

AMERICANS' DOMESTIC PRIORITIES FOR PRESIDENT TRUMP AND CONGRESS IN THE MONTHS LEADING UP TO THE 2020 ELECTION

February 2020

POLITICO



HARVARD
T.H. CHAN
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

AMERICANS' DOMESTIC PRIORITIES FOR PRESIDENT TRUMP AND CONGRESS IN THE MONTHS LEADING UP TO THE 2020 ELECTION

SUMMARY

Going into the year of the next presidential election, a new poll by POLITICO and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health shows the public's top domestic priorities for President Donald Trump and Congress. They are: taking steps to lower the cost of health care, taking steps to lower prescription drug prices, increasing federal spending on K-12 public education, and increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender.

Although health care issues are at the top of their list for presidential and congressional action, the public does not place large health system reforms, including Medicare-for-all, a Medicare buy-in, or repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act (ACA), among their top four domestic priorities. In addition, even though climate change has received wide attention nationally and internationally, the issue does not rank among the public's top four priorities for the President and Congress.

The poll also asked a short series of questions about the Australian wildfires and climate change.

PART I: DOMESTIC PRIORITIES FOR PRESIDENT TRUMP AND CONGRESS

A new poll by POLITICO and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health asked Americans about their priorities for President Trump and Congress in 2020. Respondents were given a list of 22 domestic policy areas identified in the media and in the current presidential primary campaigns as potential priority action items for the president and Congress. Because Congress can only take action on a few of them at a time, people were asked how important each of the areas should be as a priority.

The top four extremely or very important priorities for the public as a whole, as shown in Table 1, are: taking steps to lower the cost of health care, taking steps to lower prescription drug prices, increasing federal spending on K-12 public education, and increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender,

Taking action to lower health care costs and prescription drug prices are at the top of the priority list for both Democrats and Republicans. However, the list of top priorities differs considerably between adherents of the two parties, reflecting the continuing partisan divisions in the country.

For Democrats, the other top priorities, aside from health care costs and prescription drug prices, are increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes and changing the health care system so that every American can buy into Medicare if they want to.

For Republicans, the other top priorities, aside from health care costs and prescription drug prices, are restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S. and taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit.

Table 1. Americans’ Top Four Domestic Priorities (among 22) for President Trump and Congress, by Party Identification

Rank, priority, % saying “extremely” or “very important”								
Total			Democrats			Republicans		
Rank	Priority	%	Rank	Priority	%	Rank	Priority	%
1	Taking steps to lower the cost of health care	80	1	Taking steps to lower the cost of health care	89	1	Taking steps to lower the cost of health care	76
2	Taking steps to lower prescription drug prices	75	2	Taking steps to lower prescription drug prices	85	2	Taking steps to lower prescription drug prices	69
3(t)	Increasing federal spending on K-12 public education	63	3	Increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender	76	3	Restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S.	67
3(t)	Increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender	63	4	Changing the health care system so that every American can buy into Medicare if they want to	74	4	Taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit	65

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans’ Domestic Priorities for President Trump and Congress in the Months Leading Up to the 2020 Election, January 21 – 26, 2020. Base: U.S. adults.

Although health care issues are at the top of their list for presidential and congressional action, the public does not place large health system reforms, including Medicare-for-all, a Medicare buy-in, or repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act (ACA), among their top four priorities.

“The poll results show that after the Democratic primaries are over, the focus for the public in their voting is going to be the pocketbook issue of lowering their health care costs and prescription drugs prices, not major health system reform,” said Robert J. Blendon, co-director of the survey and the Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “This suggests the importance of candidates in the general election having credible proposals to address these personal cost issues.”

Table 2 shows the responses of Democrats and Republicans to all 22 issues discussed in the poll.

