

To: Progressive Policy Institute
From: Pete Brodnitz
Re: August Battleground Polling, Part 2
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Jobs and the Economy: Comparing the Parties

PPI recently commissioned a national opinion survey in battleground House districts and states to examine how voters view President Biden's Build Back Better initiatives, how the two parties compare on the economy, and how the public views controversial proposals in Congress to break up or heavily regulate leading U.S. tech companies.

In this second poll report, we focus on how voters rate Democrats and Republicans on jobs and the economy, tax and fiscal policy, and innovation, entrepreneurship and competition. Our findings provide crucial context for the debate – both between the parties and between pragmatic and left-leaning Democrats – over the President's ambitious spending and tax proposals.

The poll concentrates on voters in 44 Congressional swing districts and 9 states thought to have competitive Senate races in next year's midterm elections. Whether Democrats will consolidate their slim House and Senate majorities or cede control to the Republicans likely will be decided on this contested political terrain.

In general, the poll shows strong support among battleground voters for President Biden and his infrastructure plan, as well as Democratic advantages on tax fairness. On the other hand, it highlights what appear to be structural Democratic weaknesses on jobs, taxes, deficits and support for entrepreneurship and private enterprise. Party leaders should be mindful of these pitfalls as the drama over the Biden infrastructure and social investment plans unfolds on Capitol Hill.

Here are some key findings:

- Battleground voters trust President Biden (by a 53% to 47% margin) and Congressional Democrats (52-48) more than Republicans to "improve the economy."
- Although the nation just emerged from a pandemic recession under a Republican President, and voters trust Congressional Democrats to improve the economy, they divide evenly on the question of which party "knows how to create good jobs" (50/50 split) and they still turn to the GOP as the party that "knows how to strengthen the economy" (52-48). The slight difference to the two types of questions may be due to some voters knowing improvements are more likely if they are done in coordination with the sitting (Democratic) President.
- However, Republicans have the advantage on helping companies be more innovative, working to create private sector jobs, strengthening the economy, and helping U.S. firms win the competition with China for economic and technological leadership. For instance, voters are more likely to credit the GOP as the party striving to create private sector jobs (54% Republicans, 46% Democrats).
- Two-thirds of battleground voters say they are concerned that Democrats are too anti-business. This includes 73% of Independents and even 42% of Democrats.
- Voters overwhelmingly believe that Republicans, more than Democrats, stand more for the wealthy (74%) and favor special interests (63%). Democrats are seen more as the party of the poor (72%).

- Democrats have the edge when it comes to standing for the middle class (56% say this applies more to the Democrats, 44% say it applies more to Republicans).

Economic Narrative

- When asked their chief economic concerns, the top responses are health care (17%), the Federal budget deficit and national debt (14%), being able to afford retirement (9%) and economic growth (9%).
- Just under half (48%) say they believe they can identify President Biden's economic strategy. Among those who say they can identify it, there is overwhelming support (89%).
- On the economy, voters say jobs, growth and rewarding work are more important goals than addressing inequality and fairness. More are aspirational and interested in opportunity than in equal outcomes: nearly a third (28%) say the most important goal for improving the economy is to "increase the number of good jobs," while a quarter (24%) say "spur innovation and growth" and a similar number (20%) say "reward work" is most important. Only 10% said "promoting fairness" should be the most important goal.
- On tax reform, the goals are somewhat different – voters are more open to addressing inequality in the tax code. When asked what the top goal of changing the tax code should be, 41% say "making sure the wealthy and companies pay more in taxes," with economic investment and jobs their second priority (29%). Voters are split 50/50 when asked whether the tax code should emphasize "promoting tax fairness and addressing income inequality" or "promoting enterprise and rewarding hard work by Americans."
- Battleground voters are less responsive to the GOP's usual supply side prescriptions for the economy than they are to multiple alternative approaches. Battleground voters favor more public investment to improve the economy over cutting taxes and regulations by a solid margin of 58-42. Independents favor investment by 60-40 and undecided voters by 61-36.
- Tax fairness is another potent issue on which Republicans are likely to find themselves on the defensive. Battleground voters say their top priority for tax policy is making sure corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes.
- Voters side with Democrats in supporting additional IRS funding to crack down on tax cheats and evaders.
- Reinforcing other findings that voters' tax allergy may be waning, by 54-36 battleground voters believe raising taxes to finance new public investments will have a positive impact on the economy.
- Voters favor (by 53-47) taxing gains from capital and labor at the same level. However, they oppose capital gains hikes when they are presented as a way to finance public investment in infrastructure and child tax credits (54% opposed).
- However, despite the President's clear focus on making tax changes among upper income earners, voters narrowly believe the proposed changes will increase their taxes (47%) compared to 42% who say the changes will have no impact.
- Battleground district and state voters rank deficits and debt as their second highest economic concern. By 88-12, they say the national debt is a "serious problem." Independents, undecideds, and Hispanic voters strongly express this view.

