

**SALVE**  
THE PELL CENTER

# VOICES of VALUE

## September 2024 Survey Report



## COMPILED BY

### **Jim Ludes and Katie Sonder**

Pell Center for International Relations at Public Policy  
Salve Regina University

**Dr. Jim Ludes** is Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at Salve Regina University in Newport, RI, as well as Executive Director of the university's Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy. In addition, he is executive producer and co-host of "Story in the Public Square," an eight-time Telly Award-winning, weekly, public affairs program broadcast on SiriusXM's POTUS channel as well as on public television stations across the country. The show is part of a broader Pell Center initiative to study, celebrate, and tell stories that matter.

Over a 30-year career, Dr. Ludes has worked at the intersection of academia, politics, and national security. In those years, he worked as Legislative Assistant for defense and foreign policy to then-Senator John Kerry, advised the presidential campaigns of John Kerry and Barack Obama, led the Obama-Biden transition team's processes for winning Senate confirmation of Department of Defense nominees for the roles of Deputy Secretary of Defense; Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; Comptroller; and General Counsel. Those political experiences notwithstanding, Ludes built the American Security Project, a Washington, DC, think-tank, into a leading voice of a principled, bipartisan approach to national security.

Dr. Ludes earned his Ph.D. in history from Georgetown University. His dissertation, *A Consistency of Purpose: Political Warfare and the National Security Strategy of the Eisenhower Administration*, was completed in 2003. He is editor of, and contributor to, *Iraq Uncensored* (2009) and co-editor of two previous books: *Attacking Terrorism* (2004) and *Twenty-First Century Proliferation* (2001).

Jim's research today focuses on foreign disinformation in American politics. He speaks regularly on the topic and publishes, through the Pell Center, "The Active Measures Newsletter," as well as "The Active Measures Newsletter Podcast" —weekly examinations of the best reporting on the topic.

**Ms. Katie Sonder** is Associate Director and Fellow at the Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy at Salve Regina University. Sonder's current research involves applying conflict resolution best practices to U.S. political polarization. Sonder earned her M.A. in International Peace and Conflict Resolution from American University in Washington, DC and her B.A. in Philosophy from New York University. She has lived and worked abroad in Thailand through the Princeton in Asia fellowship and in Ethiopia as a Peace Corps volunteer.



**SALVE REGINA**  
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## ABOUT THE PELL CENTER

The Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy at Salve Regina University is a multidisciplinary research center focused at the intersection of politics, policies and ideas. Dedicated to honoring Senator Claiborne Pell's legacy, the Pell Center promotes American engagement in the world, effective government at home, and civic participation by all Americans.

Our programs are designed to generate new ideas, to expand public understanding of important issues, and, ultimately, to help the public and its leaders make better decisions.

The Pell Center is animated by Senator Pell's belief that politics is about translating ideas into action to help people. We work to supplement the education offered to Salve Regina students by fostering civic participation to make the world a better place.

## ABOUT SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

Salve Regina University is a Catholic, coeducational institution of higher education, founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1947. For more than 75 years, Salve has offered rigorous, innovative academic programming in the liberal arts tradition that prepares students to be global citizens and lifelong learners. More than 2,700 undergraduate and graduate students from around the world are enrolled at Salve in 48 undergraduate majors, 13 master's degree programs, combined bachelor's/master's programs, and doctoral programs. Every undergraduate student engages in Salve Compass, a four-year transformational framework through which they develop the experience, skills, and wisdom required for a fulfilling career and to make a positive difference in the world. For more information visit [salve.edu](https://salve.edu).



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# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The following is an analysis of a Rhode Island-specific survey conducted by the Pell Center at Salve Regina University. The survey, fielded by Embold Research between September 16 and September 20, 2024, via the web and SMS messaging, gathered responses from 876 likely voters in Rhode Island, with a modeled margin of error of 3.5%. Demographics of survey participants can be found at the end of the report.

Likely voters are registered to vote in Rhode Island and answered “Yes, definitely,” “Yes, probably,” and “Maybe 50-50,” to the question: “How likely are you to vote in the November 2024 election for President, U.S. Congress, and other offices?”

## ELECTION POLLING AND JOB PERFORMANCE

Rhode Island likely voters favor Vice President Kamala Harris over former President Donald Trump by a 52% to 38% margin with 7% still undecided. Harris substantially outperforms President Joseph Biden’s position in a June Pell Center survey that gave the incumbent only a 7% lead over his challenger.

Harris enjoys strong margins in most measured demographics, but—tracking with national polling—lags behind Trump with men who did not attend any college. In that demographic, she trails Trump by 29 points. In contrast, Harris enjoys a 55% margin among college educated women in Rhode Island.

The presidential race in Rhode Island seems to hinge on only a handful of issues. When asked about the issue most important in determining their vote, 44% of Republicans cited immigration while 35% cited the economy. Democrats are motivated by the health of American democracy (33%) and reproductive rights (24%). Issues like crime, gun control, health care, education, foreign policy, climate change, taxes, and student loan forgiveness barely registered with voters.

In the race for one of Rhode Island’s seats in the U.S. Senate, incumbent Senator Sheldon Whitehouse leads challenger Patricia Morgan by a margin of 52% to 36% with 11% undecided.

In the first Congressional district race, incumbent Representative Gabe Amo leads his challenger, Allen Waters 56% to 27% with 16% undecided. While in the second Congressional district, incumbent Representative Seth Magaziner leads challenger Steven Corvi by a margin of 50% to 37% with 12% undecided.

Rhode Island’s federal delegation receives consistently strong job approval ratings with senior Senator Jack Reed leading the field with 60% of likely voters reporting they “strongly” or “somewhat strongly” approve of his performance. Whitehouse (49%), Amo (47%), and Magaziner (42%) all maintain a positive net approval rating (the difference between total approve and disapprove).

Among Rhode Island’s state-wide office holders, the governor and lieutenant governor stand out for their poor job approval ratings. Governor Dan McKee’s rating remains under-water, with only 34% of likely voters offering approval while 56% disapprove. Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos received approval from 26% of likely voters in the survey while 39% disapproved.

When asked about the overall direction of the state, 41% said the state was on the right track, while 59% said it was headed in the wrong direction. Broken down along party affiliation, the divide becomes obvious with Democrats (69%-31%) the only group likely to see the state heading in the right direction. Republicans are the most pessimistic (5%-95%), but Independent voters are decidedly “wrong track,” as well (28%-72%).



# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

## POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND THE 2024 CYCLE

Perhaps not surprisingly, 93% of Rhode Island’s likely voters believe the country has become more polarized in the last year. They point to a variety of causes, including disinformation and fake news (51%); partisan media (27%); social media platforms (23%); money in politics (22%); and political leaders and public officials in both parties.

A majority of Rhode Islanders (59%) express concern about the health of American democracy, even while 60% of respondents report trust in the 2024 election to be “fair and accurate.”

The findings about the health of American democracy reflect a partisan divide on the issue with 77% of GOP voters describing “the U.S. system of democracy” as unhealthy, compared to 43% of Democrats who hold the same view.

## NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS

Rhode Island voters get most of their news about national and local politics from local TV news (43%). The news operations of the major broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS) are a close second (42%); followed by CNN (26%); Facebook (26%); national newspapers like *The Washington Post* or *Wall Street Journal* (25%); MSNBC (24%); and Fox News (23%).