Table 2. Americans’ Domestic Priorities (among 22) for President Trump and Congress, by Party Identification

% saying each of the following should be an “extremely” or “very important” priority

	Total	Dems	Reps
Taking steps to lower the cost of health care	80	89	76
Taking steps to lower prescription drug prices	75	85	69
Increasing federal spending on K-12 public education	63	71	44
Increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender	63	76	48
Taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit	60	60	65
Changing the health care system so that every American can buy into Medicare if they want to	59	74	43
Taking more national action to address the opioid epidemic	57	59	58
Increasing spending on the nation’s infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and airports	56	58	54
Changing the federal tax law enacted in 2017 so it does more for middle income individuals and less for upper-income individuals and businesses	53	58	43
Changing the health care system so that all Americans would get health insurance from Medicare, which is now mainly for people age 65 or over and is paid for by taxpayers. This plan is often called Medicare for All.	53	71	29
Making major increases in federal spending and regulation to reduce climate change	52	68	30
Renewing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, or DACA, which grants temporary legal status to people brought to the US illegally as children	48	55	26
Enacting stricter gun control laws	47	68	21
Restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S.	45	29	67
Increasing national defense spending	40	36	59
Enacting President Trump’s new trade agreement with Canada and Mexico	39	28	61
Impeaching and removing President Trump from office	39	69	11
Investigating President Trump’s investments and taxes	38	59	12
Trying again to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare	37	40	37
Taking steps to make sure abortion is legal in all or most cases	34	51	14
Taking steps to make sure abortion is illegal in all or most cases	33	30	51
Decreasing federal regulation of business	24	23	30

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans’ Domestic Priorities for President Trump and Congress in the Months Leading Up to the 2020 Election, January 21 – 26, 2020. Base: U.S. adults.

Following President Trump's State of the Union address, it is important to note that there are large partisan differences on two particular issues raised in the address and in the Democrats' response.

Restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S. is not among the top four priorities of the public as a whole (ranked 14th of 22), but it is the #3 priority for Republicans. Republicans are more than twice as likely as Democrats (67% to 29%) to say that restricting unauthorized immigration is an extremely or very important priority.

Even though climate change has received wide attention nationally and internationally, the issue does not rank among the public's top four priorities for the President and Congress (ranked 11th of 22). Democrats (68%) are more than twice as likely as Republicans (30%) to see making major increases in federal spending and regulation to reduce climate change as an extremely or very important priority. But even among Democrats, it is tied for the #8 priority.

In addition, even though large health system reforms are not among the top four priorities for the public as a whole, two of them are rated as extremely or very important priorities by significantly more Democrats than Republicans. These include a Medicare buy-in (named by 74% of Democrats vs. 43% of Republicans) and Medicare-for-All (71% vs. 29%). This helps explain the importance of these proposals in the Democratic primaries.

The poll, taken shortly before the U.S. Senate vote on the impeachment of President Trump, shows that for most of the public it was not a very high priority (ranked as #17).

PART II: THE AUSTRALIAN WILDFIRES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

As shown in Table 3, two-thirds of the Americans have been following news report about wildfires that have been devastating areas of Australia very or somewhat closely. More than half of the public (54%) believes they these wildfires are related to climate change, but there are large differences by party identification. About two-thirds of Democrats (68%) believe the wildfires are related to climate change, compared with only 36% of Republicans. The response to this question reflects the partisan divide on climate change as whole.

More than six in ten Americans (61%) are not too or not at all concerned that wildfires like those in Australia will happen in their own state during the next five years.

Table 3. Americans' Views on the Australian Wildfires and Climate Change, by Party Identification

	Total	Dems	Reps
Following news reports about wildfires that have been devastating areas of Australia			
Very/fairly closely	67	69	68
Not too/not at all closely	33	30	31
Australian wildfires are...			
Related to climate change	54	68	36
Not related to climate change	39	28	56
Concern that wildfires like those in Australia could happen in your state in the next five years			
Very concerned	19	28	11
Somewhat concerned	18	16	20
Not too/not concerned	61	55	67
In past five years, you or family member ever had to leave your home due to fire, flood, storm	16	18	13
(Among those who had to leave home) Think this event was related to climate change	59	NA	NA

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans' Domestic Priorities for President Trump and Congress in the Months Leading Up to the 2020 Election, January 21 – 26, 2020. Base: U.S. adults. NA = Not enough cases for analysis.

