

Political Polling: An Inside Look

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Spark: March 2023



TOPICS

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MY STORY

How I got involved in this

02

WHAT IS POLLING

The basics

03

HOW ARE POLLS USED

How different people use polls to make decisions

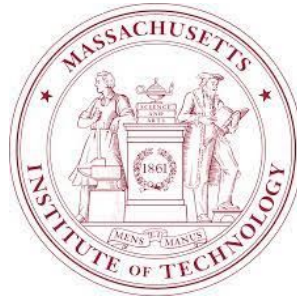
04

SCIENTIFIC POLLING

How polls are designed and how you interpret them

My Story

- Education
- Work
- Outside Interests and organizations





What is polling?

- Aims to measure public opinion on a particular topic
- Attempts to achieve a representative random sample
 - The demographics of the people responding should look similar to the total population
 - Ideally, the people answering the poll are completely random - every person in the population has an equal chance of being picked
- Using statistics, we can reasonably estimate what the population thinks by asking a much smaller portion of the population
- Differs from informal surveys/straw polls by following a strict set of guidelines to avoid bias
 - These surveys are usually directed to a particular audience and can be answered multiple times



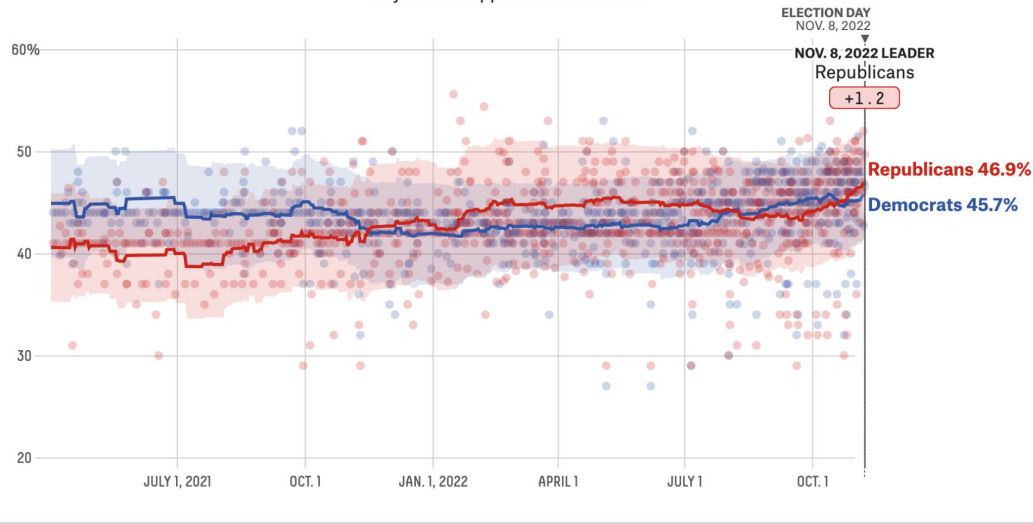
Who uses political polls? For what purposes?

- Can be used by candidates, the media, political action committees, advocacy groups, government offices, and more
- **TYPES**
 - **Horseshoe polling** - Who do voters currently prefer in an upcoming election?
 - **Approval/favorability polling** - Do voters like a particular politician or think they're doing a good job?
 - **Issue polling** - What do voters think about a particular issue? What policies do they support?
 - **Messaging polling** - What message can a politician use to convince voters to vote for them or support their policies? Which issues or character traits should they focus on?

What are political polls used for?

Do voters want Republicans or Democrats in Congress?

An updating estimate of the generic congressional ballot, based on polls that ask people which party they would support in an election.



UPDATED MAR. 17, 2023, AT 10:04 AM

How unpopular is Joe Biden?

An updating calculation of the president's approval rating, accounting for each poll's quality, recency, sample size and partisan lean.