As the election nears, 29% of respondents report avoiding news, and 43% report doing so “sometimes.” The top stories people are trying to avoid are entertainment and celebrity news (45%); national politics (38%); election coverage (38%); the Israel-Hamas war (30%); and the war in Ukraine (28%).

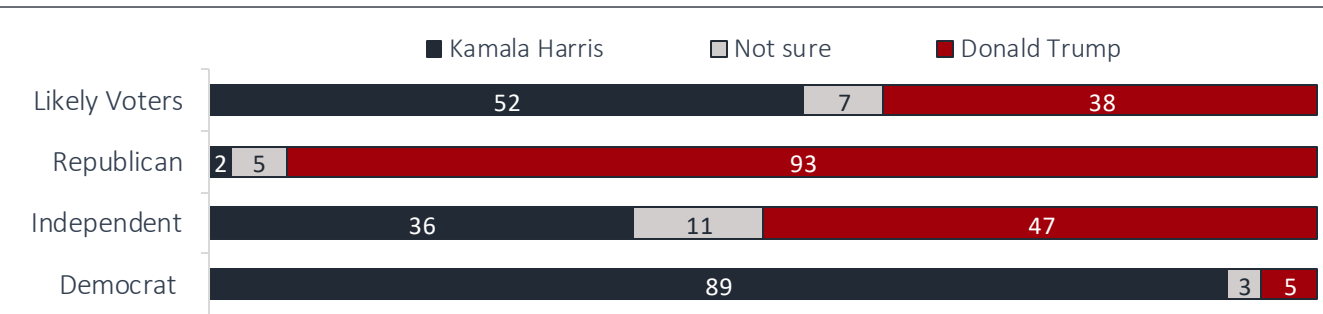
As in other questions, there is a partisan break in what stories people are trying to avoid. For example, among Republicans who report avoiding news, 63% avoid news about climate change; 59% about entertainment and celebrities; and 50% about social justice. Democrats who report avoiding news say they avoid stories about national politics (37%); election coverage (34%); and the Israel-Hamas war (32%).



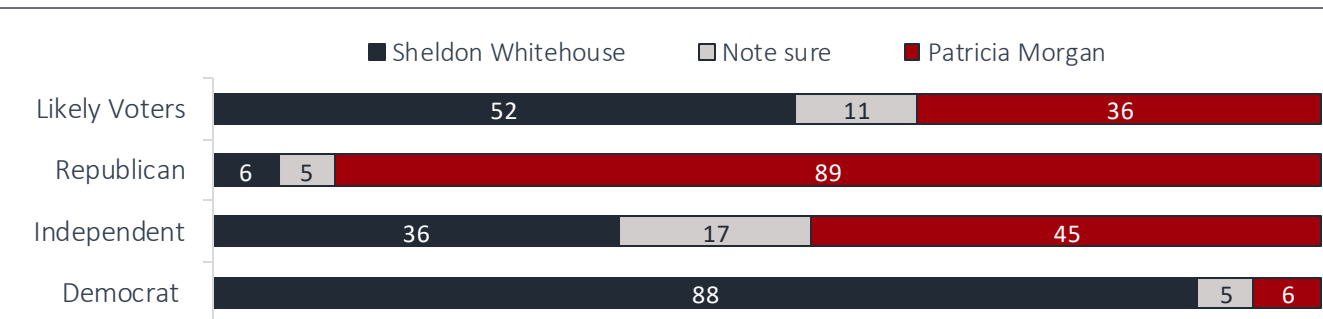
# 2024 ELECTIONS

## If the election were held today, % who would vote for ...

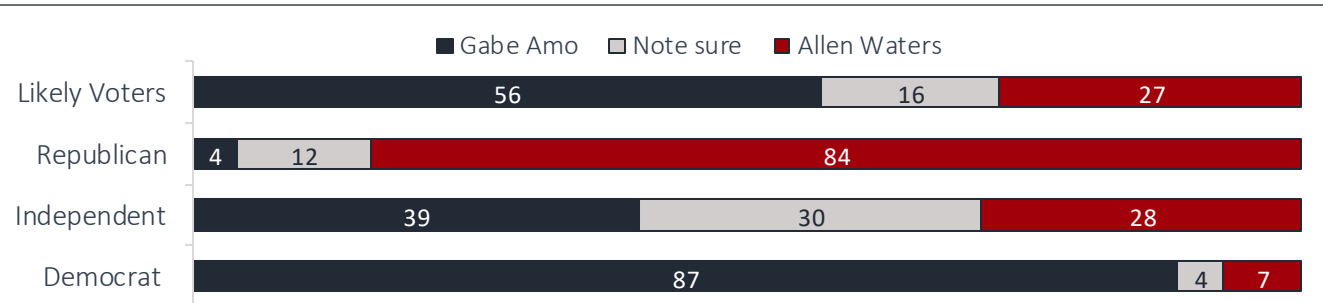
### United States President\*



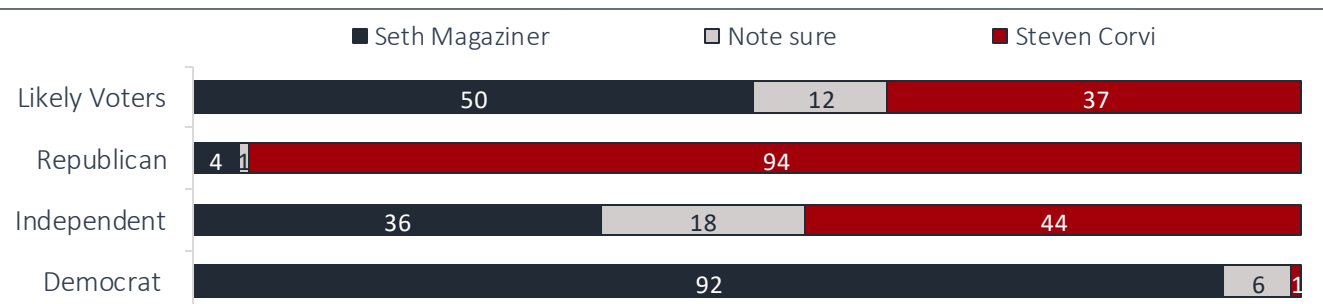
### Senator from Rhode Island



### House Representative from Rhode Island, CD1



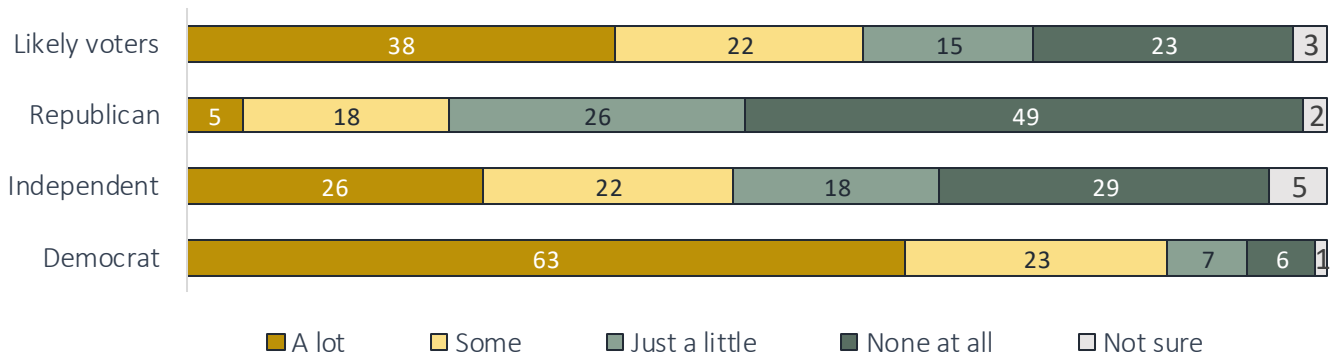
### House Representative from Rhode Island, CD2



