

September 27, 2024

**TO:** Katie Langford and Jim Ludes, Pell Center at Salve Regina University  
**FROM:** Jessica Mason, Embold Research  
**RE:** Voices of Value Survey Results, September 2024



On behalf of the Pell Center at Salve Regina University, Embold Research conducted a poll among 876 likely voters in Rhode Island to monitor and better understand voters' perceptions of political polarization and the current political landscape both nationally and in Rhode Island, following previous polling conducted in June of this year, and in October of 2023.<sup>1</sup> This research found that voters continue to foster strong concerns about both the integrity of the 2024 presidential election and the escalation of political polarization. In addition to these concerns, self-identified Democrats' and Republicans' perceptions of the causes of polarization, as well as opinions on key current events, continue to be deeply partisan. This research also found distinct partisan differences in the way likely voters are approaching the 2024 general election, both in central motivations for voting and satisfaction with the current presidential candidates.

---

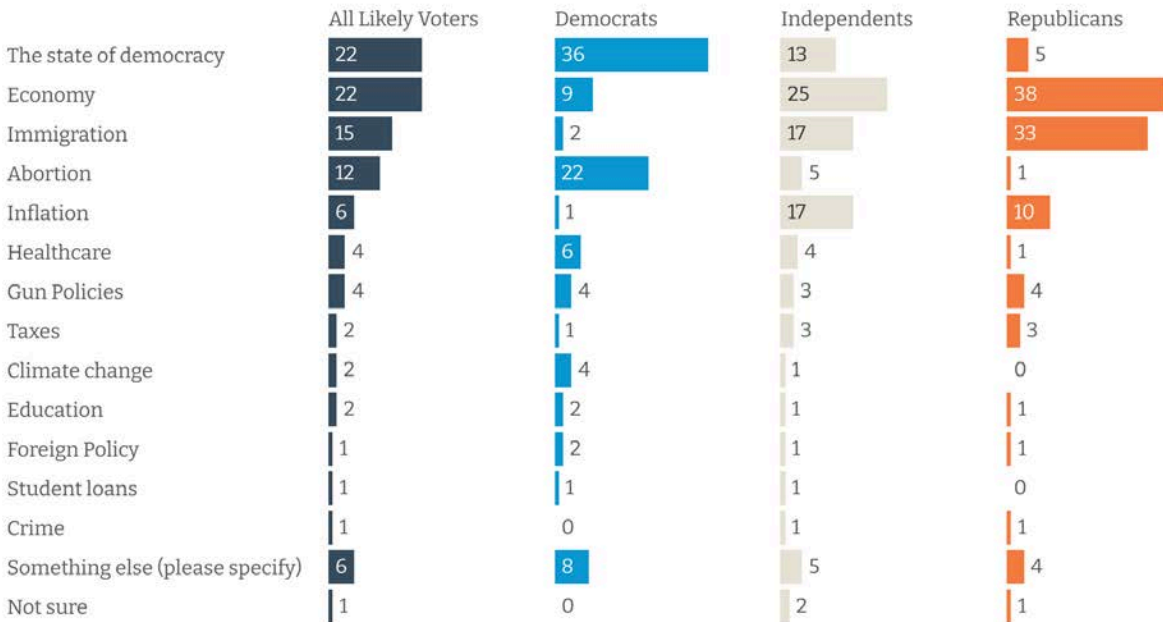
## 2024 Election in Context

**Rhode Island voters identify the state of democracy and the economy as the deciding issues when voting this November.** When asked to select the single most important factor in deciding their vote, likely voters most often select "the state of democracy" (22%) or the "economy" (22%). Immigration (15%) and abortion (12%) are the next most likely to be selected. Top issues vary significantly by partisanship: self-identified Democrats are most likely to select the state of democracy (36%) or abortion (22%) as the most important issue, while self-identified Republicans are most likely to select the economy (38%), or immigration (33%).

---

<sup>1</sup>On behalf of the Pell Center at Salve Regina University, Embold Research surveyed 876 likely voters in the state of Rhode Island from September 16-20, 2024. Respondents were recruited via dynamic online sampling and SMS text-to-web sampling to attain a sample reflective of the electorate. Post-stratification weighting was performed on age, gender, ethnicity, education, region, party registration, and 2020 presidential vote. Weighting parameters are based on the demographic composition of 2024 general election voters, based on probabilistic turnout scores provided by Deck. These scores incorporate past vote history and demographic factors, as well as environmental factors including media coverage, fundraising numbers, and candidate demographics. The modeled margin of error is +/- 3.5%.