About one in six Americans report that in the past five years they or a family member has had to leave their home because of a major fire, flood, or storm. Among those who have, nearly six in ten (59%) believe the event was related to climate change. Moreover, this group that has had recent experience with natural disasters is twice as likely as those who have not (36% to 16%) to say they are very concerned that wildfires like those in Australia will happen in their state in the next five years.

In California, which saw its own widespread fires in recent months, residents are more than twice as likely as Americans as a whole (36% to 16%) to report that they or a family member has had to leave their home in the past five years because of a major fire, flood, or storm. A majority of California residents say they are very (39%) or somewhat concerned (16%) that wildfires like

those in Australia will happen in their own state during the next five years. The proportion of Californians who are very concerned about this possibility is twice as large as among the American public as a whole (19%).

METHODOLOGY

The results are based on polling conducted by *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Representatives of the two organizations worked closely to develop the survey questionnaires and analyze the results of the polls. *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health paid for the surveys and related expenses.

The project team was led by Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Joanne Kenen, Executive Editor, Health Care at *Politico/Politico Pro*. Harvard research team also included John M. Benson.

Interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,011 randomly selected adults, ages 18 and older, via telephone (including cell phones and landlines) by SSRS of Glen Mills, Pennsylvania. The interviewing period was January 21 – 26, 2020. The data were weighted to reflect the demographics of the national adult population as described by the U.S. Census.

When interpreting these findings, one should recognize that all surveys are subject to sampling error. Results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole U.S. adult population had been interviewed. The margin of error for the full sample is ± 3.5 percentage points. For questions asked of half-samples, the margin of error is ± 5.0 percentage points.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases and for variations in probability of selection within and across households, sample data are weighted by household size, cell phone/landline use and demographics (sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, and region) to reflect the true population. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

Politico/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Poll

**AMERICANS’ DOMESTIC PRIORITIES FOR PRESIDENT TRUMP
AND CONGRESS IN THE MONTHS LEADING UP TO
THE 2020 ELECTION**

This survey was conducted for *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health via telephone by SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone (cell phone and landline) **January 21 – 26, 2020**, among a nationally representative sample of **1,011 U.S. adults**. The margin of error for total respondents is ± 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For questions asked of half-samples, the margin of error is ± 5.0 percentage points. More information about SSRS can be obtained by visiting www.ssrs.com.

DOMESTIC PRIORITIES FOR PRESIDENT TRUMP AND CONGRESS

POLQ1. The country faces a number of critical domestic issues. Here is a list of some things Congress and President Trump could work on during the rest of the year, keeping in mind that they can work on only a few of these issues at a time. For each one, please tell me if you think it SHOULD BE a priority or SHOULD NOT BE a priority for the federal government. POLQ2. (Ask if “should be a priority”) And should that be an extremely important, very important, or only a somewhat important priority? **(Items a-k asked of half-sample A; n=494; Items l-v asked of half-sample B; n=517)**

**a. Taking steps to lower the cost of health care
Based on half-sample A; n=494**

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	45	51	42	40
Very important	35	38	34	36
Somewhat important	11	7	11	13
Not a priority	8	4	10	10
Don’t know/Refused	1	-	3	1

**b. Taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit
Based on half-sample A; n=494**

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	24	20	22	29
Very important	36	40	43	30
Somewhat important	16	18	15	15
Not a priority	21	19	18	23
Don’t know/Refused	3	3	2	3

c. Taking more national action to address the opioid epidemic
Based on half-sample A; n=494

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	25	27	26	23
Very important	32	32	32	33
Somewhat important	14	14	12	13
Should not be a priority	26	24	27	28
Don't know/Refused	3	3	3	3

d. Making major increases in federal spending and regulation to reduce climate change
Based on half-sample A; n=494

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	28	38	10	29
Very important	24	30	20	25
Somewhat important	12	11	14	11
Should not be a priority	34	19	55	34
Don't know/Refused	2	2	1	1

e. Restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S.
Based on half-sample A; n=494