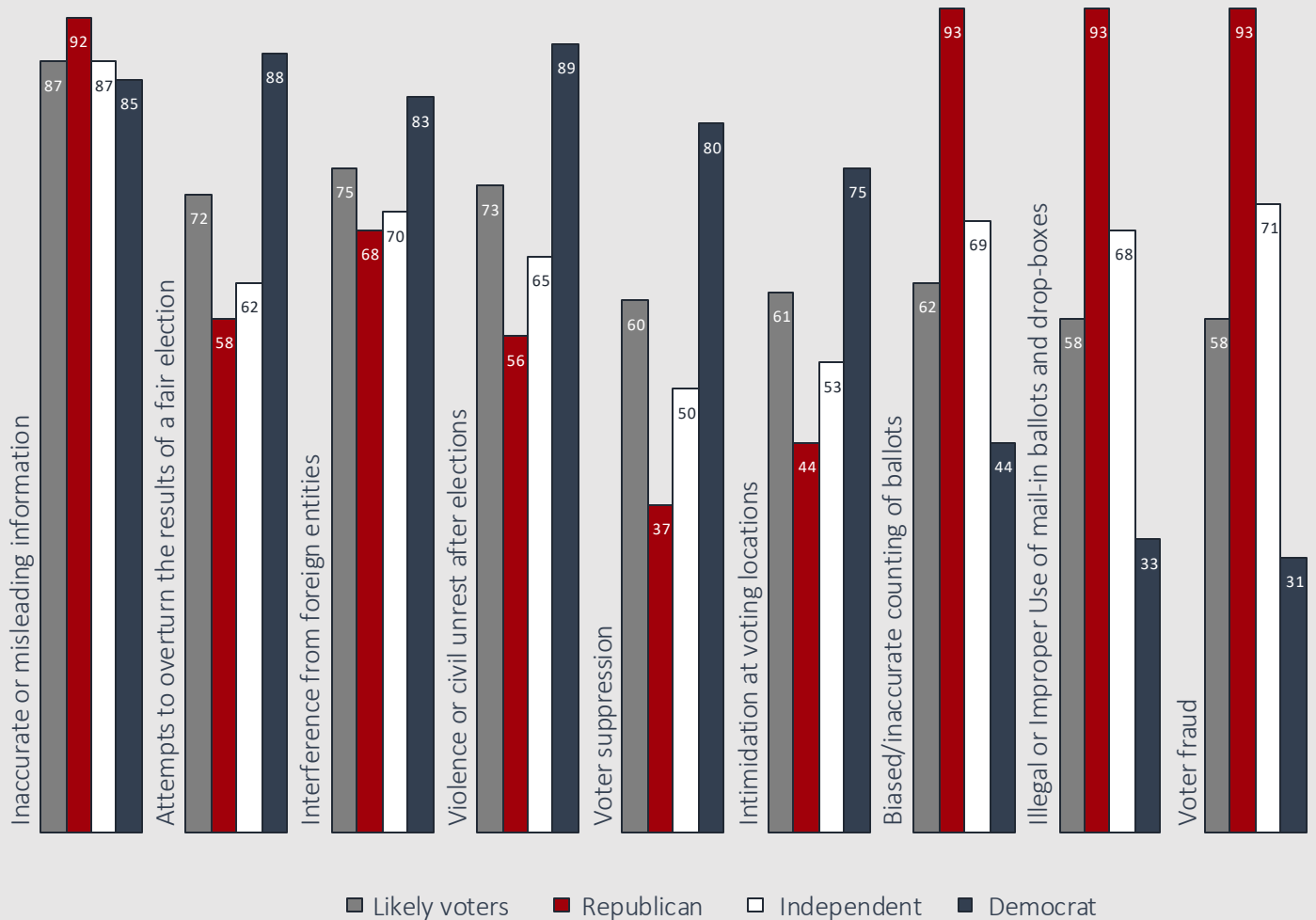
\* Less than or equal to 4% from each category said they plan to vote for another candidate, excluded here.  
 Note: totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

# 2024 ELECTIONS

## % trust in the 2024 U.S. elections to be fair and accurate



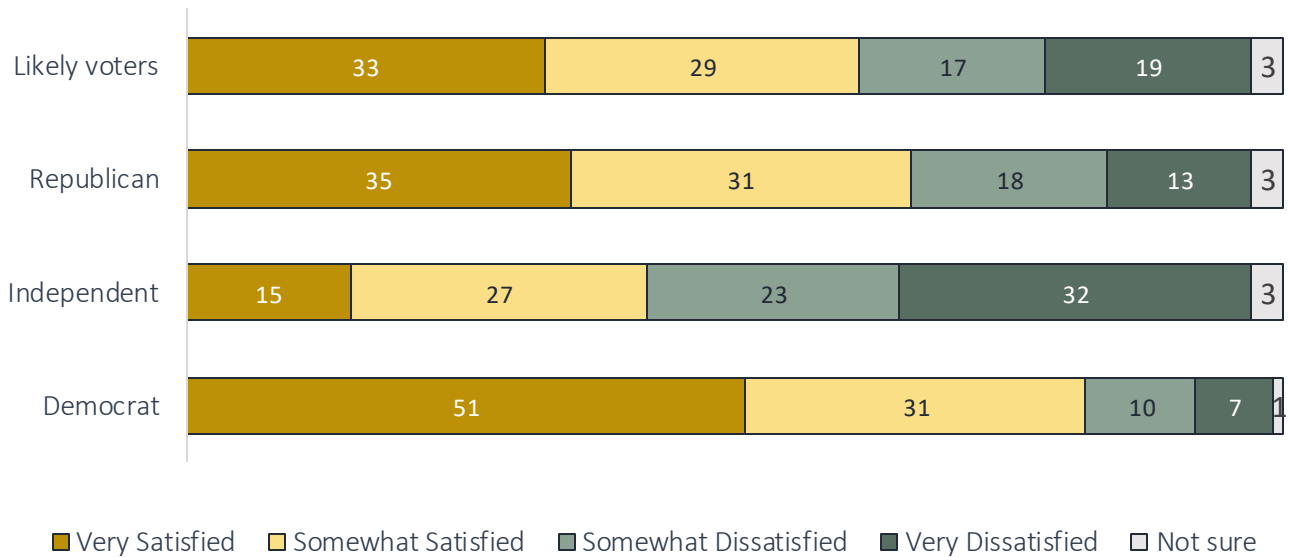
## % very or somewhat concerned about the following during the 2024 elections