- By 80-20, voters say they are worried about the mounting debt burden on the young and working families. They also express strong concerns about inflation (74-26).
- Voters are slightly more inclined to blame Democrats than Republicans for running up public debt (32-28). Similarly, they trust Republicans more than Democrats (32-28) to get the debt under control, but a plurality (40%) say they trust neither party.

Medicare Expansion

- Nearly six-in-ten (57%) of voters say they support expanding Medicare to cover more services even though Medicare already spends more than it taxes in through premiums and payroll taxes, while 43% of voters oppose the idea.
- Among those who support expanding Medicare to cover more services, a plurality (42%) say they think it should be paid for by charging higher premiums for those who receive the expanded benefits, 35% say it should be paid for by raising taxes paid by workers, and 23% say it should be paid for by borrowing the money and adding the cost to our national debt.

A Deeper Dive into Voter Attitudes

Economy

Q7. Which of the following economic issues worries you the most?

Ranked by All.

The price of healthcare	17
Federal budget deficit and national debt	14
Being able to afford retirement	9
Economic growth	9
Taxes	8
Economic inequality	7
Income and wages	6
Food prices	6
Total Immigration	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigrants taking American jobs 	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal immigration/Border security 	1
Housing prices	5
The actions of big tech companies	3
Job opportunities	2
Climate change and the environment	1
COVID	1
Inflation	1
General anti-Dem	1
None of these	2

Q9. Which of the following would you say is the most important goal when it comes to improving the economy?

Ranked by All.

Increase the number of good jobs	28
Spur innovation and growth	24
Reward work	20
Reduce inequality	16
Promote fairness	10
Increase the availability of union jobs	2

Biden Ratings

Q13. As far as you know, does President Biden have an economic strategy for the country?

Yes	48
No	36
Don't know	16

If "Yes" in Q13

Q14. In general, do you support or oppose that strategy?

Strongly support	47
Somewhat support	42
Somewhat oppose	6
Strongly oppose	5
Total Support	89
Total Oppose	11

If "Yes" in Q13

Q15CMB. As far as you know, what is President Biden's main approach to improving the economy?
[OPEN-ENDED, MULTIPLE RESPONSES ACCEPTED]

Ranked by All.

Infrastructure investment/Build Back Better	35
Total Job Creation	26
• Job creation/get people back to work (General)	20
• Increasing wages/Better paying jobs	8
Total Economic Relief	15
• Focusing on COVID (Vaccines, COVID relief)	11
• Economic stimulus/putting money in pockets	4
Raising taxes on wealthy and big corporations	6
Green energy jobs/Green New Deal/Climate focus	6
Overspending/giving away money	4
Help everyone/Reduce income and other inequality	3
Improving/Expanding health care	2
Child tax credit/Helping families	2
Buying American-made/increasing US manufacturing jobs	2
Supporting the middle class	2
Tax and spend/raising taxes	1
More union jobs	1
Improved foreign policy/trade	1
Student debt relief/Higher ed support	1
Biden has no plan/Doing nothing	1
General positive	2
General Biden/Dem negative	2
Don't know	7

Q16. Who do you trust more to improve the economy?

President Biden	53
Republicans in Congress	47

Q17. Who do you trust more to improve the economy?

Democrats in Congress	52
Republicans in Congress	48

Comparing Parties on the Economy

Economic Comparison – Summary

Which party does each of the following apply to more?				
		All		
		Dem	GOP	Diff
Q18_1-13; Ranked by Diff				
Q18_4	Stands more for the poor.	72	28	+44
Q18_7	Is too anti-business.	65	35	+30
Q18_9	Stands more for the middle class.	56	44	+12
Q18_6	Has the better approach to infrastructure investments.	53	47	+6
Q18_10	Helps people like you.	52	48	+4
Q18_13	Loves America.	51	49	+2
Q18_2	Knows how to create good jobs.	50	50	0
Q18_8	Knows how to strengthen the economy.	48	52	-4
Q18_12	Has the best plan to win the economic competition with China.	48	52	-4
Q18_5	Helps companies be more innovative.	46	54	-8
Q18_11	Is working to create private sector jobs.	46	54	-8
Q18_1	Is too close to corporate special interests.	37	63	-26
Q18_3	Stands more for the wealthy.	26	74	-48

Q18_1. Is too close to corporate special interests.