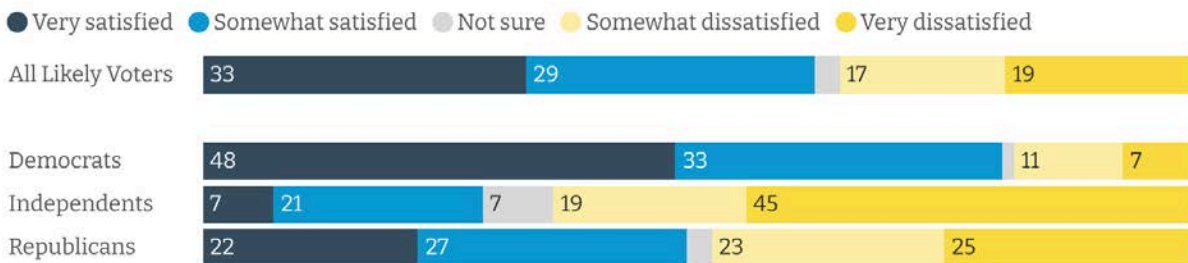
## Top Issues ahead of the 2024 Election



Q: What one issue is most important in deciding your vote this November?

**Just over six in 10 likely voters (62%) say that they are satisfied with their choice of candidates for the 2024 presidential election.** Among those who report satisfaction with candidate choice, one-third say that they are “very satisfied.” In contrast, 36% say they are dissatisfied with their candidate options. Notably, satisfaction with the options for candidates varies heavily by partisan lines. An overwhelming majority of self-identified Democrats (80%) say that they are satisfied with their choice of candidates. In contrast, self-identified Republicans are split on their perception of their choice for president: 49% are satisfied, and 49% are dissatisfied. Moreover, Independent voters display high levels of dissatisfaction with their presidential options, with 65% saying they are dissatisfied, and only 28% saying they are satisfied.

## Satisfaction With Presidential Candidates



Q: In general, how satisfied are you with your choice of candidates in this fall's presidential election?

**For just over half of likely voters (54%), the selection of vice president for both the Republican and Democratic ticket does not impact their vote choice.** For voters who are swayed by the selection of vice presidential candidates, there is a greater lean toward Harris (27% more likely to vote for Harris) than toward Trump (15% more likely). Only 1% of voters say that the vice presidential selection has made them less likely to vote.

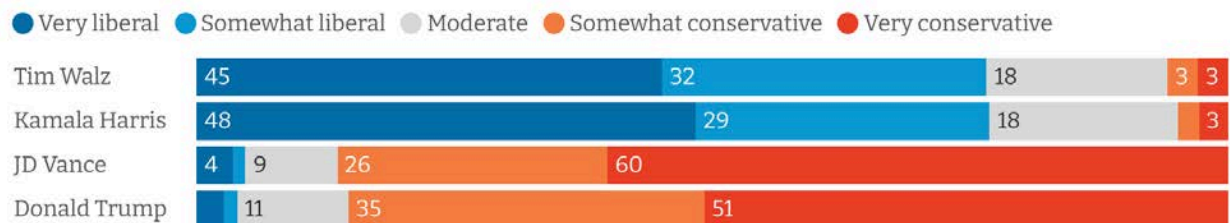
## Impact of VP Candidate on Vote Choice



Q: Does the selection of Vice President for both the Republican and Democratic parties change your mind about who to vote for in the Presidential election?

**Perceptions of the ideological lean of both the presidential and vice presidential candidates are heavily partisan.** Voters across the political spectrum overwhelmingly view Kamala Harris and Tim Walz as liberal (77% and 77% respectively). Meanwhile, Donald Trump and JD Vance are overwhelmingly seen as conservative (85% and 86% respectively). However, there is a noticeable difference in the intensity of these perceptions: six in 10 voters believe JD Vance to be “very conservative” and just over half (51%) believe the same for Donald Trump. In contrast, just under half (48%) believe that Kamala Harris is “very liberal” and 45% believe the same for Tim Walz. Additionally, both Kamala Harris (18%) and Tim Walz (18%) are more likely to be considered moderate compared to Donald Trump (11%) and JD Vance (9%).