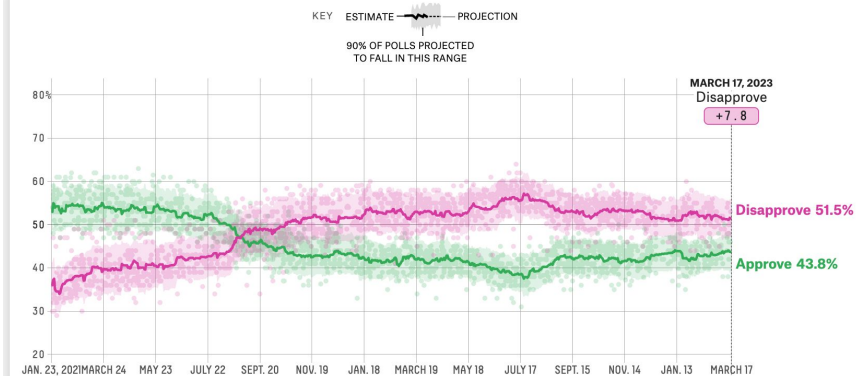
[How this works](#)

[See the latest polls](#)

Today

4 years

All polls

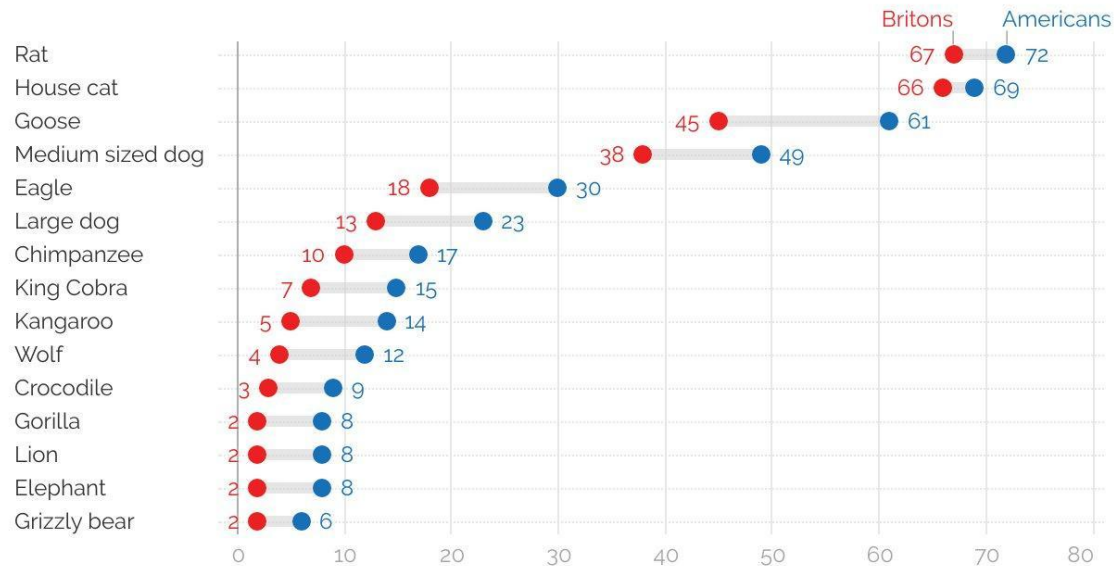


What are political polls used for?

Americans are more confident than Britons that they could beat any animal in a fight

Which of the following animals, if any, do you think you could beat in a fight if you were unarmed?

% of 2,082 GB adults



What goes into conducting a poll?





Drafting

- First, decide what the poll will be about
 - Which group of people will you be polling?
 - What information are you looking for? What issues do you want to focus on?
 - How much do you want to ask about?
 - Do you want to test any messages?
- Once topics are set, go about writing questions
 - Include demographic questions to make sure to know if sample is representative
 - Be aware of how wording and order of questions could affect answers
 - Make sure questions are clear and concise
 - Wording of answer choices is also important

Drafting

The island of Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory of the United States. Its 3.2 million residents are US citizens, but they are denied the right to vote for President and do not have voting representation in Congress. Most Puerto Ricans speak Spanish as their first language, and Puerto Rico has its own representation in some international competitions such as the Olympics. Many have suggested that Puerto Rico should no longer be a territory of the United States.

