on difficult issues, such as immigration. He is experienced with the job now, and with his "great accomplishments," they don't want someone else coming in to change things. They want President Trump to continue to do what he has been doing. Also, we heard reservations about Joe Biden, with them saying he lacks competency, he lacks integrity (as shown by the "corrupt" dealings involving his son), and he says what he thinks people want to hear.

Those who would choose Joe Biden in this hypothetical matchup told us it's time for a change from President Trump. They trust him and support many of his policies. They believe there's a "lack of diplomacy" in the country right now and Biden would help fix that.

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS VS. PRESIDENT TRUMP

Those who would vote for President Trump told us they want to "stay the course" because he has done a good job for the country. They feel secure, and good financially, so they aren't interested in making any big changes. They believe Sanders has too much of a "socialist mentality"—his plans are too expensive and not feasible.

Those who would choose Sanders over Trump told us he is trustworthy as he has been consistent with his policy positions throughout his career. We heard support for his position on healthcare and Medicare for All, which was described as a top concern for the plurality of our swing voters heading into the 2020 election. Lastly, we heard he was "robbed of the nomination in 2016" and "deserves his chance."





Notably, none of the eight swing voters who would choose President Trump over Joe Biden would change their mind if their home-state U.S. Senator, Amy Klobuchar, were Biden's vice presidential pick. They told us he would be the figurehead for the country. The vice president doesn't do very much, and her policies wouldn't influence him.

Not only would most of our swing voters choose President Trump over Biden or Sanders in hypothetical matchups, but they expect him to defeat either one of them.

They have such a high level of confidence that if they were placing a \$100 bet on the outcome of the election, they would say their confidence in Trump's winning would score at 7 on a zero to 10 scale (from zero being "you are totally confident Joe Biden/Bernie Sanders will win" to 10 being "you are totally confident President Trump will win"). Specifically, for Biden vs. Trump, they scored this 7.0/10, and for Sanders vs. Trump, they scored this 7.1/10.

Respondents listed reasons why they're so confident Trump will win re-election:

- Based on what they read and hear, he continues to have a strong base of support
- He has the incumbency advantage
- Biden is a weak candidate—he wouldn't do well in a debate against Trump, his corruption will come to light, and he's too old



3

MOST EDINA SWING VOTERS ARE STICKING WITH PRESIDENT TRUMP IN 2020, CITING PROGRESS FOR OUR COUNTRY AND HIS ENGAGEMENT WITH THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

If another presidential election were being held tomorrow between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, 10 of our 11 swing voters would vote for the president again, including all 10 Obama-Trump voters.

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, seven would vote for President Trump and four would vote for President Obama.

Six of our respondents hope the Democrats nominate a candidate for president who is easy for President Trump to beat, while five would prefer they nominate someone who can beat him.

Swing voters listed what they like about President Trump politically:

- He's not a politician – he's about the country and wants to make it better
- He's been extremely engaging with the American people in a lot of ways that we haven't seen from previous presidents – he speaks to the people directly and not through the media
- He's not afraid to say what's on his mind (“Political correctness is out the window.”)
- He has improved our trade deals with China, Mexico, and Canada
- He's tough on immigration (he doesn't want to let everyone into the country)

When they watch President Trump on TV or on their device, they feel:

- Politically engaged (2)
- Unpredictable (2)
- Happy (1)
- Powerful – he's powerful, so I feel more powerful as a citizen being in this country (1)
- Secure, knowing he's doing good things for the country (1)
- Tense, in a good way (1)
- Apprehensive, but hopeful in what he's saying (1)
- Nervous – you don't know what he's going to say (1)
- Embarrassed—how is our country looking to the world? (1)

Our swing voters don't have a high level of trust in the media's coverage of President Trump, scoring this 3.8/10 (from “totally mistrust” to “totally trust”), and they feel slightly positively, on average, about his tweets, scoring them 5.1/10 (from “I hate them” to “I love them”).