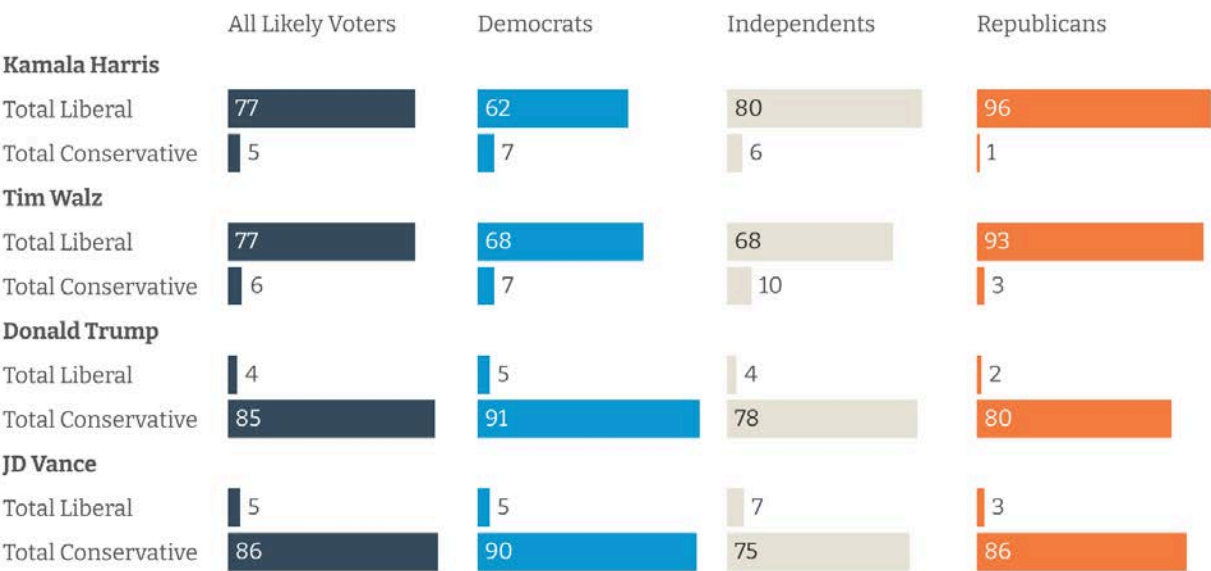
## Ideological Lean of Presidential Candidates



Q: For each of the following, do you believe they are...?

**Partisan affiliation appears to be a major factor in perceptions of candidate ideology.** For example, self-identified Republicans universally consider Kamala Harris to be “very liberal” (91%), compared to 66% of self-identified Independents, and just 13% of self-identified Democrats. A similar, but less stark, phenomenon occurs on the republican ticket: Seven in 10 Democrats believe Trump to be “very conservative,” compared to 38% of Independents, and 30% of Republicans.

### Ideological Lean of Candidates By Partisanship



Q: For each of the following, do you believe they are...?

### 2024 Vote Choice and Perceptions of Key Political Figures

**Harris holds a significant lead over Trump in the 2024 election.** If the November election were held today, just over half of voters (52%) say they would vote for Harris, while 38% would vote for Trump, putting Harris at a 14-point lead. Only 3% say they would vote for another candidate, with the most common alternative candidate named being Jill Stein. Harris captures the strongest support from women (60%), voters of color (61%), and college-educated voters (65%). Meanwhile, Trump polls ahead of Harris among men (49%), and non-college-educated voters (47%). Additionally, while vote choice falls strongly on partisan lines, self-identified Independents support Trump by a 16-point margin: 40% of these voters would vote for Trump, while 24% would vote for Harris. At the same time, a quarter of self-identified Independents remain unsure.

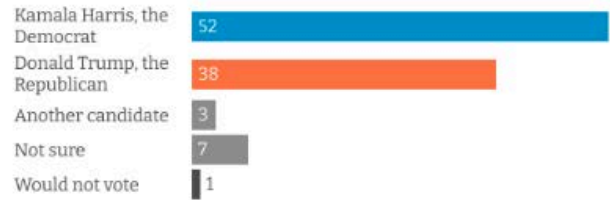
Harris' lead is also much more significant than that of Biden's before the June Presidential Debate. When asking voters how they would vote in June, 40% of voters said they would vote for Biden, while 33% said they would vote for Trump, giving Biden a 7-point lead. Additionally, 12% of voters said they would vote for Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who was still officially in the presidential race at the time of polling.

2024 Presidential Election Trial Heat - June



Q: If the 2024 election for president were held today, and the candidates were the following, who would you vote for?  
[If not sure] If you had to choose, who would you vote for?