What do you think should happen to Puerto Rico?

- Become a state
- Become an independent country
- Remain in its current status
- Something else
- Not sure

Do you consider Puerto Ricans to be Americans?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you support or oppose the following actions with respect to Puerto Rico? [Strongly support | Somewhat support | Neither support nor oppose | Somewhat oppose | Strongly oppose | Not sure]

- Admitting Puerto Rico into the union as a state
- Letting Puerto Rico become an independent country
- Giving Puerto Rico voting representation in Congress
- Giving Puerto Ricans a vote in Presidential elections
- Offering Puerto Rico a binding referendum to decide whether to remain in its current status or to change it by becoming a state, becoming independent, or some other arrangement with the United States

Do you support statehood for the District of Columbia?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

70. Do you consider Puerto Ricans to be Americans?

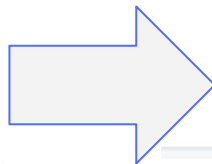
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

71. The District of Columbia is home to over 650,000 American citizens and does not have representation in the U.S. Congress and cannot vote for President. Do you support or oppose DC becoming a state?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Not sure

72. Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory of the United States. It is home to 3.2 million primarily Spanish-speaking residents and does not have representation in the U.S. Congress and cannot vote for President. Do you support or oppose:

[Strongly support | Somewhat support | Somewhat oppose | Strongly oppose | Not sure]



- Puerto Rico becoming a state
- Puerto Rico becoming an independent country
- Granting Puerto Rico votes in the Electoral College and in Congress
- Allowing Puerto Ricans to decide whether to become a state, to become an independent country, to remain an unincorporated territory, or arrange another agreement with the U.S.

73. Based on what you know, what is the best option for Puerto Rico:

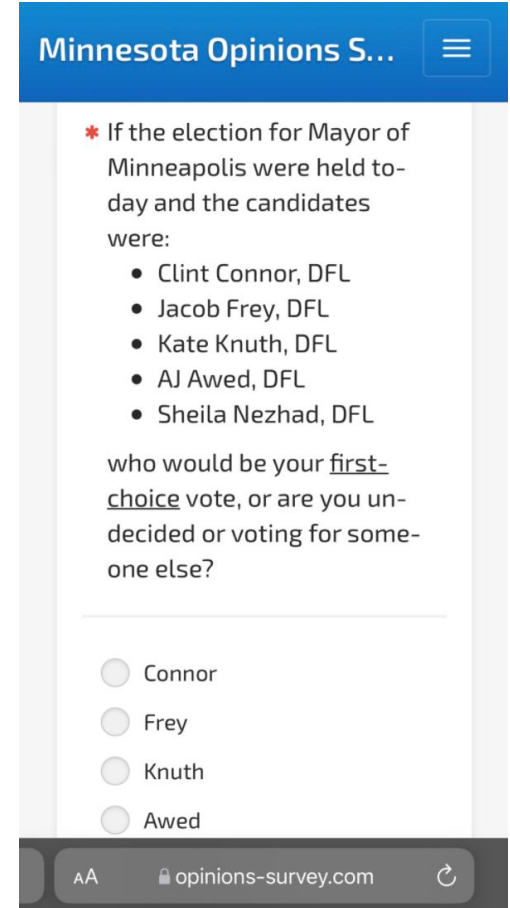
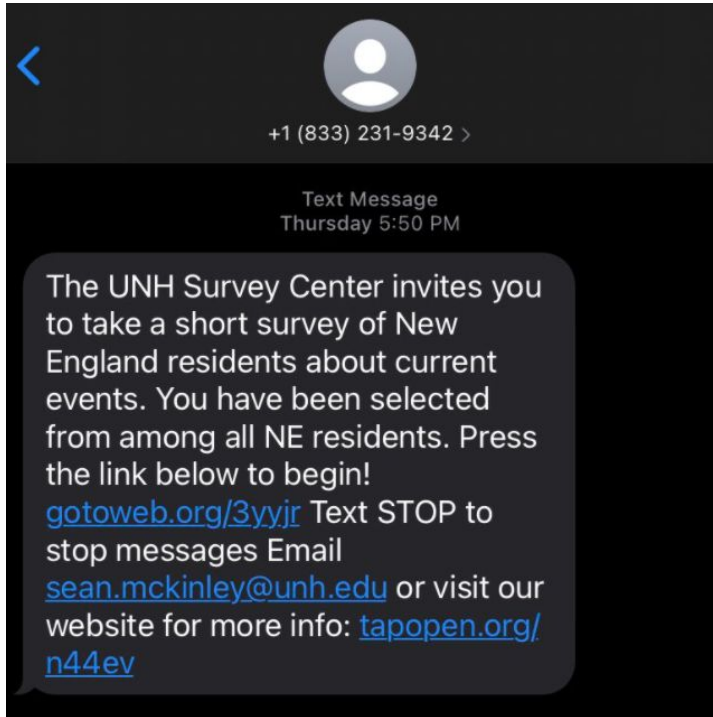
- Becoming a state
- Becoming an independent country
- Remaining an unincorporated territory
- Something else (specify)