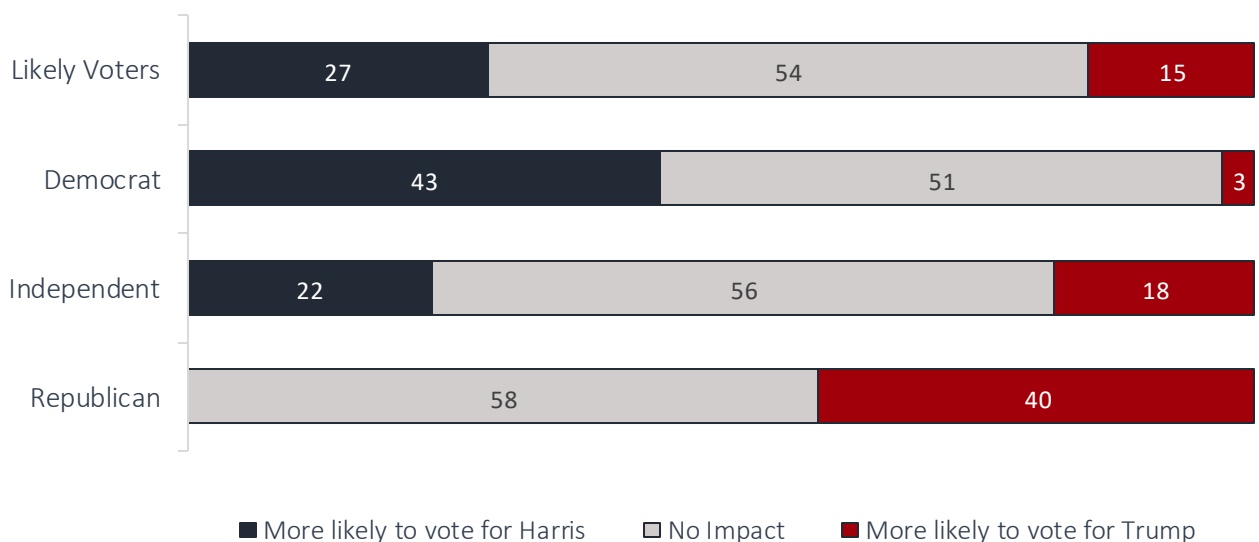
Note: totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

