

June 18, 2024

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



On behalf of the Pell Center at Salve Regina University, Embold Research conducted a poll among 1,450 likely voters in Rhode Island in order to understand voters' perceptions of political polarization and the current political landscape both nationally and in Rhode Island.<sup>1</sup> This research found that while many voters value their American, state, and political identity, there is little trust in the current state of U.S. democracy and pessimism about the direction of Rhode Island. This research also found strong concerns about both the 2024 presidential election and an escalation of polarization in the past year. In addition to these concerns, Democrats' and Republicans' perceptions of the causes of polarization, as well as opinions on key current events, are deeply partisan.

---

## Identity and Trust in Politics

**National, state, and political identity are central components of voters' identities.** Just over seven in 10 likely voters say that being an American is "very important" to their identity, with an additional 16% saying that it is "moderately important." A majority of likely voters also believe that being a Rhode Islander is an important part of their identity, however, this sentiment carries less intensity than does national pride: 40% say that it is a very important aspect of their identity, while 28% say that it is moderately important and 15% say that it is slightly important. Political identity also forms a key part of personal identity for a significant portion of Rhode Island likely voters, regardless of their political affiliation: 52% of Democrats, 69% of independents, and 54% of Republicans say that their political affiliation is extremely or very important to their identity.

---

<sup>1</sup>On behalf of the Pell Center at Salve Regina University, Embold Research surveyed 1450 likely voters in the state of Rhode Island from June 5-14, 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 were based on voterfile data. The modeled margin of error is +/- 2.8%.

## Key Aspects of Identity

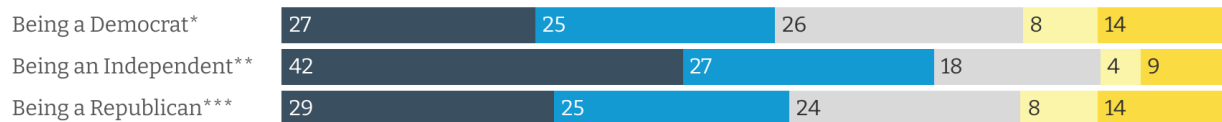
● Very important ● Moderately important ● Slightly important ● Not important at all



Q: How important are the following aspects to your identity?

## Partisan Identification and Identity

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



Q: How important are the following aspects to your identity?

\* Asked only of self-identified Democrats

\*\* Asked only of self-identified Independents

\*\*\* Asked only of self-identified Republicans

**Despite a strong sense of national and state identity, a majority of voters do not have faith in the current systems of American government.** Only 11% of voters enthusiastically rate the U.S. system of democracy as healthy. Meanwhile, 28% believe that it is moderately healthy, and 60% believe U.S. democracy to be in poor shape. This pessimism also carries into perceptions of the direction of Rhode Island: 60% say that things in Rhode Island are headed off on the wrong track, while only 40% believe that things are headed in the right direction. Voters under 35 (66%), non-college-educated voters (66%), and white voters (61%) are the most likely to feel that Rhode Island is headed in the wrong direction. Additionally, nearly all Republicans (91%) say that Rhode Island is on the wrong track, while two-thirds of Democrats are optimistic about the direction of the state.