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	18	10	36	11
Very important	27	19	31	32
Somewhat important	13	14	8	18
Should not be a priority	39	54	25	37
Don't know/Refused	3	3	-	2

f. Enacting stricter gun control laws
Based on half-sample A; n=494

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	27	37	15	29
Very important	20	31	6	16
Somewhat important	8	9	7	8
Should not be a priority	44	22	70	47
Don't know/Refused	1	1	2	*

g. Trying again to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare
Based on half-sample A; n=494

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	15	11	20	13
Very important	22	29	17	23
Somewhat important	10	5	12	11
Should not be a priority	48	51	47	49
Don't know/Refused	5	4	4	4

h. Taking steps to make sure abortion is legal in all or most cases
Based on half-sample A; n=494

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	17	28	6	16
Very important	17	23	8	17
Somewhat important	12	13	14	12
Should not be a priority	50	35	69	51
Don't know/Refused	4	1	3	4

i. Decreasing federal regulation of business
Based on half-sample A; n=494

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	9	9	10	8
Very important	15	14	20	17
Somewhat important	20	16	16	22
Should not be a priority	52	59	50	48
Don't know/Refused	4	2	4	5

j. Impeaching and removing President Trump from office
Based on half-sample A; n=494

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	23	43	10	16
Very important	16	26	1	19
Somewhat important	8	6	1	11
Should not be a priority	48	20	83	50
Don't know/Refused	5	5	5	4

k. Changing the health care system so that every American can buy into Medicare if they want to
Based on half-sample A; n=494

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	24	28	14	27
Very important	35	46	29	29
Somewhat important	11	7	12	14
Should not be a priority	28	16	43	29
Don't know/Refused	2	3	2	1

l. Taking steps to lower prescription drug prices
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	38	45	39	30
Very important	37	40	30	41
Somewhat important	11	7	9	15
Should not be a priority	13	8	22	13
Don't know/Refused	1	-	*	1

m. Increasing spending on the nation's infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and airports
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	25	26	29	21
Very important	31	32	25	33
Somewhat important	17	13	22	21
Should not be a priority	26	28	24	25
Don't know/Refused	1	1	-	-

n. Increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	34	41	28	31
Very important	29	35	20	31
Somewhat important	10	10	10	10
Should not be a priority	26	13	42	26
Don't know/Refused	1	1	-	2

o. Increasing federal spending on K-12 public education
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	29	31	19	35
Very important	34	40	25	35
Somewhat important	13	10	18	13
Not a priority	22	16	37	17
Don't know/Refused	2	3	1	*

p. Changing the federal tax law enacted in 2017 so it does more for middle income individuals and less for upper-income individuals and businesses
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	22	25	18	23
Very important	31	33	25	32
Somewhat important	16	16	16	17
Should not a priority	28	24	39	24
Don't know/Refused	3	2	2	4

q. Renewing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, or DACA, which grants temporary legal status to people brought to the US illegally as children
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	20	22	12	21
Very important	28	33	14	32
Somewhat important	13	16	14	10
Should not be a priority	36	26	57	33
Don't know/Refused	3	3	3	4

r. Enacting President Trump's new trade agreement with Canada and Mexico
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	13	7	24	12
Very important	26	21	37	24
Somewhat important	15	18	10	15
Should not be a priority	37	47	28	36
Don't know/Refused	9	7	1	13

s. Investigating President Trump’s investments and taxes
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	19	31	3	17
Very important	19	28	9	16
Somewhat important	9	11	2	12
Should not be a priority	51	28	85	52
Don’t know/Refused	2	2	1	3

t. Increasing national defense spending
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	16	11	31	12
Very important	24	25	28	20
Somewhat important	11	7	10	13
Should not be a priority	47	54	30	55
Don’t know/Refused	2	3	1	*

u. Taking steps to make sure abortion is illegal in all or most cases
Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	14	10	27	9
Very important	19	20	24	16
Somewhat important	7	8	5	6
Should not be a priority	57	58	43	65
Don’t know/Refused	3	4	1	4

v. Changing the health care system so that all Americans would get health insurance from Medicare, which is now mainly for people age 65 or over and is paid for by taxpayers. This plan is often called Medicare for All.