# 2024 ELECTIONS

## % satisfaction with choice of candidates for presidential election



## % of voters who say the selection of the vice presidential candidates impacts vote

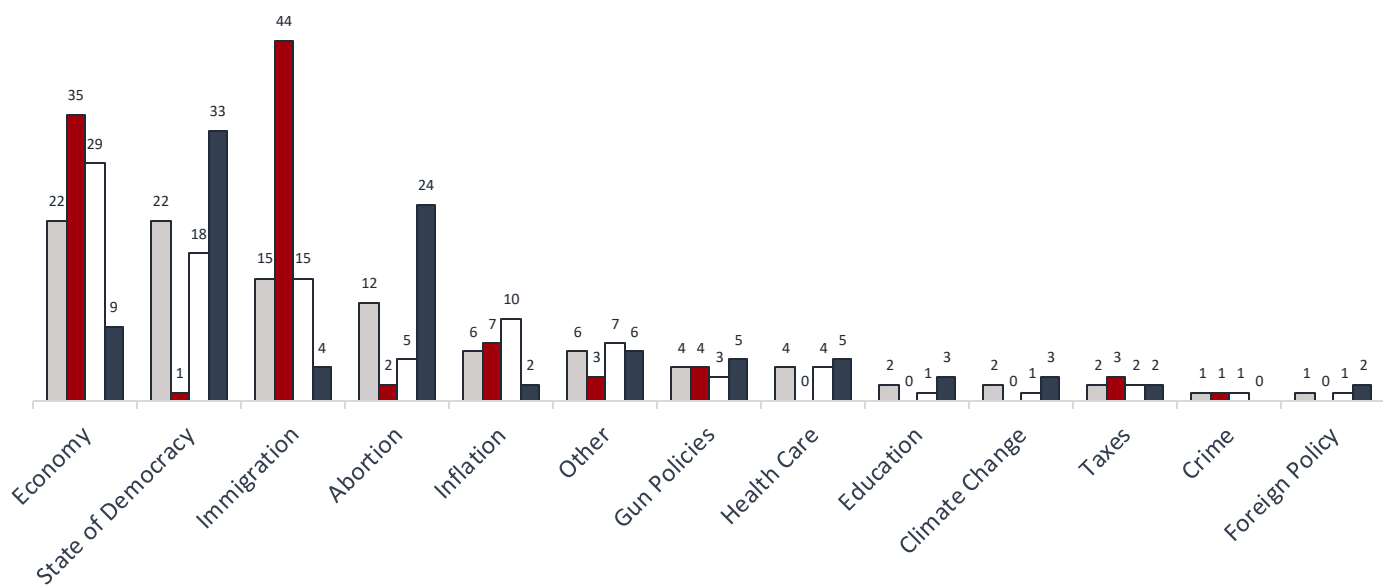




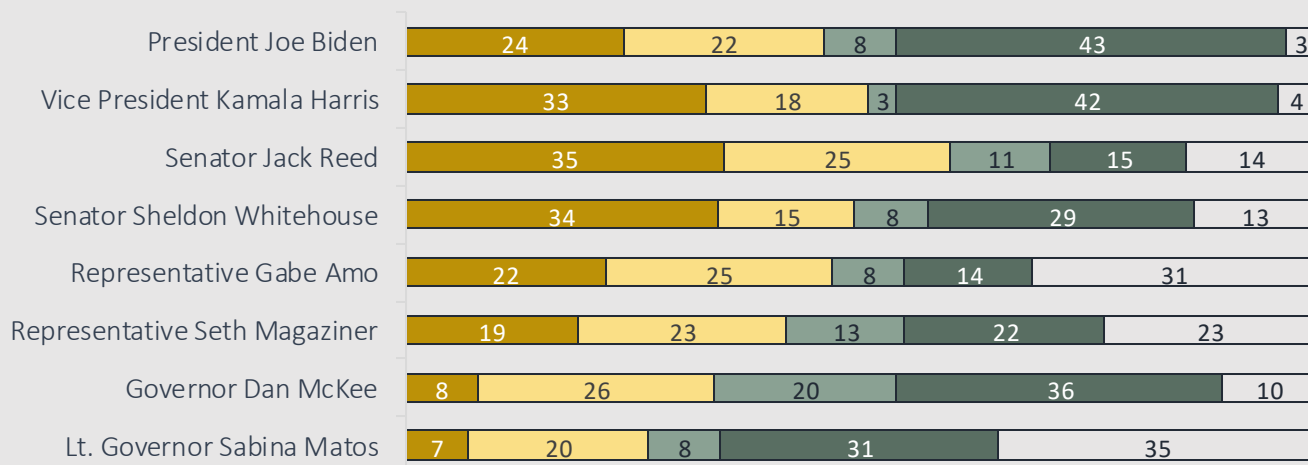
# 2024 ELECTIONS AND JOB PERFORMANCE

## Issue most important in deciding vote in 2024 presidential election

■ Likely voters   
 ■ Republican   
 □ Independent   
 ■ Democrat



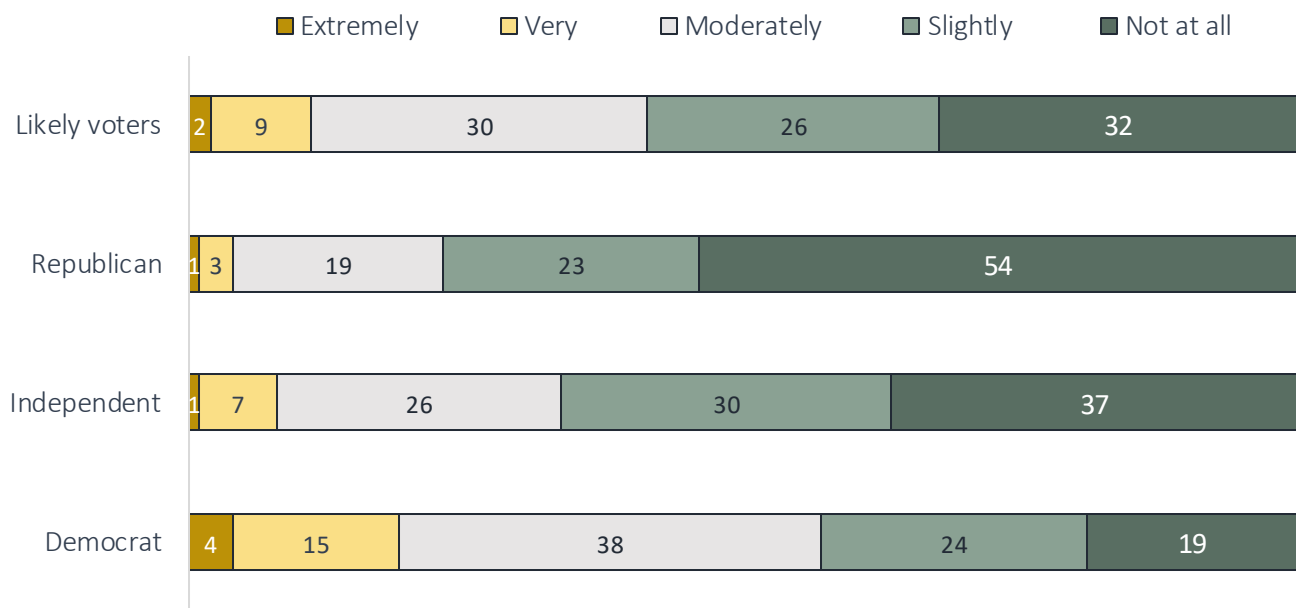
## % approval ratings of job performance



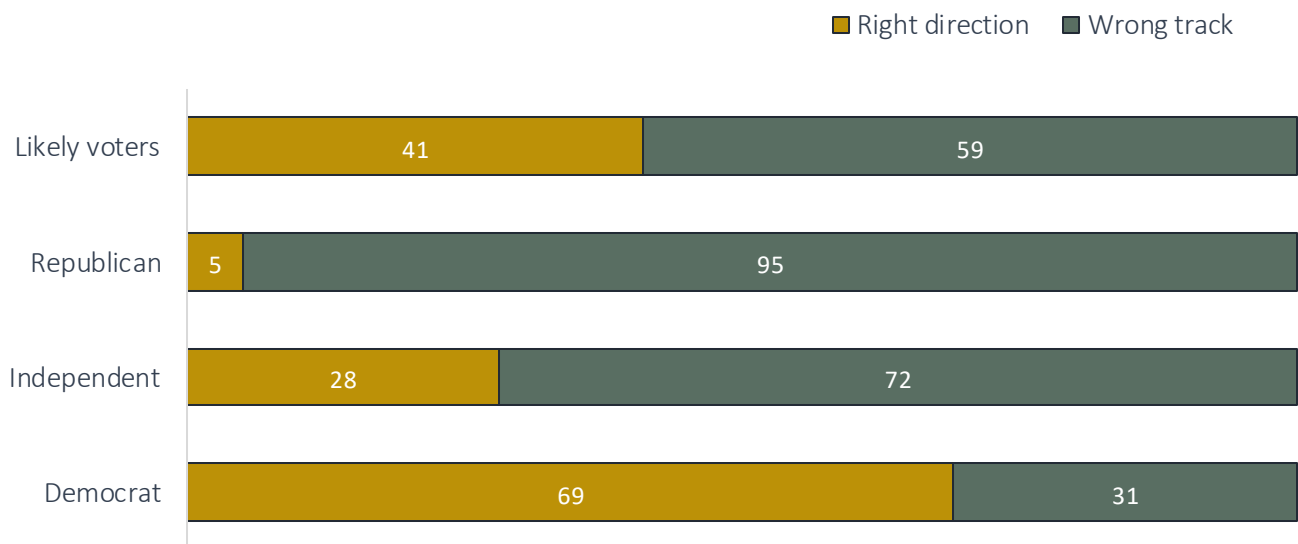
■ Strongly approve   
 ■ Somewhat approve   
 ■ Somewhat disapprove   
 ■ Strongly disapprove   
 □ Not sure

# PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. DEMOCRACY

## % who believe U.S. democracy is \_\_\_ healthy



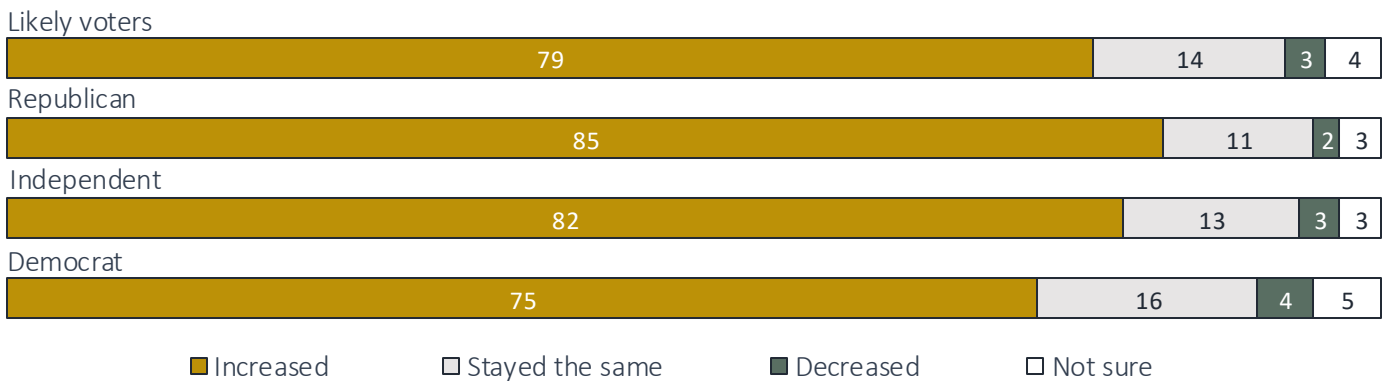
## % who believe Rhode Island overall is heading in the right direction or is off on the wrong track