Fielding: Getting Responses

- Live phone calls
 - Traditionally the “gold standard,” but not as much anymore
 - Becoming harder as less people pick up their phones
- Automated phone calls
 - Answer by pressing a button on the phone
- Panels
 - Recruit a group of people who will agree to answer surveys
 - Sometimes platforms will offer a cash incentive
- Text-to-web
 - Text people a link to an online questionnaire
- Online ads
 - Advertise a questionnaire on social media
- Mail
- Door-to-door
 - Rare in the US, more common in Latin America

Fielding: Getting Responses



Let's try it out!

<https://tinyurl.com/SparkPoll>





Achieving a Representative Sample

- The more people you survey, the closer your estimates will be to reality
 - Must weigh cost vs accuracy
- Pollsters also must make sure the group of people that answered the poll has the same demographic traits as the overall population
 - Bias towards a particular race, gender, or other demographic could change people's answers
- Important demographics to keep track of
 - Race
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Political party
 - College education (recently has become more important)
 - Geographic region
- Ways to correct bias
 - Targeting - keep track of demographics while poll is out in the field and try to get more responses from a particular group that you need more of
 - Weighting - count responses from a particular group more in the overall results

Achieving a Representative Sample

In the 2018 race for US House of Representatives, did you vote for:	The Democratic candidate	46
	The Republican candidate	36
	Another candidate	1
	Don't remember	6
	Did not vote	10
Gender	Male	46
	Female	54
Age Range	18 to 34	20
	35 to 49	25
	50 to 64	30
	65 or older	25
Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	1
	Asian / Pacific Islander	3
	Black or African American	11
	Hispanic or Latino/a	10
	Other	2
Educational Attainment	White / Caucasian	73
	High school diploma or less	11
	Some college, but no degree	30
	Associate's degree, or two-year college degree	15
	Bachelor's degree, or four-year college degree	24
Graduate degree	20	



Analyzing Results

- First see if there's anything obviously wrong
 - Adjust weights if things seem off
- Pay attention to the *margin of error* - how precise we expect the results to be
- **Toptlines**
 - These are the overall results for the entire population
 - Most precise information
- **Crosstabs**
 - Look at how specific demographic groups answered questions
 - Can give insight into what's causing the overall result to be what it is
 - Since this data is only a subset of everyone who answered the poll, the numbers are less precise
- If different messages are being tested, we can see how they affected how people view the candidates/issues

Analyzing Results

33B. Favorability of Politicians — Bernie Sanders

Do you have a favorable or an unfavorable opinion of the following people?