2024 Presidential Election Trial Heat - September

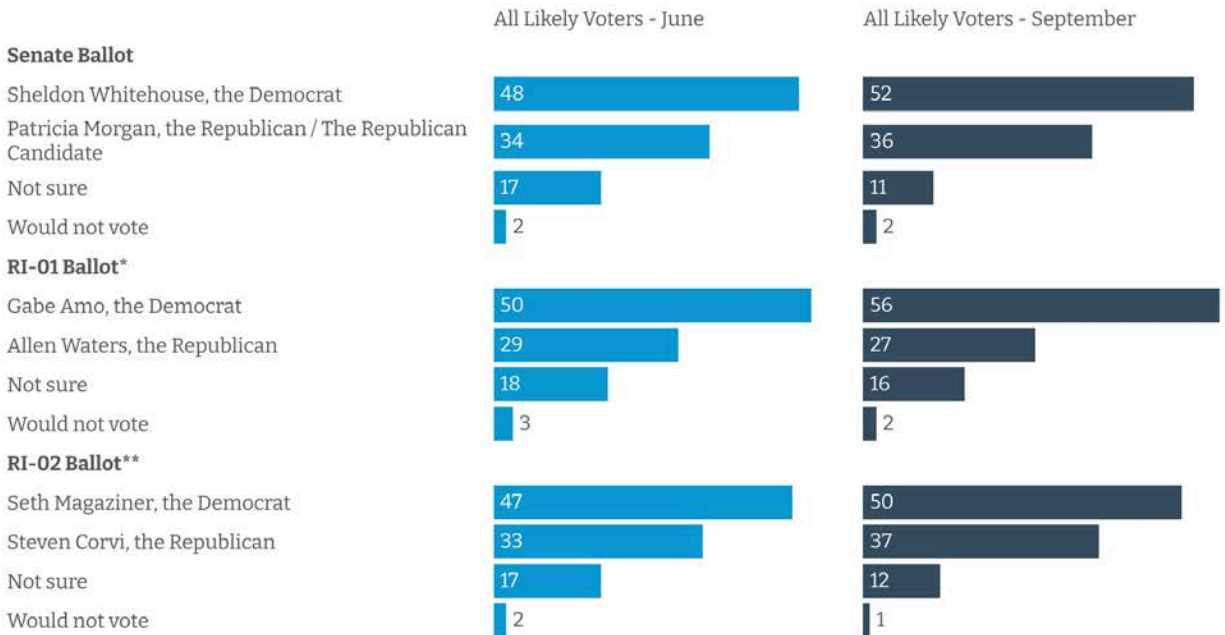


Q: If the 2024 election for president were held today, and the candidates were the following, who would you vote for?  
[If not sure] If you had to choose, who would you vote for?

**As the election nears, voters remain relatively consistent in their vote choice for State Senate and House of Representatives.** Across all three races, there are slight increases in support for both the Democratic and Republican candidates from June to September as the number of unsure voters dips. Between 11% and 16% of voters say they are unsure across all three races, a smaller proportion than those who were unsure in June.

For the race for U.S. Senator of Rhode Island, just over half (52%) of likely voters say they would vote for Democrat Sheldon Whitehouse, while 36% say they would vote for Republican Patricia Morgan. In CD-01, 56% of voters say they would vote for Democrat Gabe Amo, while 27% would vote for Republican Allen Waters. In CD-02, 50% of voters would vote for Democrat Seth Magaziner, while 37% would vote for Republican Steven Corvi.

## 2024 Vote Choice



\* Asked only of respondents who live in RI-01

\*\* Asked only of respondents who live in RI-02

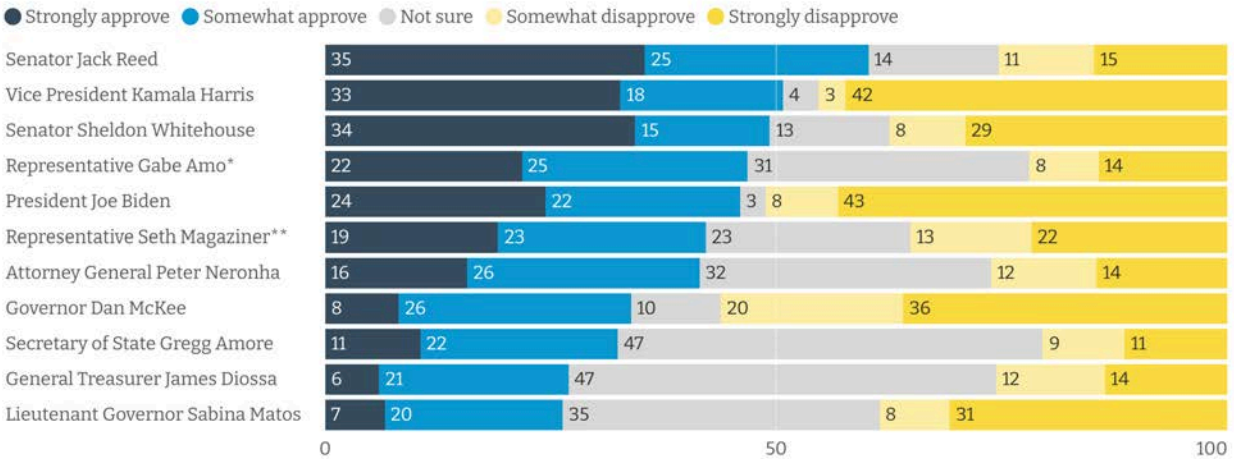
**Rhode Island Voters tend to approve of how their Senator or Representative is doing, but remain critical of the job performances of Governor McKee and President Biden.** In line with the previous June survey, Senator Jack Reed (60%) garners the highest approval rating out of a list of elected officials. Additionally, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (49%), Representative Gabe Amo (47%), and Representative Seth Magaziner (42%) retain net-positive approval ratings; however, Senator Magaziner's approval has fallen significantly since June (-9 point change). In contrast, voters remain critical of both Governor Dan McKee and President Biden: 51% disapprove of Biden's job performance, and 56% disapprove of Governor McKee's job performance.