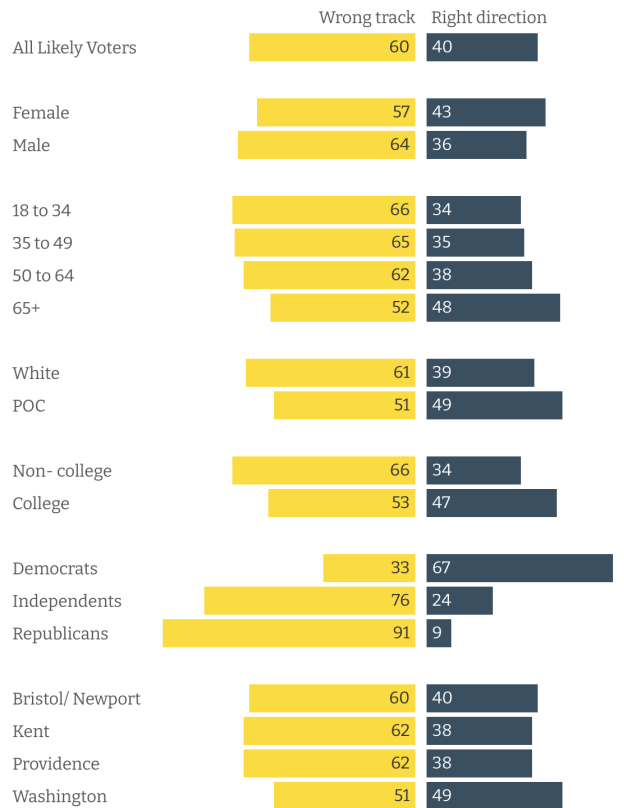
## Health of American Democracy

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



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

## Direction of Rhode Island



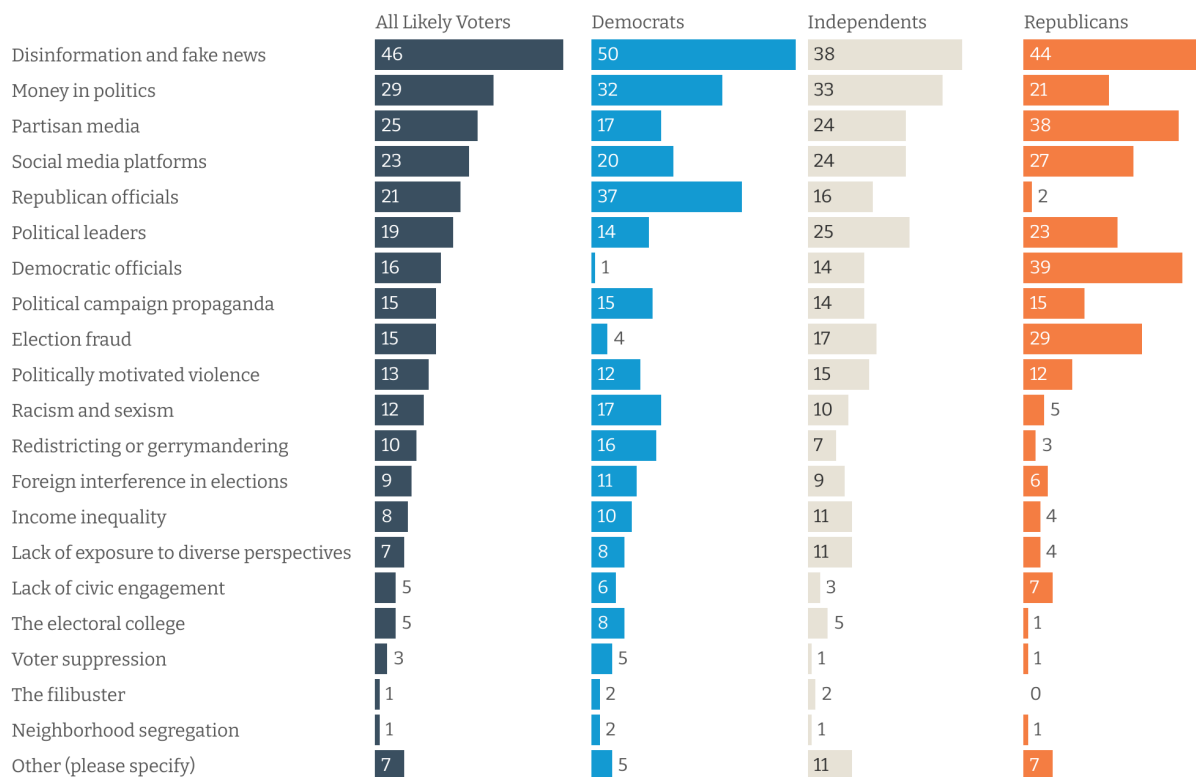
Q: Overall, how would you say things in Rhode Island are going? Are they heading in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?