The Democratic Party	37
The Republican Party	63

Q18_2. Knows how to create good jobs.

The Democratic Party	50
The Republican Party	50

Q18_3. Stands more for the wealthy.

The Democratic Party	26
The Republican Party	74

Q18_4. Stands more for the poor.

The Democratic Party	72
The Republican Party	28

Q18_5. Helps companies be more innovative.

The Democratic Party	46
The Republican Party	54

Q18_6. Has the better approach to infrastructure investments.

The Democratic Party	53
The Republican Party	47

Q18_7. Is too anti-business.

The Democratic Party	65
The Republican Party	35

Q18_8. Knows how to strengthen the economy.

The Democratic Party	48
The Republican Party	52

Q18_9. Stands more for the middle class.

The Democratic Party	56
The Republican Party	44

Q18_10. Helps people like you.

The Democratic Party	52
The Republican Party	48

Q18_11. Is working to create private sector jobs.

The Democratic Party	46
The Republican Party	54

Q18_12. Has the best plan to win the economic competition with China.

The Democratic Party	48
The Republican Party	52

Q18_13. Loves America.

The Democratic Party	51
The Republican Party	49

- When asked what concerns voters more about Democrats in Congress, 60% say they are more concerned that Democrats in Congress do not do enough to help create good jobs and are too anti-business, while 40% say they are more concerned that Democrats are too close to big business and corporate special interests.

Q19. Which concerns you more about the Democrats in Congress when it comes to economic issues?

They are too close to big business and corporate special interests.	40
They don't do enough to help create good jobs and are too anti-business.	60

- Just as many battleground voters say Democrats “do not do enough to create jobs and are too anti-business” as say that Republicans are “too close to the wealthy and corporate special interests.” However, the latter is expressed more vehemently, which suggests that Democrats have more potential to change how they are viewed on this issue.

Party Concerns – Summary

Please tell me how concerned you are about each of the following.			
Q20_1-4; Ranked by Very Concerned		All	
		Very Concerned	Total Concerned/Not Concerned
Q20_2	The Democrats in Congress want to spend too much money without paying for it.	47	73/27
Q20_1	The Republicans in Congress are too close to the wealthy and corporate special interests.	44	68/32
Q20_4	The Democrats in Congress do not do enough to help create jobs and are too anti-business.	35	67/33
Q20_3	The Republicans in Congress are blocking efforts to provide job training and community college.	32	57/43

Q20_1. The Republicans in Congress are too close to the wealthy and corporate special interests.

Very concerned	44
Somewhat concerned	24
Not very concerned	17
Not at all concerned	15
Total Concerned	68
Total Not Concerned	32

Q20_2. The Democrats in Congress want to spend too much money without paying for it.

Very concerned	47
Somewhat concerned	25
Not very concerned	19
Not at all concerned	9
Total Concerned	73
Total Not Concerned	27

Q20_3. The Republicans in Congress are blocking efforts to provide job training and community college.

Very concerned	32
Somewhat concerned	25
Not very concerned	21
Not at all concerned	22
Total Concerned	57
Total Not Concerned	43

Q20_4. The Democrats in Congress do not do enough to help create jobs and are too anti-business.

Very concerned	35
Somewhat concerned	32
Not very concerned	21
Not at all concerned	11
Total Concerned	67
Total Not Concerned	33

- A plurality (42%) of battleground voters say they think Republicans are the party that cares more about helping entrepreneurs and small business owners succeed, while 37% say Democrats care more about helping small businesses succeed. The Republican edge on this means Republicans are not just seen as the party of “big corporate special interests” – they are also seen as the party of small businesses.

Q21. Which party cares more about helping entrepreneurs and small business owners succeed?

The Republicans	42
The Democrats	37
Both equally	21

Q22. Which is closer to your view of what the Federal government should do now when it comes to economic policy:

Make investments but be careful about how much spending and debt increases.	63
Make bold and significant new investments now and address the impact they have on the national debt later.	20
Do not make big investments in the economy now.	17

Q23. Which is closer to your view:

Public investments in infrastructure, science and technology, education and health are essential to making our economy work for everyone.	58
Cutting taxes and government regulation is the best way to strengthen our economy.	42

Q24. Who do you think benefits most from the policies of the Democrats in Congress:

The rich	28
The poor	28
The middle class	23
The working class	21

Q25. Who do you think benefits most from the policies of the Republicans in Congress:

The rich	57
The poor	2
The middle class	23
The working class	18

Q26. From what you have heard, do you believe President Biden's proposed tax changes, if passed, would:

Increase your taxes	47
Reduce your taxes	11
Have no impact on your taxes	42

Framing

Q29. Which party's approach do you favor?