**Notably, half of likely voters (51%) approve of Vice President Harris' job performance.**

Additionally, her approval rating correlates roughly with voters' 2024 presidential vote choice. Demographic groups of likely voters who are more favorable toward her job performance - such as women (59% approve), college-educated voters (64%), and voters of color (62%), also say they would vote for her in the upcoming election in similar proportions.



## Job Approval Ratings



Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the following individuals?

\* Asked only of respondents who live in RI-01

\*\* Asked only of respondents who live in RI-02

## Election integrity

**Voters remain relatively confident in the fairness and accuracy of the 2024 elections.** In line with previous polling conducted in June, six in 10 voters say they have at least “some” trust in the 2024 elections to be fair and accurate, with 38% saying they have “a lot” of trust. At the same time, nearly a quarter of voters (23%) say they have no trust at all in the fairness and accuracy of the upcoming elections. Trust in the upcoming election remains deeply partisan: mirroring results seen in the June survey, a strong majority of self-identified Democrats (66%) say they have a “a lot” of trust in the integrity of the upcoming elections, compared to 18% of Independents and just 7% of Republicans.

## Trust in U.S. General Election

● A lot ● Some ● Not sure ● Just a little ● None at all

### September



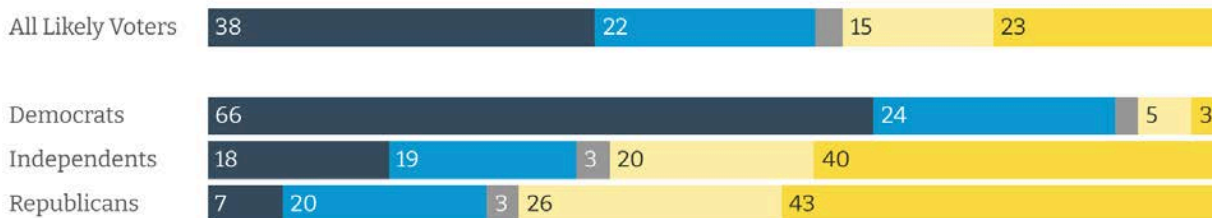
### June



Q: How much trust do you have in the 2024 U.S. elections to be fair and accurate?

## Trust in U.S. General Election by Partisanship

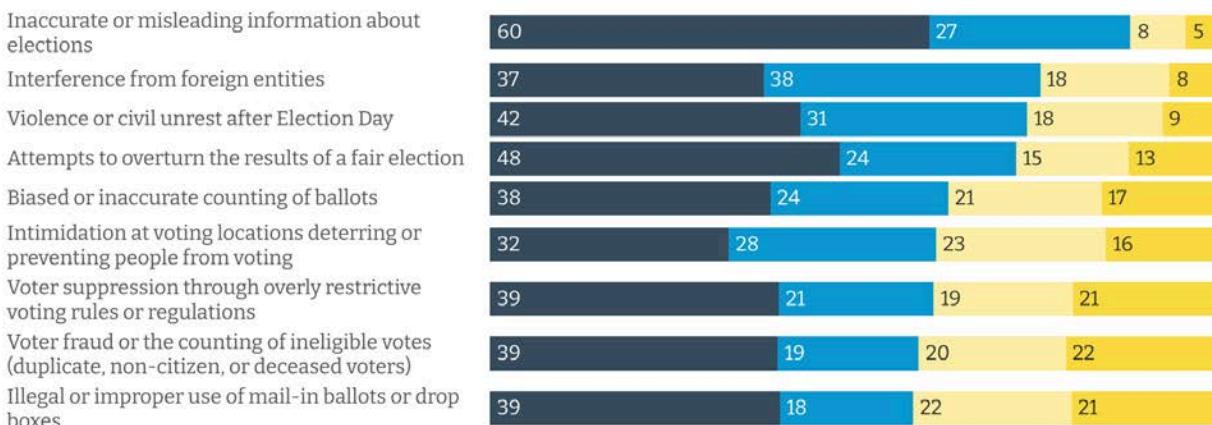
● A lot ● Some ● Not sure ● Just a little ● None at all



Q: How much trust do you have in the 2024 U.S. elections to be fair and accurate?

## Top Concerns around the 2024 General Election

● Very concerned ● Somewhat concerned ● Not that concerned ● Not concerned at all



Q: How concerned are you about the following when it comes to the 2024 elections?