## Polarization

**The vast majority of voters believe that the country is becoming increasingly polarized.** When asked about the level of polarization in this past year, 78% of voters say that political polarization has increased, and an additional 11% say that the level of polarization has stayed the same. Only 4% of voters believe that the country has become less politically polarized in the past year.

**A significant portion 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, 46% of voters select “disinformation and fake news” as one of the top three contributors. Money in politics (29%) and Partisan media (25%) are the next most selected as top contributors to polarization. There is a partisan element to these concerns: concerns about money in politics are largely driven by Democrats and Independents, while concerns about partisan media are driven by Republicans. Additionally, significant portions of Democrats blame Republican officials (37%) for polarization, while many Republicans blame Democratic officials (39%) and election fraud (29%).

## Top Contributors to Political Polarization



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

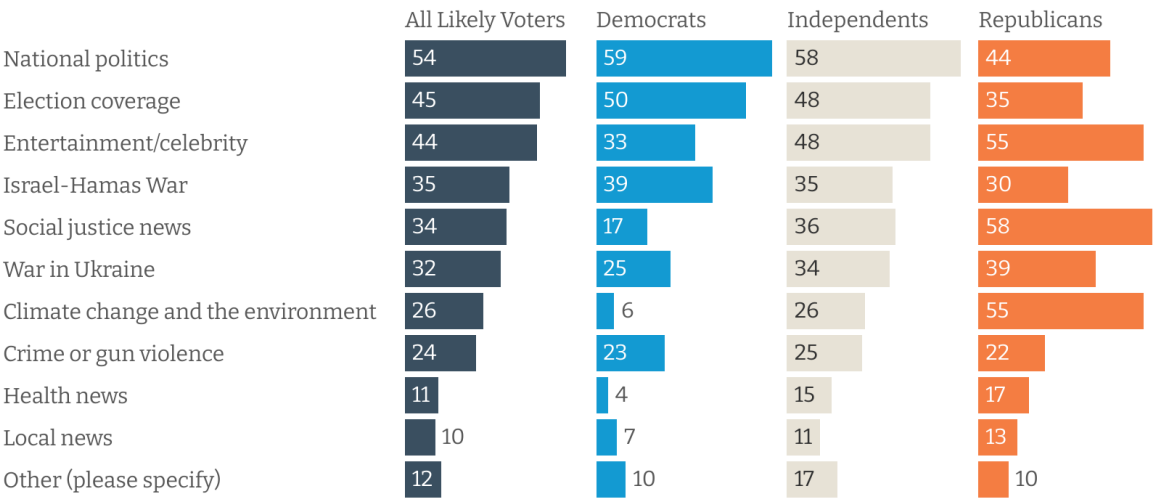
## News Avoidance

**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, 38% say yes, 35% say sometimes, and only 28% say no. Women, voters under 50, and voters of color are more likely to avoid the news than their counterparts. Additionally, voters who identify as Independent are more likely to avoid the news (80%), compared to either Democrats (69%) or Republicans (72%).

**When asked what news topics they choose to avoid, national politics (54%), election coverage (45%), and entertainment/celebrity news (44%) rise to the top.** Significant portions of voters also say that they avoid news on the Israel-Hamas War (35%), social justice news (34%), and news about the war in Ukraine (32%). Topics most commonly avoided differ by party affiliation: Republicans are most likely to say they avoid news about social justice (58%), climate change and the environment (55%), and entertainment news (55%). Meanwhile, Democrats are most likely to avoid news on national politics (59%) and election coverage (50%).

## Avoided News Topics

Among those who say they avoid news at least sometimes

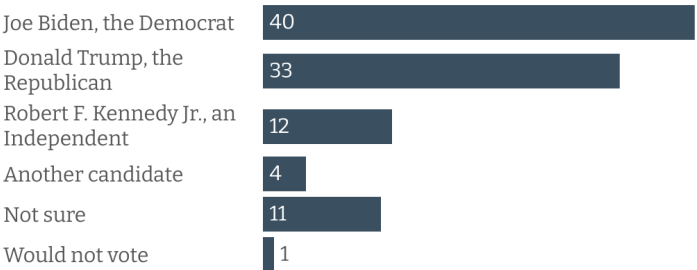


Q: You said that you actively try to avoid news these days. Which of the following news topics do you try to avoid? Please select all topics that you try to avoid.