	Total	Gender		White Men		White Women		Race	
		Male	Female	No degree	College Grad	No degree	College Grad	Black	Hispanic
Very favorable	23%	19%	25%	14%	20%	18%	29%	38%	25%
Somewhat favorable	23%	26%	21%	21%	27%	18%	24%	31%	26%
Somewhat unfavorable	12%	14%	11%	14%	14%	10%	13%	8%	14%
Very unfavorable	29%	33%	25%	41%	35%	32%	27%	11%	17%
Don't know	13%	8%	18%	10%	3%	21%	7%	13%	18%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%	99%	100%	101%	100%
Unweighted N	(1,492)	(702)	(790)	(326)	(187)	(354)	(208)	(166)	(153)

	Total	Age				Income			Region			
		18-29	30-44	45-64	65+	Under \$50K	\$50-100K	\$100K or more	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Very favorable	23%	20%	23%	25%	20%	24%	21%	23%	25%	24%	19%	24%
Somewhat favorable	23%	27%	27%	20%	22%	24%	25%	24%	26%	25%	21%	25%
Somewhat unfavorable	12%	13%	13%	13%	10%	12%	15%	12%	12%	11%	12%	14%
Very unfavorable	29%	12%	18%	36%	45%	24%	28%	34%	26%	28%	32%	26%
Don't know	13%	28%	19%	7%	3%	16%	11%	6%	11%	13%	15%	11%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	101%	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%	101%	99%	100%
Unweighted N	(1,492)	(231)	(318)	(570)	(373)	(610)	(443)	(303)	(261)	(293)	(601)	(337)

	Total	Registered	2020 Vote		Party ID			Ideology		
		Voters	Biden	Trump	Dem	Rep	Ind	Lib	Mod	Con
Very favorable	23%	24%	45%	4%	45%	4%	16%	50%	18%	5%
Somewhat favorable	23%	23%	35%	8%	31%	12%	25%	30%	32%	12%
Somewhat unfavorable	12%	11%	9%	13%	9%	14%	16%	9%	17%	12%
Very unfavorable	29%	33%	5%	69%	6%	59%	33%	7%	21%	60%
Don't know	13%	9%	7%	5%	8%	11%	11%	5%	11%	11%
Totals	100%	100%	101%	99%	99%	100%	101%	101%	99%	100%
Unweighted N	(1,492)	(1,271)	(596)	(509)	(527)	(395)	(409)	(424)	(456)	(494)

Analyzing Results















Question		Respondents	18 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65 or Older	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino/a	White / Caucasian
Sample Size (Weighted)		1125	223	276	333	277	128	114	813
How much have you heard about the following news stories in the past week? - Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar live-streaming as they played video games on Twitch	A lot	8	30	5	3	2	8	20	7
	A decent amount	9	15	10	5	8	10	3	9
	A little bit	18	16	21	18	16	13	19	19
	None at all	65	40	65	74	74	69	58	65



How can you be smarter about reading poll results when you find them?

- Who paid for the poll?
 - Is it an *internal poll*?
 - Did a group that advocates for specific issues release it?
- What reputation does the company who ran the poll have?
- What is the sample size? How transparent is the company about providing information on how the poll was conducted?
- What method did the company use to recruit respondents?
- Do the demographics match with the total population?
- What demographics did the pollster use for weighting?
- Did the company release crosstabs or just toplines?
- Does the wording of the questions seem biased?

How can you be smarter about reading poll results when you find them?