The Democrats' push to make sure the wealthy and companies pay their fair share of federal taxes.	56
The Republicans' push to cut taxes and regulations.	44

Q30. Which party's approach do you regard as the best way to improve the economy?

The Democratic Party's focus on making sure that everyone who wants training or education can get it.	52
The Republican Party's focus on lowering taxes and regulations.	48

Q31. Which party's approach do you regard as the best way to improve the economy?

The Democratic Party's focus on investing in science, research and development and new technology.	53
The Republican Party's focus on lowering taxes and regulations.	47

Q32. Which position is closer to your own view about the best way to improve the economy? Is it that of:

Democrats, who say we should increase taxes on the wealthy and big corporations to pay for new investments in quality childcare, home and elder care and family medical leave.	57
Republicans, who say raising taxes to spend money on major new programs will hurt the economy.	43

Q33. Which position is closer to your own view? Is it that of:

Democrats in Congress, who want to give the IRS more funding so it can crack down on tax evasion and collect an additional \$70 billion in revenue a year.	57
Republicans in Congress, who oppose giving the IRS any more money to harass U.S. taxpayers and corporations.	43

Economic Policies

Here are some policy ideas that Congress or the President could consider. Please tell us if you support or oppose each of these proposals.

Policy Proposals – Summary

Here are some policy ideas that Congress or the President could consider. Please tell us if you support or oppose each of these proposals.

		All	
		Strongly Support	Support/ Oppose
Q34_1-12; Ranked by Strongly Support			
Q34_1	Stop China Stealing	54	90/10
Q34_6	All Companies Pay Taxes	49	85/15
Q34_2	Manufacturing Incentives	43	86/14
Q34_11	Raise Taxes on Wealthy	42	73/27
Q34_3	Manufacturing Investments	41	87/13
Q34_10	Expand Training and Community College	40	82/18
Q34_12	Tariffs	39	85/15
Q34_4	Training and Apprenticeships	34	77/23
Q34_8	Raise Corporate Tax	33	68/32
Q34_5	Overtake Chinese EV Production	26	70/30
Q34_7	Push Back on European Regulators	25	80/20
Q34_9	End Deductions for Investments	20	52/48

Stop China Stealing

Q34_1. Increasing Federal efforts to stop China from stealing U.S. technologies and trade secrets.

Strongly support	54
Somewhat support	36
Somewhat oppose	9
Strongly oppose	1
Total Support	90
Total Oppose	10

Manufacturing Incentives

Q34_2. Giving U.S. companies financial incentives to manufacture strategically important goods such as medical supplies or the chips needed to make high-tech products.

Strongly support	43
Somewhat support	44
Somewhat oppose	11
Strongly oppose	3
Total Support	86
Total Oppose	14

Manufacturing Investments

Q34_3. Making major Federal investments designed to increase U.S. manufacturing of key goods such as the chips needed to run modern electronic products or medical supplies.

Strongly support	41
Somewhat support	46
Somewhat oppose	11
Strongly oppose	2
Total Support	87
Total Oppose	13

Training and Apprenticeships

Q34_4. Investing as much in making work-based learning and apprenticeships widely available as we invest in Federal aid to college students.

Strongly support	34
Somewhat support	43
Somewhat oppose	16
Strongly oppose	7
Total Support	77
Total Oppose	23

Overtake Chinese EV Production

Q34_5. Helping America overtake China on electric car production by investing in creating and expanding electric car charging station networks.

Strongly support	26
Somewhat support	43
Somewhat oppose	21
Strongly oppose	9
Total Support	70
Total Oppose	30

All Companies Pay Taxes

Q34_6. Changing the tax code to ensure that all profitable companies pay Federal income tax.

Strongly support	49
Somewhat support	36
Somewhat oppose	11
Strongly oppose	4
Total Support	85
Total Oppose	15

Push Back on European Regulators

Q34_7. Pushing back against European regulators who single out U.S. companies for digital taxes and regulation.

Strongly support	25
Somewhat support	55
Somewhat oppose	17
Strongly oppose	3
Total Support	80
Total Oppose	20

Raise Corporate Tax

Q34_8. Raising corporate tax rates.