## 2024 General Elections

**In a 2024 horserace, Biden leads Trump, but neither candidate clears 50%.** When asked how they would vote if the presidential election were held today, 40% of likely voters say they would vote for Joe Biden, and 33% would vote for Donald Trump. Nearly three in 10 voters opt for a third-party candidate or are unsure of who to vote for. Voters over 65 (54%), Black voters (52%), college-educated voters (52%), and women (43%) are more likely to support Biden, while men (41%), non-college-educated voters (39%), and white voters (35%) are the most likely to support Trump. Notably, the ballot is a toss-up for the youngest voters: among voters ages 18 to 34, 29% say they would vote for Biden, 27% say they would vote for Trump, 21% say they would vote for Kennedy Jr., and 11% say they would vote for another candidate or not vote at all.

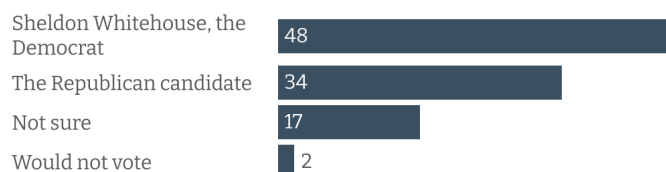
### 2024 Presidential Election Trial Heat



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?

**In contrast, Democratic candidates receive much larger shares of the vote in races for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, beating Republicans by double-digit margins.** For the race for U.S. Senator of Rhode Island, just under half (48%) of likely voters say they would vote for Sheldon Whitehouse, while 34% say they would vote for the to-be-named Republican candidate.

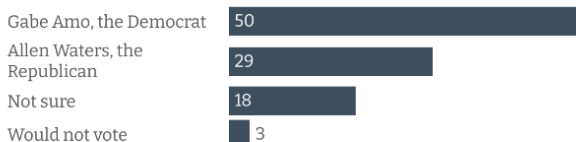
2024 Rhode Island U.S. Senator Trial Heat



Q: If the election for the U.S. Senator of Rhode Island were held today, who would you vote for?  
*[If not sure]* If you had to choose, who would you vote for?

In CD-01, 50% of likely voters say they would vote for incumbent Democrat Gabe Amo, while just 29% say they would vote for Republican Allen Waters. In CD-02, 47% of likely voters say they would vote for Democrat Seth Magaziner, while 33% would vote for republican Steven Corvi. Notably, across all three of these races, around one-fifth of likely voters say that they are unsure or would not vote in these elections.

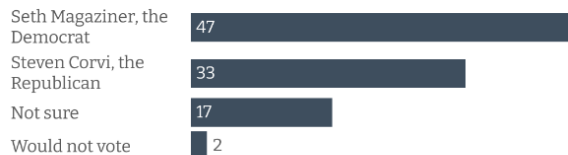
2024 House Representative RI-01 Trial Heat



If the election for the Rhode Island U.S. House representative were held today, who would you vote for?  
*[If not sure]* If you had to choose, who would you vote for?