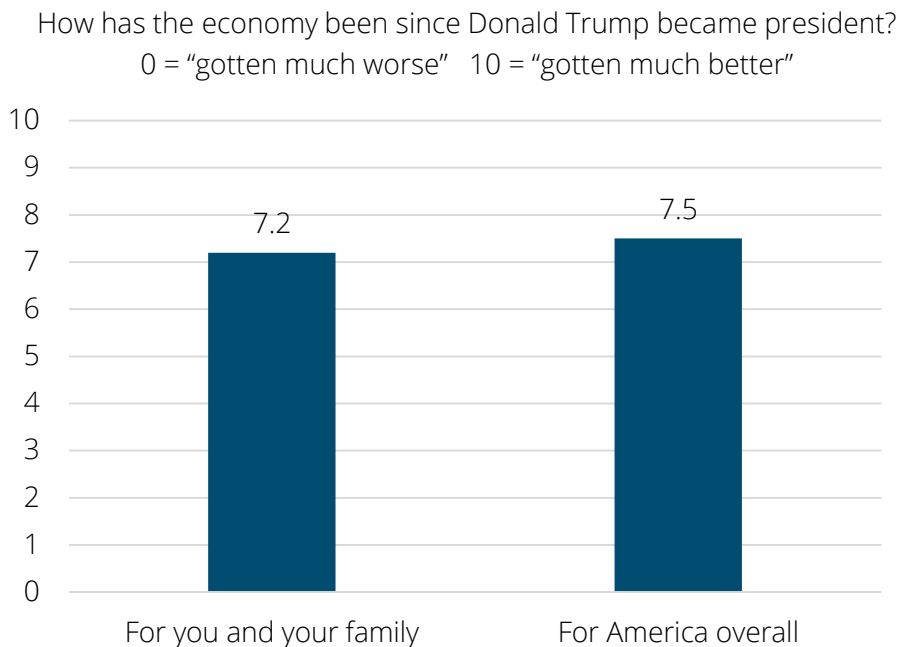
Swing voters are somewhat likely, on average, to recommend to an adult in their life they can talk to about anything, including politics, that they vote for President Trump in 2020, scoring this 6.5/10 (from “not at all likely” to “very likely”).

4

THE U.S. ECONOMY UNDER PRESIDENT TRUMP HAS BEEN GOOD FOR EDINA SWING VOTERS, WHICH WILL PLAY A KEY ROLE IN THEIR 2020 VOTE, BUT CORONAVIRUS HAS RECENTLY DAMPENED THEIR OPTIMISM ABOUT IT.

With the unemployment rate at 3.5% nationally, the lowest it has been in five decades, and the stock market volatility over the past two weeks, only two of our swing voters believe the U.S. economy is “booming,” including our Romney-Clinton voter. It’s notable that the economic impact from coronavirus has really taken a toll on their optimism about the U.S. economy. Last month, all 11 said they would have described it as “booming.”

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



Most of our swing voters believe they are better off now than they were four years ago.

Swing voters tend to believe, on average, that the U.S. economy will not enter a recession sometime in the next year, scoring it 4.7/10 (from “no chance it will enter recession” to “it’s already in recession”).

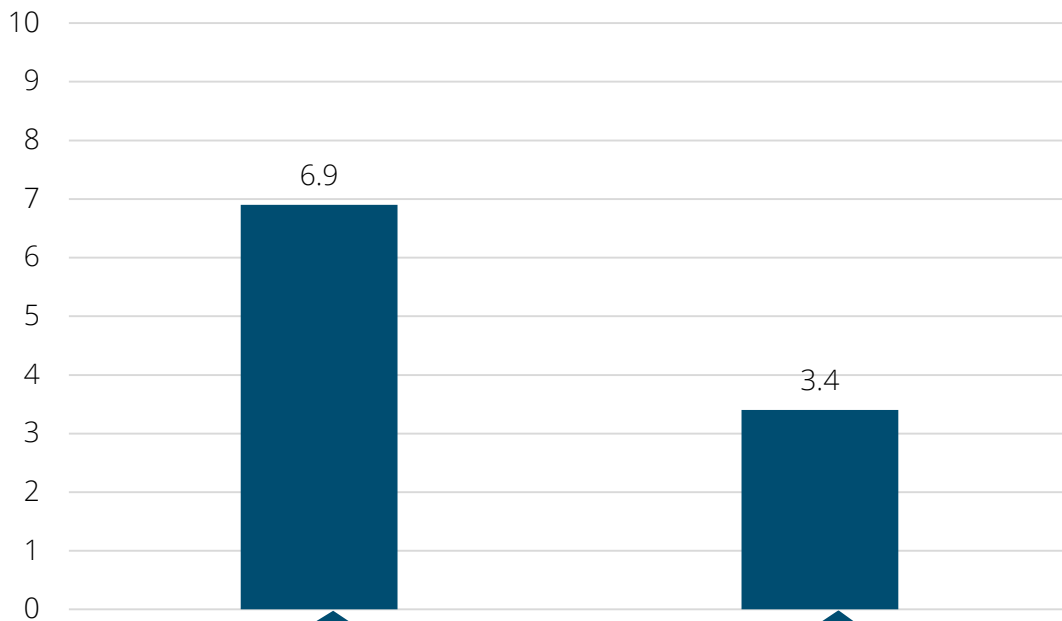
They believe the U.S. economy has been fairly strong—barring the impacts from coronavirus—and their confidence in President Trump’s handling of it has increased over the last several months, scoring it 6.5/10 (from “less confident in President Trump’s handling of the economy” to “more confident in President Trump’s handling of the economy”).