DATES	POLLSTER	GRADE	SAMPLE	WEIGHT	APPROVE		DISAPPROVE		ADJUSTED	
NOV. 5-7	TIPP Insights	A+	1,359 A	 2.51	41%	49%	41%	54%	41%	54%
NOV. 5-7	AtlasIntel	A	1,013 A	 1.86	36%	53%	37%	53%	37%	53%
NOV. 4-7	Ipsos	B-	1,004 A	 0.67	39%	57%	38%	57%	38%	57%
NOV. 4-6	Trafalgar Group	A-	1,099 LV	 1.49	40%	58%	42%	55%	42%	55%
NOV. 3-6	YouGov	B+	1,500 A	 0.95	42%	51%	43%	52%	43%	52%
NOV. 2-6	Rasmussen Reports/Pulse Opinion Research	B	1,500 LV	 1.34	42%	56%	43%	52%	43%	52%
NOV. 4-5	Morning Consult	B	2,005 RV	 0.09	42%	55%	41%	58%	41%	58%
NOV. 3-5	Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies	B+	1,000 RV	 1.33	44%	53%	44%	53%	44%	53%
NOV. 2-4	Big Village	B	1,009 A	 0.90	40%	52%	40%	53%	40%	53%
NOV. 2	Redfield & Wilton Strategies	B/C	1,500 RV	 1.17	39%	46%	41%	52%	41%	52%
OCT. 31-NOV. 2	Big Village	B	1,006 A	 0.86	41%	52%	42%	53%	42%	53%
OCT. 30-NOV. 2	ABC News/The Washington Post	A+	1,005 A	 1.99	41%	53%	42%	53%	42%	53%
OCT. 31-NOV. 1	Ipsos	B-	1,004 A	 0.56	40%	55%	40%	56%	40%	56%
OCT. 30-NOV. 1	Rasmussen Reports/Pulse Opinion Research	B	1,500 LV	 0.78	45%	54%	46%	50%	46%	50%

How can you be smarter about reading poll results when you find them?

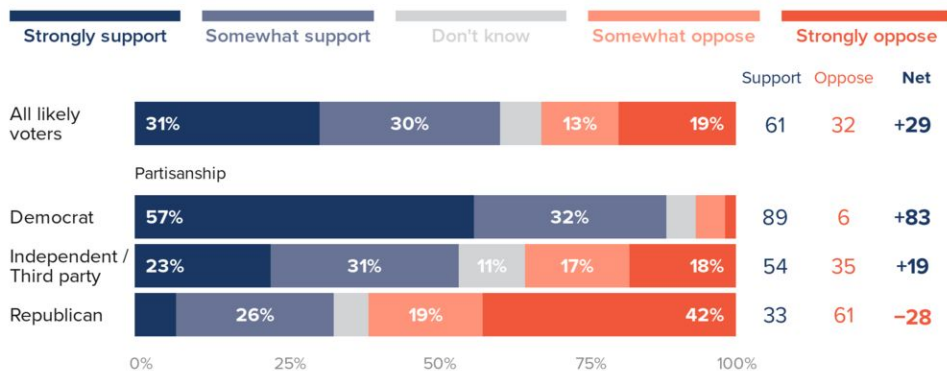
DATES	SAMPLE ⓘ	POLLSTER	SPONSOR	RESULT	NET RESULT	
U.S. Senate, Iowa, 2022 ↕ AVG.			Final Result:	Franken 44% 56% Grassley	Grassley +12.2	
Oct. 31 - Nov. 3	801 LV	A+	Selzer & Co.	The Des Moines Register, Mediacom	Franken 41% 53% ● Grassley	Grassley +12
Oct. 26 - 27	600 LV	B+	Cygnal	◆ Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation	Franken 43% 54% ● Grassley	Grassley +11
Oct. 22 - 25	623 LV	B-	Civiqs		Franken 44% 52% ● Grassley	Grassley +8
Oct. 15 - 19	600 LV	B+	Tarrance Group	◆ NRSC	Franken 42% 53% ● Grassley	Grassley +11
Oct. 14 - 18	1,008 LV	B-	Change Research	◆ Michael Franken	Franken 45% 48% ● Grassley	Grassley +3
Oct. 9 - 12	620 LV	A+	Selzer & Co.	The Des Moines Register, Mediacom	Franken 43% 46% ● Grassley	Grassley +3
Oct. 2 - 4	959 LV	A-	Emerson College		Franken 38% 49% ● Grassley	Grassley +11
Oct. 2 - 4	600 LV	B+	Cygnal	◆ Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation	Franken 40% 54% ● Grassley	Grassley +14
Sep. 23 - 28	978 LV	B-	Change Research	◆ Michael Franken	Franken 44% 49% ● Grassley	Grassley +5
Sep. 3 - 8	1,143 LV	B-	Change Research	◆ Michael Franken	Franken 44% 48% ● Grassley	Grassley +4
Jul. 13 - 14	600 LV	B+	Cygnal	◆ Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation	Franken 43% 52% ● Grassley	Grassley +8