Only asked of respondents who live in RI-01

2024 U.S. House Representative RI-02 Trial Heat

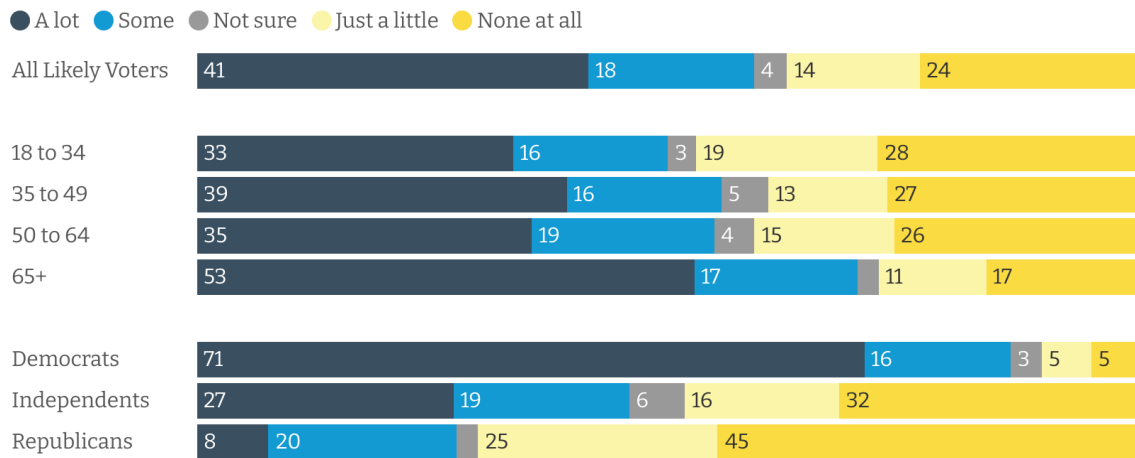


If the election for the Rhode Island U.S. House representative were held today, who would you vote for?  
*[If not sure]* If you had to choose, who would you vote for?

Only asked of respondents who live in RI-02

**A majority of voters have at least some trust in the fairness and accuracy of the upcoming 2024 U.S. Elections.** Nearly six in 10 voters say they at least have “some” trust that the 2024 U.S. elections will be fair and accurate, with 41% saying they have “a lot” of trust. At the same time, nearly a quarter of voters (24%) say they have no trust at all in the fairness and accuracy of the upcoming elections. Trust in the accuracy and fairness of the upcoming election is a deeply partisan issue: the vast majority of self-identified Democrats (71%) say they have “a lot” of trust, compared to 27% of Independents and just 7% of Republicans. In contrast, just under half (45%) of Republicans say they have no trust, compared to 35% of Independents and just 2% of Democrats. Additionally, older voters express far more trust than younger voters: Just over half (53%) of voters over 65 hold a lot of trust in the integrity of the 2024 election, compared to just one-third of voters under 35. Moreover, the youngest cohort of voters is more likely to lack trust in the integrity of the 2024 election compared to their older counterparts.

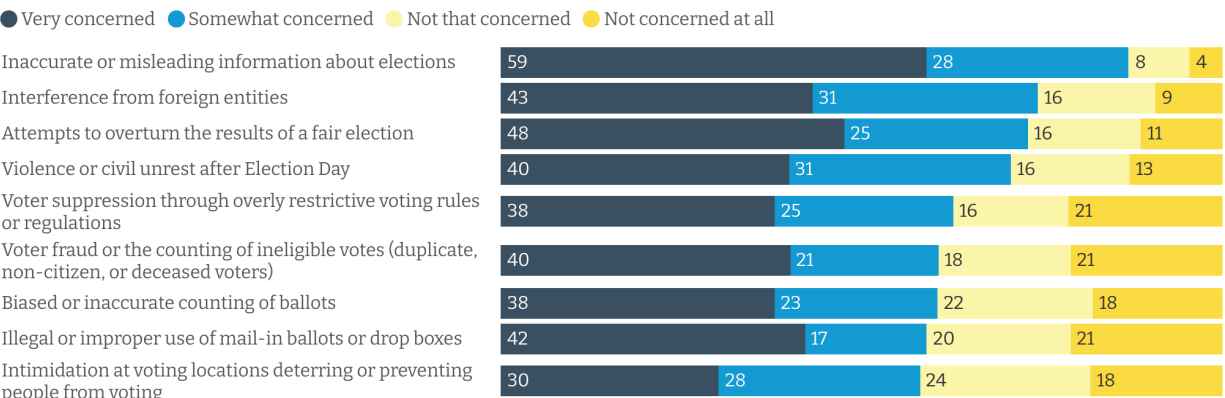
## Trust in U.S. General Election



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

**Despite relative trust in the fairness and accuracy of the 2024 general election, there are 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 (74%), attempts to overturn the results of a fair election (73%), and violence or civil unrest after election day (71%). In contrast, voters express the least amount of concern for intimidation at voting locations (58%) and illegal or improper use of mail-in ballots or drop boxes (59%), 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 (94%) and illegal or improper use of non-in-person voting (93%); these are the least prominent concerns for Democratic voters (35% and 34% respectively). In contrast, Democrats are most concerned about attempts to overturn the results of a fair election (87%) compared to just 56% of Republicans.