The state of our economy in November will have a significant impact on whether swing voters decide to re-elect the president. As the chart below shows, our swing voters are far more interested in the state of the economy in November than getting back to “normal” and moving away from this president. If coronavirus doesn't derail what our swing voters believe has been a strong economy, President Trump is in a strong position to win re-election.

Respondents told us how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements about President Trump, on a zero to 10 scale (from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”).

Do you agree or disagree with these statements about President Trump?
 0 = Totally disagree 10 = Totally agree



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.



The good news for President Trump is at this point, they aren't looking to punish him for the negative economic impacts of coronavirus. Respondents rated the impact on their support for President Trump's re-election if coronavirus turns out to trigger a recession, on a scale from zero to 10 (from "much less likely to support President Trump's re-election" to "much more likely to support President Trump's re-election"). Interestingly, they scored this 5.4/10, on average, indicating their support for him would slightly increase.

We pushed our swing voters on this issue to better understand their thinking, telling them to imagine we're in a recession and people are losing their jobs, citing the economic headwinds faced by President Carter in 1980 and President Bush, Sr. in 1992. They trust President Trump's ability to resolve the situation and we heard this is a temporary problem that won't impact the country long-term.

Even if coronavirus were to trigger a recession, they wouldn't blame him for it. He's "not all powerful" and it's "not under his control," but he would do a better job of getting us out of it. Some were skeptical that the U.S. economy, which has been strong with low interest rates, would decline so rapidly before the election that President Trump's re-election prospects would be harmed.

5

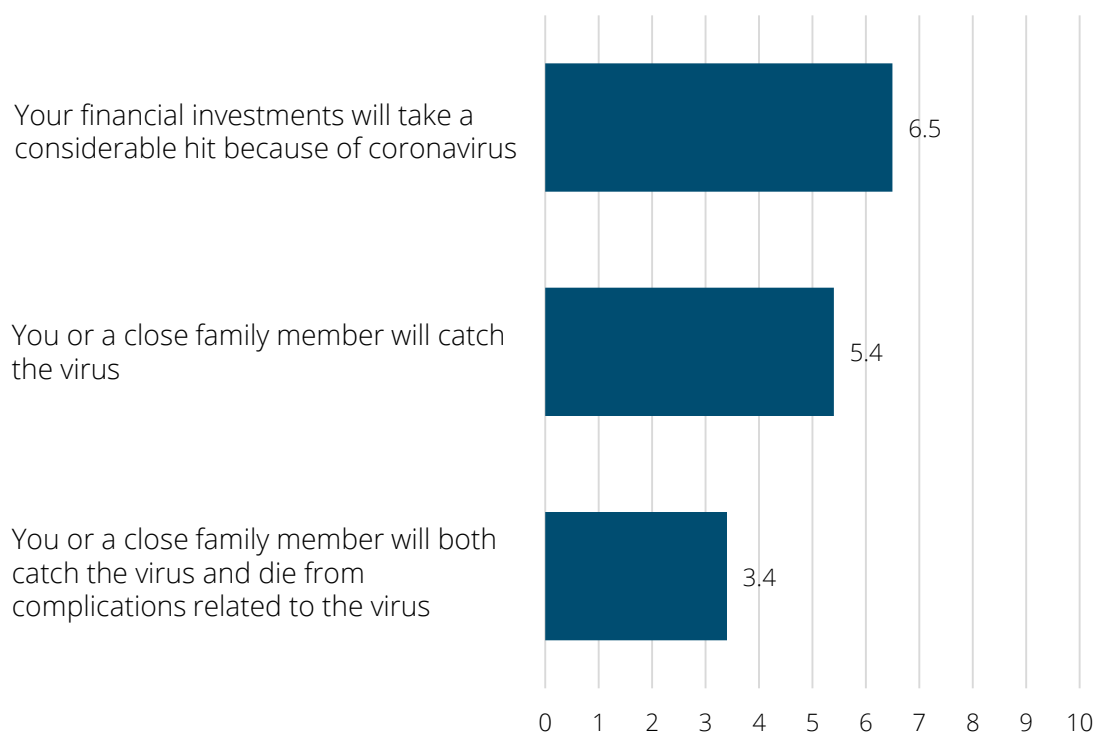
EDINA SWING VOTERS ARE MORE CONCERNED THAT CORONAVIRUS WILL CAUSE THEIR FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS TO TAKE A CONSIDERABLE HIT THAN THAT THEY OR A CLOSE FAMILY MEMBER WILL CATCH THE VIRUS AND DIE FROM IT.