Strongly support	33
Somewhat support	35
Somewhat oppose	18
Strongly oppose	15
Total Support	68
Total Oppose	32

End Deductions for Investments

Q34_9. Ending tax deductions that allow companies to partially deduct from their taxes investments they make to build factories, warehouses or other infrastructure in the United States.

Strongly support	20
Somewhat support	32
Somewhat oppose	33
Strongly oppose	15
Total Support	52
Total Oppose	48

Expand Training and Community College

Q34_10. Significantly expanding access to job training and community college so if people want to upgrade their skills or prepare for a new job, they can afford to do so.

Strongly support	40
Somewhat support	42
Somewhat oppose	12
Strongly oppose	5
Total Support	82
Total Oppose	18

Raise Taxes on Wealthy

Q34_11. Raising tax rates on people who earn more than \$400,000 a year.

Strongly support	42
Somewhat support	31
Somewhat oppose	16
Strongly oppose	10
Total Support	73
Total Oppose	27

Tariffs

Q34_12. Using tariffs to protect U.S. companies from China's unfair trade practices.

Strongly support	39
Somewhat support	46
Somewhat oppose	13
Strongly oppose	3
Total Support	85
Total Oppose	15

Spending, Debt & Inflation

Q46. The national debt is more than 22 trillion dollars. How serious of an economic problem do you think our growing national debt is?

Very serious	52
Somewhat serious	36
Not very serious	9
Not at all serious	2
Total Serious	88
Total Not Serious	12

Q47. Which party do you think is most responsible for running up the national debt?

The Republicans	26
The Democrats	33
Both equally	42

Q48. Which party do you trust most to get the debt under control?

The Republicans	32
The Democrats	28
Neither	40

Q49. How worried are you that the national debt will put heavy economic burdens on young workers and families?

Very worried	37
Somewhat worried	43
Not very worried	15
Not at all worried	5
Total Worried	80
Total Not Worried	20

Q50. How worried are you that government spending on pandemic relief and physical and human infrastructure will overheat the economy and cause inflation to rise?

Very worried	37
Somewhat worried	37
Not very worried	21
Not at all worried	5
Total Worried	74
Total Not Worried	26

Medicare Expansion

Q51. Some Democrats propose that we expand Medicare to cover more services even though Medicare already spends more than it takes in through premiums and payroll taxes. Do you support or oppose this proposal to expand services provided by Medicare?

Strongly support	25
Somewhat support	32
Somewhat oppose	25
Strongly oppose	18
Total Support	57
Total Oppose	43

Asked if “Strongly” or “Somewhat Support” in Q51

Q52. Which best represents your view of how this should be paid for?

Ranked by All.

By charging higher premiums for those who receive the expanded benefits.	42
By raising taxes paid by workers.	35
By borrowing the money and adding the cost to our national debt.	23

Tax Code Changes

Q53. If Congress were to change the tax code, which should be its top goal?

Ranked by All.

Making sure the wealthy and companies pay more in taxes.	41
Stimulating economic investment and job growth.	29
Lowering payroll taxes on working people.	22
Raising revenue to pay for public investments in infrastructure and people.	9

Q54. In general, should the U.S. tax code put more emphasis on:

Promoting tax fairness and reducing income inequality.	50
Promoting enterprise and rewarding hard work by Americans.	50

Q55. In 2017, Republicans cut the top tax rate on corporations from 35 to 21 percent. Some Democrats in Congress want to raise the rate to 25 percent to help finance public investment in infrastructure and social needs. Do you believe the Democrats' approach would have a positive or negative impact on the economy?

Very positive	26
Somewhat positive	27
Somewhat negative	17
Very negative	19
Have no impact on the economy	11
Total Positive	54
Total Negative	36

Q56. Which do you think should be taxed at a higher rate?

Ranked by All.

Both taxed equally	43
Money you earn through your own labor.	34
Money and property you inherit from your parents.	23

Q57. What people earn from stock market investments is taxed at a lower rate than money earned through wages or salaries. Do you support or oppose raising the tax rate for investment income so it is the same as the tax rate for wage and salary income?

Strongly support	19
Somewhat support	34
Somewhat oppose	24
Strongly oppose	24
Total Support	53
Total Oppose	47

Q58. Do you support or oppose raising the tax rate for investment income to pay for infrastructure and child tax credits for working families?

Strongly support	13
Somewhat support	33
Somewhat oppose	26
Strongly oppose	27
Total Support	46
Total Oppose	54

Views of Business

Q64. Thinking about the big American technology companies such as Apple, Amazon, Google, and Facebook, do you view their success and how large they have become as:

A good thing for American workers and the U.S. economy.	66
A bad thing for American workers and the U.S. economy.	34