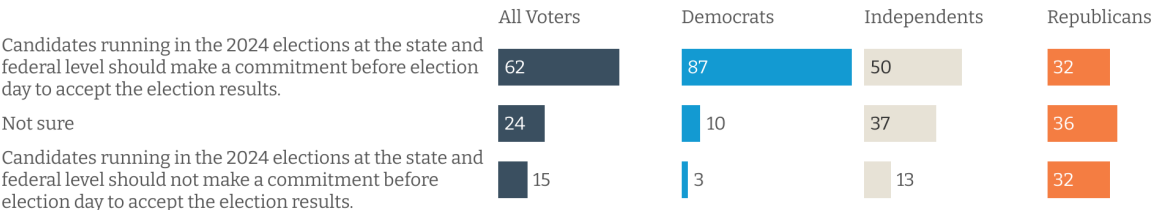
## Top Concerns around the 2024 General Election



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

**A majority of voters want 2024 election candidates to commit to accepting the election results.** Just over six in 10 voters feel that candidates running in the 2024 elections should make a commitment before election day to accept the results. Only 15% believe that candidates should not make such a commitment. Notably, nearly a quarter of voters (24%) are unsure whether candidates should or should not make a commitment to accepting election results in advance. An overwhelming number of Democrats (87%) believe that candidates should commit to accepting the 2024 results in advance, and only 3% believe the contrary. In contrast, Republicans are more divided, with 32% believing candidates should make a commitment, 32% believing that they should not, and 36% are unsure.

## Acceptance of Election Results by Candidates



Q: Which of these statements comes closest to your point of view?

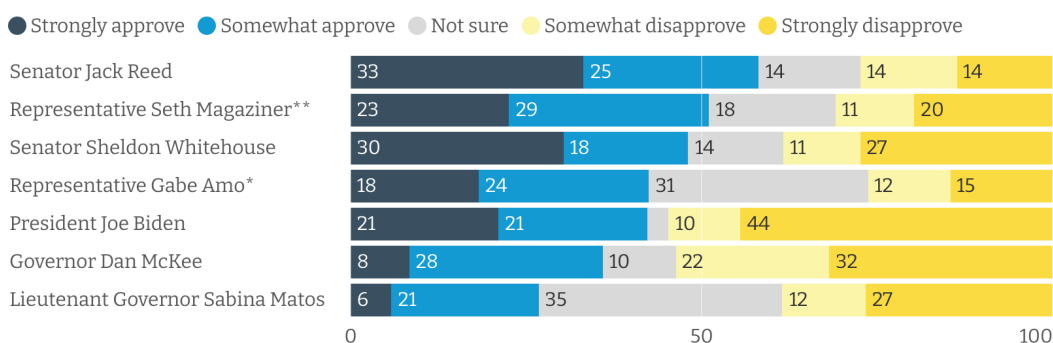
## Perceptions of Key Figures and Events

**A majority of voters in Rhode Island approve of the job their Senators and Representatives are doing, but disapprove of the current job performance of their Governor and President Biden.** Out of a list of elected officials, Senator Jack Reed (58%), and RI-02 Representative Seth Magaziner (51%), have the highest approval ratings. It is also important to note that both Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (48%) and RI-01 Representative Gabe Amo (42%) also have significant and net-positive job approval ratings. In



contrast, voters are particularly critical of President Biden and Governor McKee. While 42% of voters currently approve of Biden’s job performance, a majority (54%) disapprove. This difference is even more stark for Governor McKee: 36% of Rhode Islanders approve of his job performance, while 54% disapprove. In both cases, voters under 35 are the most critical compared to other age cohorts, with 56% disapproving of Governor McKee, and 70% disapproving of President Biden. Additionally, Lieutenant Governor Sabina Mastos is ranked the least favorably on job performance. Only 27% of likely voters approve of her job performance while 39% disapprove; however, a significant 35% of voters are unsure.