Respondents rated how strongly they approve or disapprove of President Trump's handling of the coronavirus situation, on a scale from zero to 10 (from "strongly disapprove" to "strongly approve"), scoring it 4.9/10. They are fairly neutral as a group because while he doesn't seem as concerned about it as some think he should be, he is taking action to address it, including approving \$8.3 billion to fight it and assembling a team of people to help him with the issue. They believe he is doing as well as he can, given the circumstances.

Only one swing voter—an Obama-Trump voter—thinks Joe Biden would be doing a better job than President Trump managing the response to coronavirus because he would rely more on the people who understand the issue and "do this for a living."

Also, they rated how concerned they are, realistically speaking, about a number of potential impacts from coronavirus, on a scale from zero to 10 (from "not at all concerned" to "very concerned"). This chart shows their responses in descending order, from most concerned to least concerned:

How concerned are you about these potential impacts from coronavirus?
0 = Not at all concerned 10 = Very concerned





Most swing voters view coronavirus more as a financial crisis than a health crisis. They are observing steep declines in the stock market and the markets even stopped trading one day, which was “alarming.” However, they aren’t selling their investments. They are holding onto them and some are buying more, focusing on the long-term.

Generally speaking, they’re not changing their behaviors as a result of the recent news about coronavirus. Only one respondent has canceled a trip (a cruise), only one has cut back on spending for non-essentials, and none have stocked up on food since the outbreak.

Since the outbreak started, the “dumbest thing” they have heard about coronavirus is:

- You can avoid contracting the virus by snorting cocaine
- You should wash your hands in vodka
- The virus has some connection to Corona beer
- Only Asians can carry the virus or they are more susceptible to get it (but in reality, anyone can get it)
- People are fighting over toilet paper because they think they’ll be quarantined

They believe hotels, airlines, and restaurants should take a number of steps to protect guests from coronavirus. In hotels, they should have hand sanitizers in the room, provide Clorox wipes to clean door handles and other surfaces, and implement a more stringent cleaning policy, telling guests which additional steps they’re taking to clean the room to reassure them.

Airlines should provide Clorox wipes to clean surfaces that guests would come into contact with and have people with symptoms wear face masks. Almost all of our swing voters would be comfortable having the airline take their temperature before allowing them to fly, saying it’s not an invasion of privacy.

In restaurants, employees should wash their hands and use hairnets. If any employee has symptoms of coronavirus, they should be told to stay home from work. Restaurants can take other steps, too, including providing Clorox wipes so guests can clean menus at their table.

Most swing voters agree that it’s OK for President Trump to pressure drug companies to come up with a vaccine for coronavirus, but they were wary of the federal government demanding that drug companies provide free or heavily discounted drugs to those who contract the virus. They told us it sets a bad precedent and they want drug companies investing in the development of a vaccine—and if they know they cannot recoup their investment, they won’t make it.



We showed a series of brief clips featuring a number of prominent figures talking about coronavirus, including Dr. Anne Schuchat (CDC), Dr. Amy Acton (OH Dept. of Health), President Trump, former Vice President Biden, Richard Fain (Chairman and CEO of Royal Caribbean), and Tim Buckley (CEO of Vanguard). Respondents rated on a scale from zero to 100 how much they agreed or disagreed with what they were hearing, moment-to-moment (from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”).

Most of the messaging from these people was mediocre, but it’s notable that the highest-scoring messaging overall was from Tim Buckley, who acknowledges that “the health risk is real, and the short term business impact has been significant,” while reassuring them that “the economic consequences are unlikely to be long-term.” He urges them to “stay the course” and keep a “long-term perspective.” This messaging reached 74/100 in the dial test. The end of Vice President Biden’s messaging about listening to the scientists also was well-received.