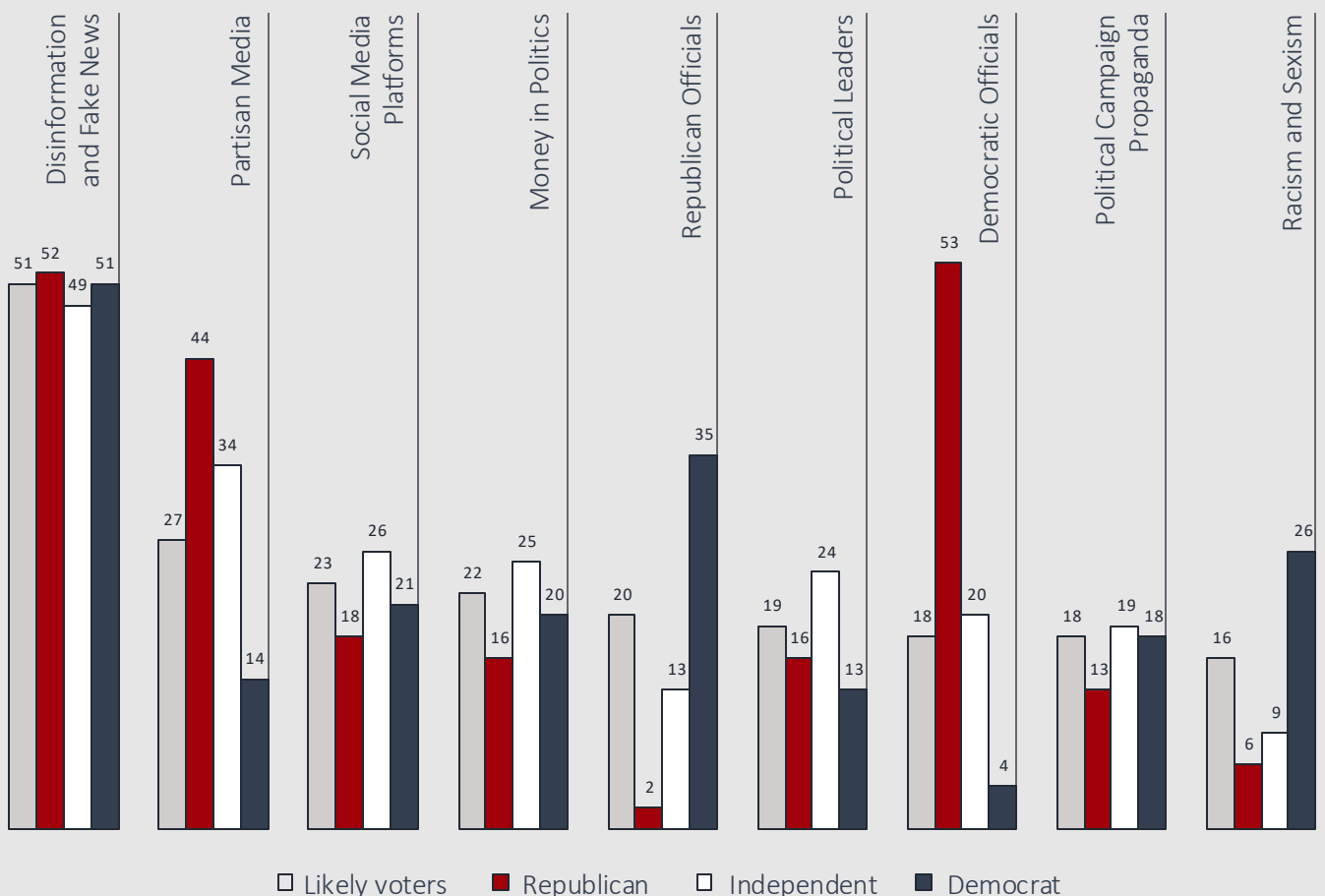
Note: totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

# ROOT CAUSES OF DIVISION

## % who believe the level of political polarization has \_\_\_ in the past year



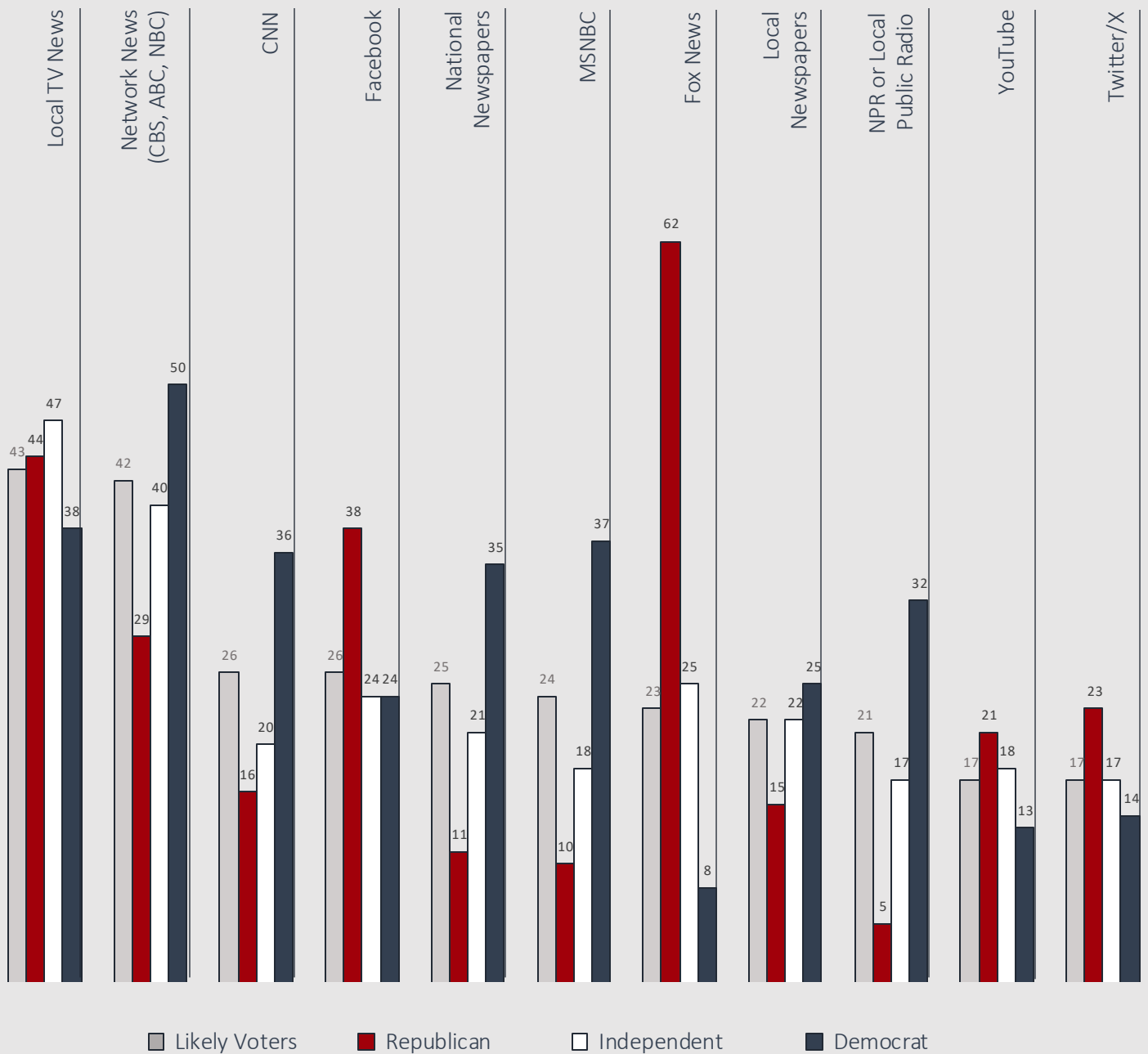
## % of voters who chose the following as a top three contributor to political polarization