**Despite continued relative trust in the fairness and accuracy of the 2024 general election, there remain pervasive concerns about the potential for bias and election interference.** An overwhelming number of voters (87%) are concerned about inaccurate or misleading information, and significant majorities are also concerned about interference from foreign entities (75%), violence or civil unrest after election day (73%), and attempts to overturn the results of a fair election (72%). In contrast, voters express the least amount of concern for illegal or improper use of mail-in ballots or drop boxes (58%) and voter fraud or the counting of ineligible votes (58%), but most voters are still concerned about these possibilities. Additionally, while voters express deep concern about inaccurate or misleading information regardless of party affiliation, other concerns take a distinctly partisan lean. Virtually all self-identified Republicans are concerned about voter fraud (93%) and illegal or improper use of non-in-person voting (92%); these are the least prominent concerns for Democratic



voters (29% and 28% respectively). In contrast, self-identified Democrats are most concerned about attempts to overturn the results of a fair election (90%), compared to just 50% of Republicans.

## Health of Democracy

**Likely voters in Rhode Island tend to be highly pessimistic about the current state of democracy nationally and within the state.** Only 11% of voters consider the U.S. system of democracy to be “extremely” or “very” healthy. Meanwhile, 30% believe it to be “moderately” healthy and 59% consider it to be “slightly” or “not at all” healthy. This pessimism continues to carry into perceptions of the direction of the state: 59% say that things in Rhode Island are headed off on the wrong track, while only 41% believe that things are headed in the right direction. Non-college-educated voters (65%) and white voters (59%) are more likely to feel that Rhode Island is headed in the wrong direction compared to their counterparts. Additionally, nearly all Republicans (91%) say that Rhode Island is on the wrong track, while seven in 10 Democrats feel that the state is headed in the right direction.

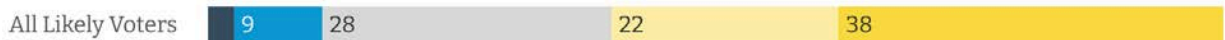
## Health of American Democracy

● Extremely healthy ● Very healthy ● Moderately healthy ● Slightly healthy ● Not at all healthy

### September



### June



Q: In your opinion, how healthy is the U.S. system of democracy?

## Polarization

### **Most voters believe that the country has continued to become more politically polarized.**

Nearly eight in 10 (79%) voters say that the country has become more politically polarized in the past year, while 14% say that the level of polarization has stayed the same, and just 3% say the the country has become less politically polarized. These proportions remain constant with voters' attitudes toward polarization in June.

### Perceptions of National Polarization

● Become less politically polarized ● Stayed the same ● Not sure ● Become more politically polarized