6

EDINA SWING VOTERS HAVEN'T HEARD MUCH NEWS ABOUT THE GREEN NEW DEAL, BUT WHEN THEY FIND OUT ITS COST AND POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THEM PERSONALLY, THEY OPPOSE IT.

Respondents rated how much news they have heard over the past several months about a concept called the “Green New Deal,” scoring it 2.2/10 (from “no news at all” to “a large amount of news”).

We provided the following background on the plan:

The Green New Deal is a proposal that its proponents say will tackle climate change and fuel economic growth by moving away from fossil fuels to 100% clean and renewable energy in just 10 years. It would provide job retraining for those working in the oil, natural gas, and coal sectors. It would also provide federal guarantees for housing, jobs, and healthcare.

Then, respondents rated how much they support or oppose this Green New Deal proposal, scoring it 5.0/10 (from “totally oppose” to “totally support”). Interestingly, no one scored this at 5/10—everyone was either positive or negative about the idea. Those who were positive about it like the idea of clean and renewable energy in 10 years. Those who were negative about it told us it doesn't sound well-thought-out and sounds like a “ploy” to get voters and to create a sense that they're in crisis. Also, it sounds very expensive, including federal guarantees for housing, jobs, and healthcare.

We followed this by presenting a different view of the plan:

Opponents of the Green New Deal say it would be costly to the average American, citing Bernie Sanders' \$16 trillion price tag for his climate change plan. Sanders says he'll fund that partly by taxing oil companies. Critics say at least some of the costs would be passed onto average Americans.

With this additional information, respondents rated how much they support or oppose the Green New Deal proposal, scoring it 3.6/10 (from “totally oppose” to “totally support”). They were put off by the \$16 trillion price tag, indicating they don't want to pay for it.





Respondents completed the following sentence: “I would be willing to pay ___ dollars more a month to help combat climate change.”¹

- \$0 (2)
- \$5 (2)
- \$10 (1)
- \$20 (1)
- \$25 (2)
- \$50 (1)
- \$75 (1)
- \$100 (1)

Four of our 11 swing voters find it “believable that when California tightens its air quality regulations, it’s effectively doing it here in Minnesota, as well.”

We heard that California sets the pace for what the rest of the nation does, having the largest population, but they didn’t immediately interpret this as: California tightens its air quality regulations and because they have so many people there, an industry that serves the entire country has to adhere to the tighter regulations there and that impacts people living in other states, like Minnesota. After hearing this, they found it believable. They are OK with allowing California to determine Minnesota’s air quality regulations relating to vehicles they buy. They say it’s healthy and we have been doing it for years—and there’s no way to prevent it.

Five of our 11 respondents know where the closest public electric charger is to their home for an electric vehicle. Only one respondent—the Romney-Clinton voter—would be willing to pay an extra \$8,000 to \$10,000 more for an electric vehicle compared to a gas-powered vehicle. They indicated that a purchase incentive (such as a rebate) would need to be at least half of the extra cost (\$4,000 to \$5,000) to sway their decision to get an electric vehicle, with some wanting the purchase incentive to cover up to the full amount of the extra cost.

¹ We told respondents that \$0 is an acceptable answer.

7

EDINA SWING VOTERS BELIEVE AMERICAN HISTORY HAS HAD MANY PERIODS OF CONTENTIOUS TIMES, BUT IT JUST SEEMS WORSE NOW BECAUSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA.

Respondents rated how much they agreed with the following statement on a scale from zero to 10 (from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”):

	Average
<p>“Donald Trump has done what he promised. He rebuilt the economy, cut taxes, got started on the wall with Mexico, passed a new trade deal... and made America great again. He deserves our thanks. But what needs to be done next is not something he’s well-equipped to do: return civility to our politics, bring Democrats and Republicans together, and return us to a calmer time. For that we need a different type of leader.”</p>	4.7

Respondents rejected this argument, on average, because they don’t believe it was calmer in Washington, DC or in the country before Donald Trump became president. Their view is our country has experienced many contentious periods throughout history, with one respondent citing the duel between Vice President Aaron Burr and former Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, which resulted in Hamilton’s death. That didn’t seem like a “calmer time” for our country. We just happen to be in another contentious time. Respondents told us we used to have only newspapers and TV as sources of information, but with social media, the public is more aware of what’s going on in the country and some doubted we could have calmness when people have such strong, differing opinions. Our swing voters suggested that the call to “return civility to our politics, bring Democrats and Republicans together, and return us to a calmer time” sounds like a Democratic political strategy to defeat President Trump rather than something that’s achievable.