How can you be smarter about reading poll results when you find them?

A Majority of Voters Support the Build Back Better Plan

The Build Back Better plan is a proposal to invest \$1.75 trillion over the next ten years to better fund long-term care for seniors and people with disabilities, expand Medicare coverage to include hearing, invest in clean energy, extend tax credits for families with children, and provide subsidies for child care.

Based on what you know now, do you support or oppose the Build Back Better plan?



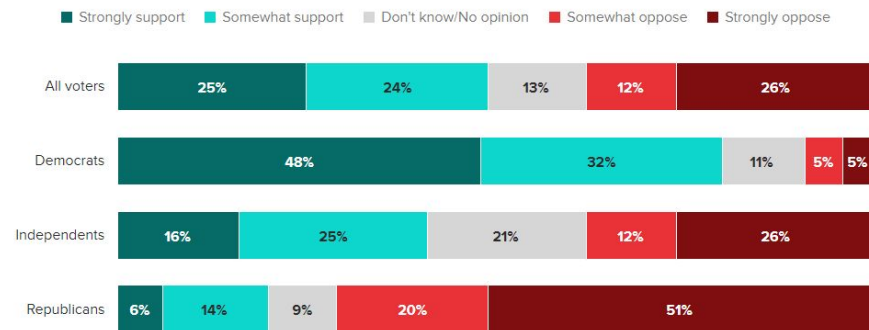
October 29–November 1, 2021 survey of 1,177 likely voters



DATA FOR PROGRESS

About Half of Voters Support House Democrats' 'Build Back Better' Bill

Voters were asked whether they support or oppose the Democrats' roughly \$2 trillion "Build Back Better" climate and social spending package



MORNING CONSULT | POLITICO

Poll conducted Nov. 20-21, 2021, among 1,999 registered voters, with a margin of error of +/-2%. Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

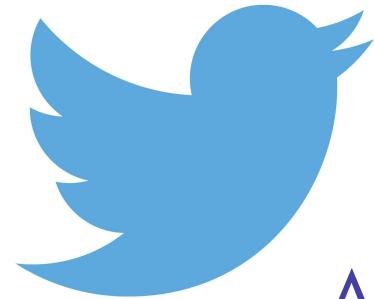
Where can you go to learn more?



FiveThirtyEight

The New York Times

**The
Economist**



And more...

Example of some of my past work:

<https://tinyurl.com/FrankysPoll>



May 17, 2021

TO: Interested Parties

**FROM: Francisco Proskauer Valerio, Technical Data Analyst
Nancy Zdunkewicz, Senior Polling Data Analyst**

RE: Voters Support Action on the Status of Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.

With the recent passage of the Washington, D.C. Admission Act in the U.S. House, many have wondered whether there will also be legislative action regarding Puerto Rico's political status. There are currently two different bills being debated in Congress to resolve Puerto Rico's status: the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act (HR 1522) and the Puerto Rico Self Determination Act (HR 2070). Change Research conducted a national survey of 1,025 voters from April 15th-20th to gauge American voters' opinions on the political status of Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.¹

**“Facts are stubborn things,
but statistics are pliable.”
— Mark Twain**



Thanks

What further questions
do you have?