#### September



#### June

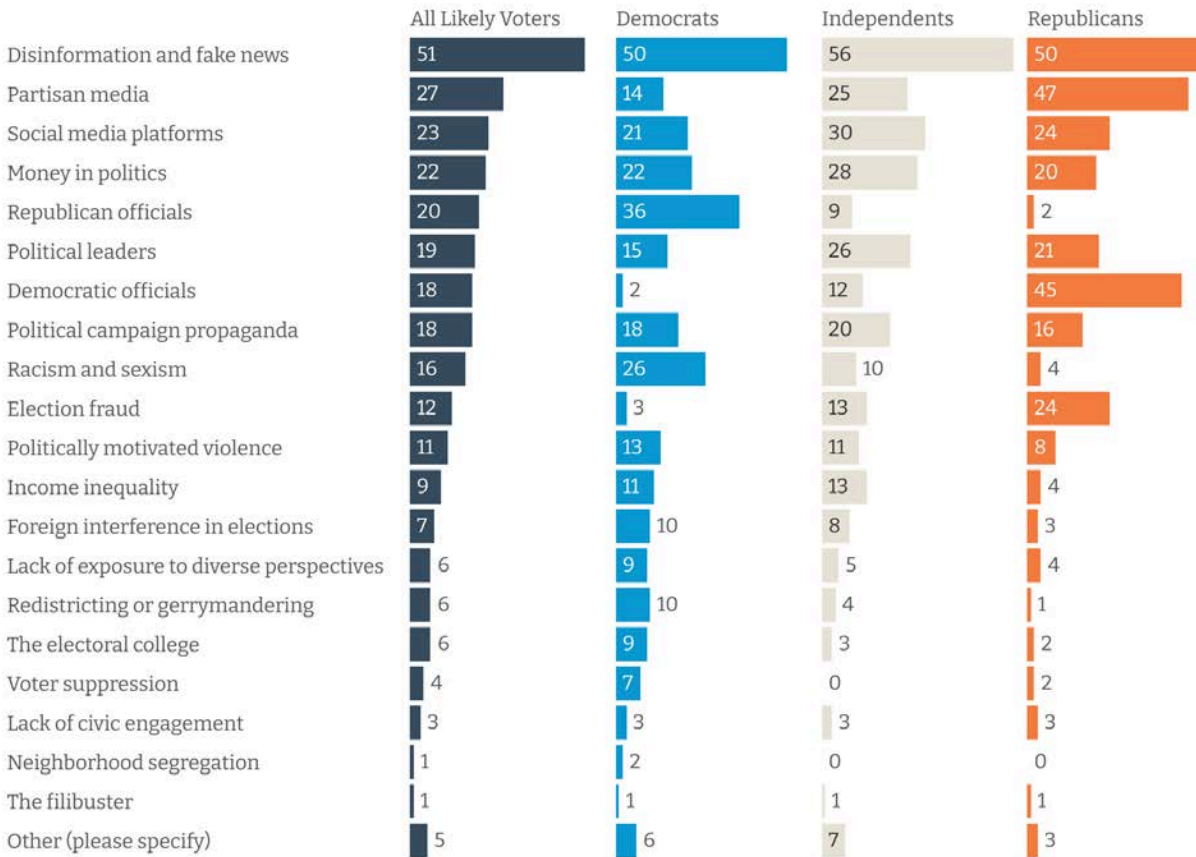


Q: In the past year, do you think the country has...

### **Just over half of voters, regardless of political affiliation, see disinformation and fake news as the strongest contributors to polarization.**

When asked to identify the strongest contributors to polarization, 51% of voters select “disinformation and fake news” as one of the top three contributors. Partisan media (29%), social media platforms (23%), and money in politics (22%) are the next most selected. There is a partisan element to these concerns: the blame toward partisan media is overwhelmingly driven by Republicans (47%), while Democrats demonstrate much more concern toward racism and sexism (26%) as a central factor toward polarization compared to other voters. Additionally, significant portions of Democrats blame Republican officials (36%) for polarization, while many Republicans blame Democratic officials (45%).

## Top Contributors to Political Polarization

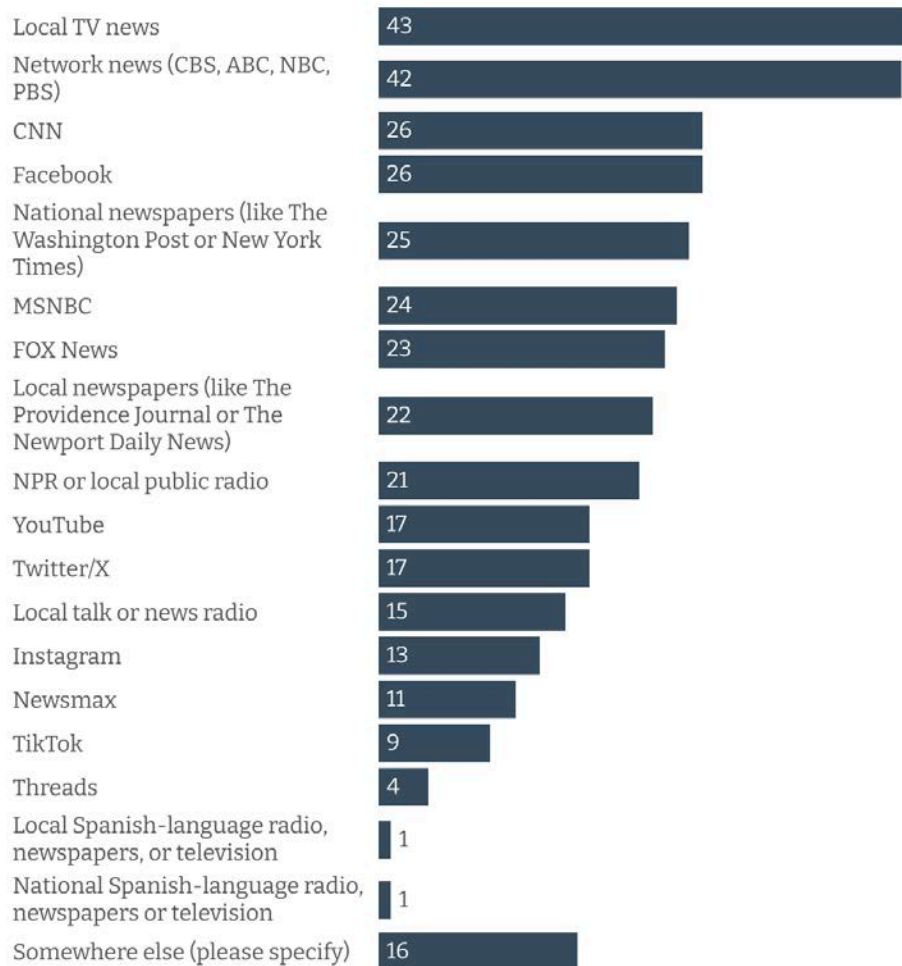


Q: What are the strongest contributors to polarization? Please select your top three.