Based on half-sample B; n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Extremely important	23	30	14	20
Very important	30	41	15	32
Somewhat important	7	5	6	8
Should not be a priority	39	23	65	38
Don’t know/Refused	1	1	-	2

Summary (% saying each of the following should be an “extremely” or “very important” priority)

^a = asked of half-sample A, n=494; ^b = asked of half-sample B, n=517

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Taking steps to lower the cost of health care ^a	80	89	76	76
Taking steps to lower prescription drug prices ^b	75	85	69	71
Increasing federal spending on K-12 public education ^b	63	71	44	70
Increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender ^b	63	76	48	62
Taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit ^a	60	60	65	59
Changing the health care system so that every American can buy into Medicare if they want to ^a	59	74	43	56
Taking more national action to address the opioid epidemic ^a	57	59	58	56
Increasing spending on the nation’s infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and airports ^b	56	58	54	54
Changing the federal tax law enacted in 2017 so it does more for middle income individuals and less for upper-income individuals and businesses ^b	53	58	43	55
Changing the health care system so that all Americans would get health insurance from Medicare, which is now mainly for people age 65 or over and is paid for by taxpayers. This plan is often called Medicare for All. ^b	53	71	29	52
Making major increases in federal spending and regulation to reduce climate change ^a	52	68	30	54
Renewing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, or DACA, which grants temporary legal status to people brought to the US illegally as children ^b	48	55	26	53
Enacting stricter gun control laws ^a	47	68	21	45
Restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S. ^a	45	29	67	43
Increasing national defense spending ^b	40	36	59	32
Enacting President Trump’s new trade agreement with Canada and Mexico ^b	39	28	61	36
Impeaching and removing President Trump from office ^a	39	69	11	35
Investigating President Trump’s investments and taxes ^b	38	59	12	33
Trying again to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare ^a	37	40	37	36
Taking steps to make sure abortion is legal in all or most cases ^a	34	51	14	33
Taking steps to make sure abortion is illegal in all or most cases ^b	33	30	51	25
Decreasing federal regulation of business ^a	24	23	30	25

THE AUSTRALIAN WILDFIRES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

(Asked of half-sample A; n=494)

POLQ3. How closely have you been following news about wildfires that have been devastating large areas of Australia?

	Very closely	Fairly closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	Don't know' Refused
Total	30	37	22	11	*
Dems	36	33	24	6	1
Reps	30	38	19	12	1
Inds	27	41	22	10	*

(Asked of half-sample A; n=494)

POLQ4. Do you think these wildfires in Australia are related to climate change, or not?

	Yes, related to climate change	No, not related to climate change	Don't know/ Refused
Total	54	39	7
Dems	68	28	4
Reps	36	56	8
Inds	55	38	7

(Asked of half-sample A; n=494)

POLQ5. Are you concerned that wildfires like those in Australia could happen in your state in the next five years, or not? (If concerned, ask) POLQ5a. Are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not too concerned?

**POLQ5/POLQ5A Combo Table
Based on half-sample A; n=494**

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Very concerned	19	28	11	19
Somewhat concerned	18	16	20	17
Not too concerned	7	9	8	6
Not concerned	54	46	59	57
Don't know/Refused	2	1	2	1

(Asked of half-sample A; n=494)

POLQ6. In the past five years, have you or a family member ever had to leave your home due to a major fire, flood, or storm, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't know/ Refused
Total	16	84	-
Dems	18	82	-
Reps	13	87	-
Inds	17	83	-

(Asked of half-sample A respondents who personally or whose family member has ever had to leave their home due to a major fire, flood, or storm in the past five years; n=75)

POLQ6a. Do you think this event was related to climate change, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't know/ Refused
Total	59	40	1
Dems	Not enough cases for analysis (N<50)		
Reps			
Inds			