Note: totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

# MEDIA HABITS

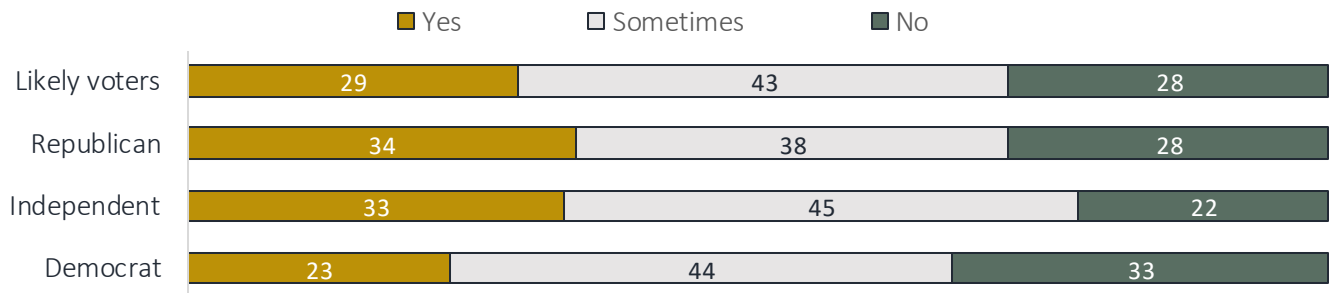
**% who get most of their news about national and local politics from ...**



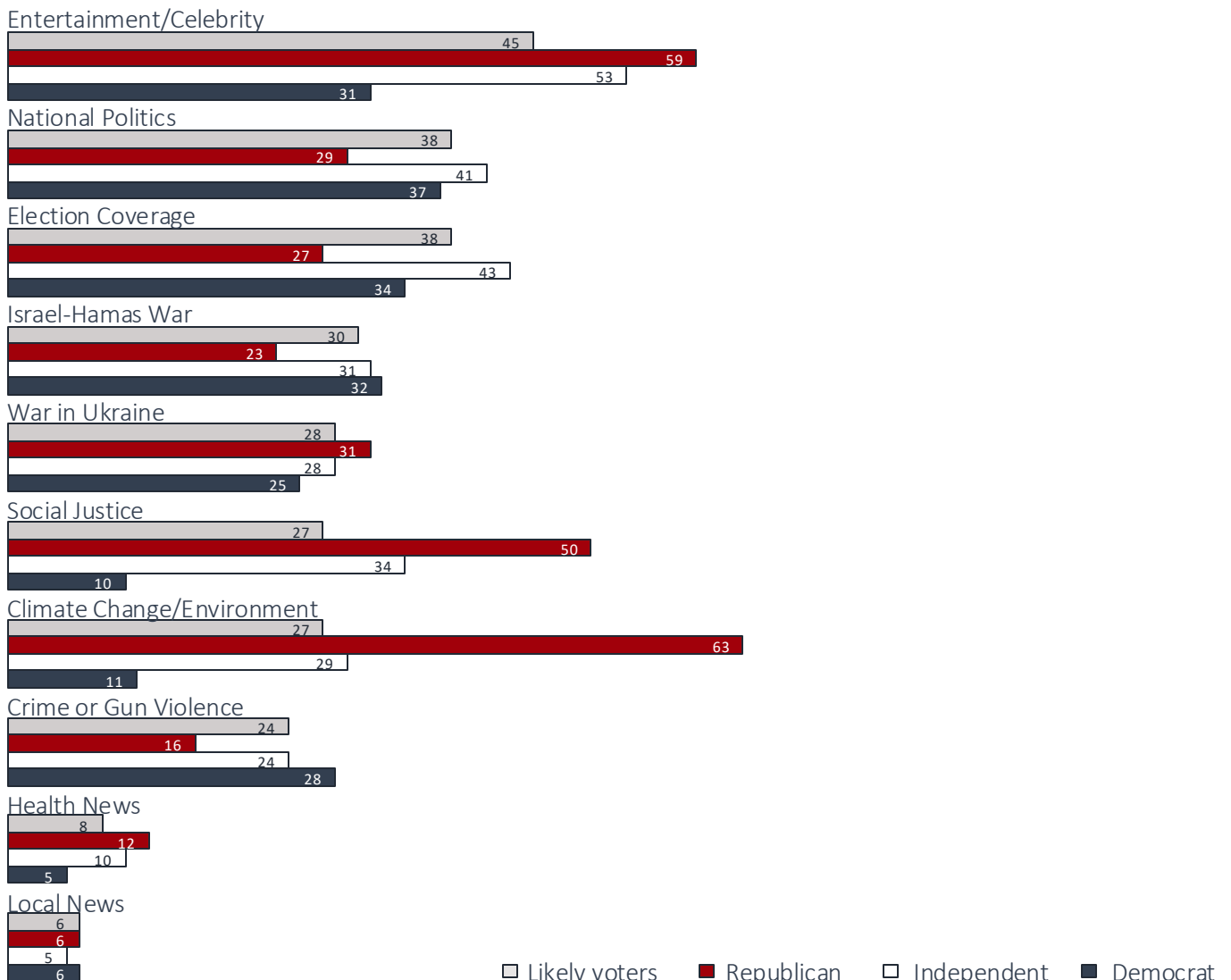
Note: totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

# NEWS AVOIDERS\*

## % who find themselves actively trying to avoid news these days



## Among news avoiders, % total who say they avoid news about the following topics



\*News avoiders is a term borrowed from the [Reuters Institute's Digital News Report](#)

Note: totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

# SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

| Likely Voters                                 |     |
|---|-----|
| n = 876; modeled margin of error 3.5%         |     |
| <b>Registered Party</b>                       |     |
| Republican                                    | 14% |
| Unaffiliated                                  | 46% |
| Democrat                                      | 39% |
| <b>Likelihood of voting in 2024 elections</b> |     |
| Yes, definitely                               | 89% |
| Yes, probably                                 | 5%  |
| Maybe (50-50)                                 | 6%  |
| <b>Age</b>                                    |     |
| 18-34   | 22% |
| 35-49   | 22% |
| 50-64   | 27% |
| 65+   | 29% |
| <b>Race</b>                                   |     |
| White   | 81% |
| Hispanic                                      | 7%  |
| Black   | 4%  |
| AAPI  | 4%  |
| American Indian or Alaska Native              | 1%  |
| Other   | 3%  |
| <b>Gender</b>                                 |     |
| Female  | 53% |
| Male  | 46% |
| Other   | 1%  |
| <b>Highest level of education completed</b>   |     |
| High school diploma or less                   | 16% |
| Some college, no degree                       | 29% |
| Associate's degree                            | 15% |
| Bachelor's degree                             | 22% |
| Graduate degree                               | 18% |
| <b>Congressional district</b>                 |     |
| 1   | 46% |
| 2   | 51% |

Note: 'not sure' responses not shown

# SURVEY QUESTIONS

Pell Center | Rhode Island | September 2024

## Demographics

1. Are you:

- Male
- Female
- Other

2. In what year were you born? [TEXT BOX]

3. In what ZIP code do you currently live? [TEXT BOX]

3b. Here is a map of Rhode Island's two congressional districts. In which district do you live? [SHOW MAP]

- 1
- 2
- Not sure

4. What is your race?

- White / Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- Black or African American
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Other (please specify): [TEXT BOX]

[If Hispanic/Latino not selected] Are you from a Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish-speaking background?