## News Consumption and Avoidance

**Voters are most likely to turn to Local TV News (43%) or network news (42%) to get their information, however, there are clear generational and partisan differences in news consumption.** While local TV news is a relatively popular source across all age groups, the youngest cohort of voters are much more likely to turn to social media platforms such as Instagram (34%), X/Twitter (32%), YouTube (30%), and TikTok (28%) compared to their older counterparts. Additionally, news consumption has a partisan element: voters who self-identify as Democrats are most likely to get their news from network news (52%), MSNBC (38%), or CNN (37%); meanwhile, self-identified Republicans are most likely to turn to local TV news (52%) or FOX News (50%).

## News Sources



Q: How do you get most of your news about national and local politics and issues? Please select all that you watch, read or listen to for at least an hour per week.

**Most voters (72%) say that they actively avoid news at least some of the time.** When asked if they actively try to avoid the news, 29% say yes, 43% say sometimes, and only 28% say no. In comparison to June, fewer voters report outright actively avoiding news (-9 points), but the proportion of voters who “sometimes” avoid the news has increased (+8 points). Women, non-college-educated voters, and voters under 50 are more likely to avoid the news than their counterparts. Additionally, Democrats are less likely to say they actively avoid the news (23%) compared to Independent (40%) and Republican (36%) voters.

## News Avoidance

● Yes ● Sometimes ● No

### September



### June

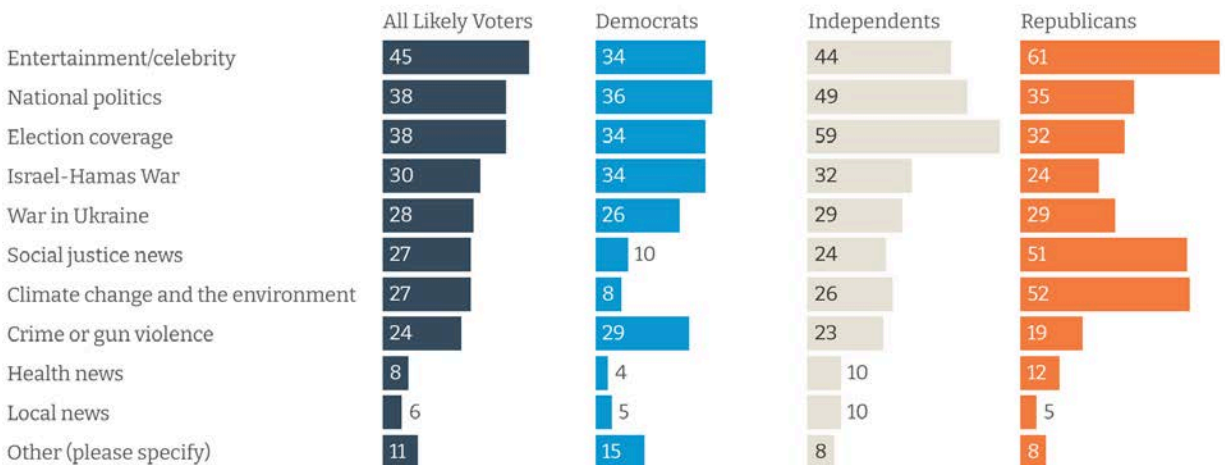


Q: Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days?

**Outside of entertainment and celebrity news (45%), voters who avoid the news are most likely to say they try to avoid the topics of national politics (38%) and election coverage (38%).** Topics to avoid also vary by partisan affiliation: outside of entertainment news, Republicans are most likely to select “climate change and the environment” (51%) and “social justice news” (52%) as topics they avoid. Meanwhile, Democrats are most likely to avoid national politics (36%), election coverage (34%), and the Israel-Hamas war (34%).

## Avoided News Topics

Among those who say they avoid news at least sometimes



Q: You said that you actively try to avoid news these days. Which of the following news topics do you try to avoid? Please select all topics that you try to avoid.

## Conclusion

Likely voters in Rhode Island continue to express distinct political unease, in line with findings from previous polling conducted earlier this summer. A significant portion of voters negatively rate the current health of U.S. democracy and believe that Rhode Island is off on the wrong track. Additionally, although a majority of voters say they have at least “some trust” in the integrity of the 2024 election, many voters express significant concerns about potential threats to that integrity, including the potential for bias, interference, fraud, and even violence following the election.

This unease is coupled with persistent affective polarization and partisan division. Most voters continue to believe that polarization has worsened in the past year. Additionally, likely voters’ perceptions on key topics like the most pressing concerns surrounding the integrity of the 2024 election and the top contributors to polarization fall on partisan lines, with Republicans and Democrats likely to blame the other party for the current political environment.

As the general election nears, these partisan differences also correlate with voters’ satisfaction with their choice of presidential candidates and the determining issues that drive their vote. Though self-identified Democrats report being highly satisfied with their choice of presidential candidates, there is a distinct concern over the health of democracy driving their vote choice. Conversely, self-identified Republicans show significantly less enthusiasm with their choice of candidates, with concerns about the economy and immigration driving their decision.