## 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

**Voters are largely dissatisfied with the Governor’s handling of the Washington Bridge crisis.** Nearly six in 10 voters (59%) disapprove of Governor Dan McKee’s handling of the Washington Bridge crisis, with 37% saying they “strongly disapprove.” Men (63%), white voters (61%), and self-identified Independents (68%) and Republicans (75%) are the strongest opponents of McKee’s handling of the crisis. Additionally, voters under 35 (64%) are much more likely to be critical of McKee’s response compared to their older counterparts.

**In light of the Washington Bridge closure, voters strongly support the creation of a Rhode Island Office of the Inspector General.** Nearly three-quarters of voters say that they support the creation of an Office of the Inspector General (46% “strongly support”). Additionally, this issue attracts bipartisan support. While Republicans are particularly supportive (82%) of the creation of this new office, strong majorities of Democrat (67%) and Independent (72%) voters also support it.

## Support for Rhode Islander Officer of the Inspector General

● Strongly support ● Somewhat support ● Don't know/need more information ● Somewhat oppose ● Strongly oppose

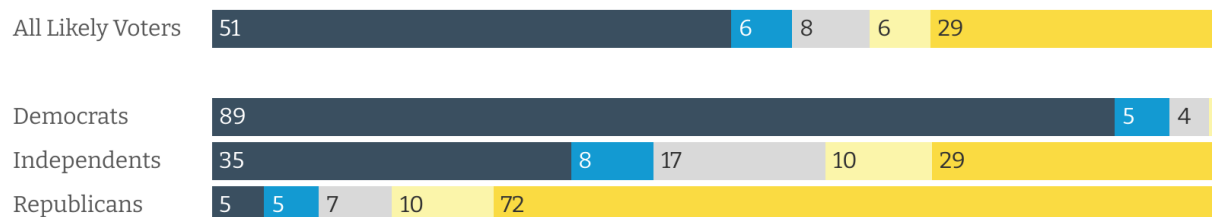


Q: Since the Washington Bridge closure, there has been a renewed push by some elected officials to create a Rhode Island Office of the Inspector General. While Republicans have pushed for an Office of the Inspector General for decades, a recent bill proposing the creation of this new office has bipartisan support. Do you support or oppose the creation of a Rhode Island Office of the Inspector General?

**When it comes to Donald Trump’s recent conviction in his New York state trial, 57% of likely voters believe the jury issued the correct verdict.** Additionally, just over half say they “strongly agree” that the jury issued the correct verdict. Perceptions of the verdict fall on partisan lines. Virtually all Democrats (94%) believe that the jury issued the current verdict, while most Republicans (82%) disagree. Meanwhile, Independents are split on the issue, with 44% agreeing with the verdict, 40% disagreeing, and 17% saying they are unsure.

## Perception of Trump New York Trial Verdict

● Strongly agree ● Somewhat agree ● Not sure ● Somewhat disagree ● Strongly disagree



Q: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
“The jury issued the correct verdict in the New York hush money trial against former president Donald Trump.”

## Conclusion

Likely voters in Rhode Island express distinct political unease. 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, many voters express doubt about the integrity of the upcoming general election and express overwhelming concern about the potential for bias, interference, fraud, and even violence in the wake of the Election.

This unease is embedded in a concerning trend of rising political polarization. Most voters believe that polarization has increased 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.

At the same time, there is potential for bi-partisan unity. In the face of a regional crisis, both Republicans and Democrats strongly support the creation of a Rhode Island Office of the Inspector General, indicating that bi-partisanship is possible in an increasingly polarized political environment.