- Yes
- No

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High school diploma or less
- Some college, but no degree
- Associate's degree, or two-year college degree
- Bachelor's degree, or four-year college degree
- Graduate degree

6. Are you registered to vote in Rhode Island?

- Yes
- No [Terminate]
- Not sure [Terminate]

7. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a: [RANDOMIZE DEM/REP]

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent/Other

[IF DEMOCRAT/REPUBLICAN] Do you consider yourself a:

- Strong Democrat/Republican
- Not so strong Democrat/Republican

[IF INDEPENDENT/OTHER] Do you consider yourself closer to: [RANDOMIZE DEM/REP]

- The Democrats
- The Republicans
- Neither

7b. Regardless of what you think of the political parties, which party are you registered to vote with?

- The Democratic Party
- The Republican Party
- Registered to vote, but not with a political party
- Some other political party

8. How did you vote in the 2020 election for President, or for some reason were you unable to vote?

- Joe Biden, the Democrat
- Donald Trump, the Republican
- Jo Jorgensen, the Libertarian
- Not registered/Too young/Ineligible
- Did not vote

9. How likely are you to vote in the November 2024 election for President, U.S. Congress, and other offices?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, probably
- Maybe (50-50)
- No, probably not [TERMINATE]
- No, definitely not [TERMINATE]

## Elections

10. If the 2024 election for president were held today, and the candidates were the following, who would you vote for? [RANDOMIZE CANDIDATES]

- Donald Trump, the Republican
- Kamala Harris, the Democrat
- Not sure
- Another candidate (please specify)

[If not sure] If you had to choose, who would you vote for? [RANDOMIZE CANDIDATES]

- Donald Trump, the Republican
- Kamala Harris, the Democrat
- Not sure
- Would not vote

11. If the election for the **U.S. Senator of Rhode Island** were held today, who would you vote for? [RANDOMIZE CANDIDATES]

- Sheldon Whitehouse, the Democrat
- Patricia Morgan, the Republican
- Not sure

[If not sure] If you had to choose, who would you vote for? [RANDOMIZE CANDIDATES]

- Sheldon Whitehouse, the Democrat
- Patricia Morgan, the Republican
- Not sure
- Would not vote

12a. [IF RI-01] If the election for the **Rhode Island U.S. House** representative were held today, who would you vote for? [RANDOMIZE CANDIDATES]

- Gabe Amo, the Democrat
- Allen Waters, the Republican
- Not sure

[If not sure] If you had to choose, who would you vote for? [RANDOMIZE CANDIDATES]

- Gabe Amo, the Democrat
- Allen Waters, the Republican
- Not sure
- Would not vote

12b. [IF RI-02] If the election for the **Rhode Island U.S. House** representative were held today, who would you vote for? [RANDOMIZE CANDIDATES]

- Seth Magaziner, the Democrat
- Steven Corvi, the Republican
- Not sure

[If not sure] If you had to choose, who would you vote for? [RANDOMIZE CANDIDATES]

- Seth Magaziner, the Democrat
- Steven Corvi, the Republican
- Not sure
- Would not vote

13. Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the following individuals? [RANDOMIZE][Strongly approve | Somewhat approve | Somewhat disapprove | Strongly disapprove | Not sure]

- Senator Jack Reed
- Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
- [IF RI-01] Representative Gabe Amo
- [IF RI-02] Representative Seth Magaziner
- Governor Dan McKee
- Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos
- Attorney General Peter Neronha
- General Treasurer James Diossa
- Secretary of State Gregg Amore
- President Joe Biden
- Vice President Kamala Harris

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

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Not sure

15. 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?

- Yes, I'm more likely to vote for Harris now
- Yes, I'm more likely to vote for Trump now
- Yes, I'm more likely to vote for a third party candidate now
- Yes, I'm less likely to vote now
- No, it doesn't impact my vote choice

16. For each of the following, do you believe they are...? [RANDOMIZE] [Very conservative | Somewhat conservative | Moderate | Somewhat liberal | Very liberal]

- Kamala Harris
- Tim Walz
- Donald Trump
- JD Vance

17. What **one** issue is most important in deciding your vote this November? [RANDOMIZE]

- Economy
- Inflation
- Abortion
- Immigration
- Crime
- Gun Policies
- Healthcare
- Education
- Foreign Policy
- Climate change
- Taxes
- Student loans
- The state of democracy
- Something else (please specify):
- Not sure



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

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

19. How concerned are you about the following when it comes to the 2024 elections? [Very concerned | Somewhat concerned | Not that concerned | Not concerned at all]

- Inaccurate or misleading information about elections
- Violence or civil unrest after Election Day
- Attempts to overturn the results of a fair election
- Interference from foreign entities
- Voter suppression through overly restrictive voting rules or regulations
- Intimidation at voting locations deterring or preventing people from voting
- Biased or inaccurate counting of ballots
- Illegal or improper use of mail-in ballots or drop boxes
- Voter fraud or the counting of ineligible votes (duplicate, non-citizen, or deceased voters)

### Democracy And Identity

20. In your opinion, how healthy is the U.S. system of democracy? [RANDOMLY FLIP]

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

21. 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?

- Right direction
- Wrong track

22. In the past year, do you think the country has... [ROTATE]

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

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

[RANDOMIZE]

- Disinformation and fake news
- Partisan media
- Social media platforms
- Lack of civic engagement
- Lack of exposure to diverse perspectives
- Income inequality
- Neighborhood segregation
- Racism and sexism
- Politically motivated violence
- Political leaders
- Money in politics
- Political campaign propaganda
- Voter suppression
- Redistricting or gerrymandering
- Election fraud
- Foreign interference in elections
- The filibuster
- The electoral college
- Democratic officials
- Republican officials
- Other (please specify)[textbox]

### Media Trust and Consumption

24. 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.

- CNN
- MSNBC
- FOX News
- Network news (CBS, ABC, NBC, PBS)
- Local TV news
- Newsmax
- Local newspapers (like The Providence Journal or The Newport Daily News)
- National newspapers (like The Washington Post or New York Times)
- NPR or local public radio
- Local talk or news radio
- Local Spanish-language radio, newspapers, or television
- National Spanish-language radio, newspapers or television
- Facebook
- Twitter/X
- Threads
- Instagram
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Somewhere else (please specify)

25. Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days?

- Yes
- Sometimes
- No

26. [IF YES OR SOMETIMES] 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.

- Election coverage
- National politics
- Social justice news
- War in Ukraine
- Israel-Hamas War
- Climate change and the environment
- Entertainment/celebrity
- Health news
- Local news
- Crime or gun violence
- Other (please specify)[textbox]

27. In what language did you complete this survey?

- English
- Spanish