

Voters' Priorities for the New Congress

March 14, 2019

The National Women's Law Center recently commissioned PerryUndem and GBA Strategies to conduct public opinion research to understand voters' policy preferences and attitudes toward issues disproportionately affecting women. The research began with online discussions among 175 voters across the country. Based on these conversations, we crafted a survey to measure views among a national sample of n = 2,000 registered voters. The survey oversampled voters of color and includes n = 400 each of Black, Latinx, and AAPI voters. The survey was administered online using YouGov from January 4th through 10th, 2019.

Two years of intense activism in the women's movement led to a historic November 2018 election that had record turnout, record engagement among women voters, and record wins by women candidates. The election also saw candidates discussing issues central to the lives of women and girls, including sexual assault, reproductive rights, and women's economic opportunity. In this current study, we examine how salient these issues are across demographic groups. We also explore the connections that voters see among these issues in order to begin finding ways to break down silos and to move toward a more integrated approach to the issues.

Voters Want Congress to Protect Core Women's Issues.

The core women's issues examined in this study – protecting reproductive rights and access to care, improving economic opportunity, and preventing sexual assault and harassment – are priorities among majorities of all voters, including Republicans and voters in rural areas. Democrats and voters of color are most likely to consider these issues “extremely” important.

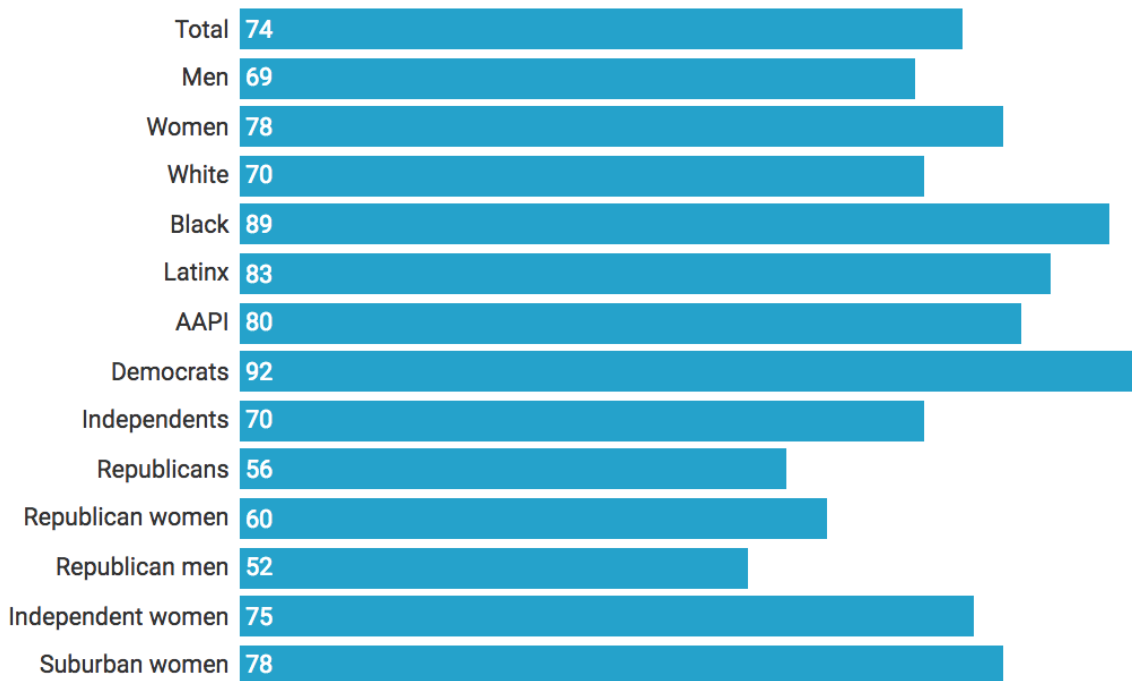
Voters Want Congress to Protect Reproductive Rights.

Majorities of voters support reproductive rights and want Congress to work on protecting those rights.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) believe it's important for Congress to work on "protecting reproductive rights," with half (53%) saying it is "extremely" or "very" important. Majorities of women and voters of color consider protecting reproductive rights at least very important. Swing groups also prioritize the issue – 56% of independent women and 60% of suburban women say it is extremely or very important for Congress to work on. Even majorities of Republican women (60%) and Republican men (52%) say it is at least somewhat important for Congress to protect these rights. Fewer than half of Republicans (43%) say protecting reproductive rights is not important.

Three-quarters of voters (74%) say it is important for Congress to protect reproductive rights.

% Extremely, very, or somewhat important

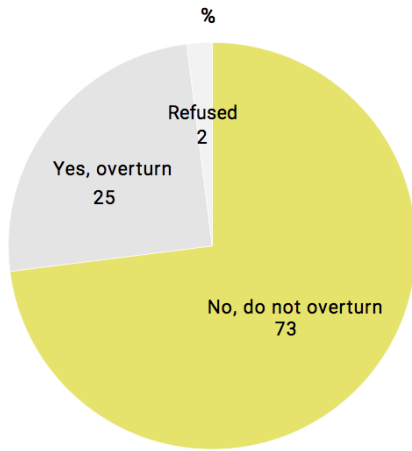


The same proportion of the electorate (73%) supports the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* ruling and does not want the decision overturned¹. There is little difference between genders – men (71%) and women (75%) feel similarly. Democrats (89%) and independents (76%) support *Roe v. Wade*, as do half of Republicans (49%) and Trump supporters (52%).

Seventy-three percent of voters do not want *Roe v. Wade* overturned.

Would you like to see the Supreme Court overturn its *Roe v. Wade* decision, or not?

In 1973, the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision established a woman’s constitutional right to have an abortion. Would you like to see the Supreme Court overturn its *Roe v. Wade* decision, or not?



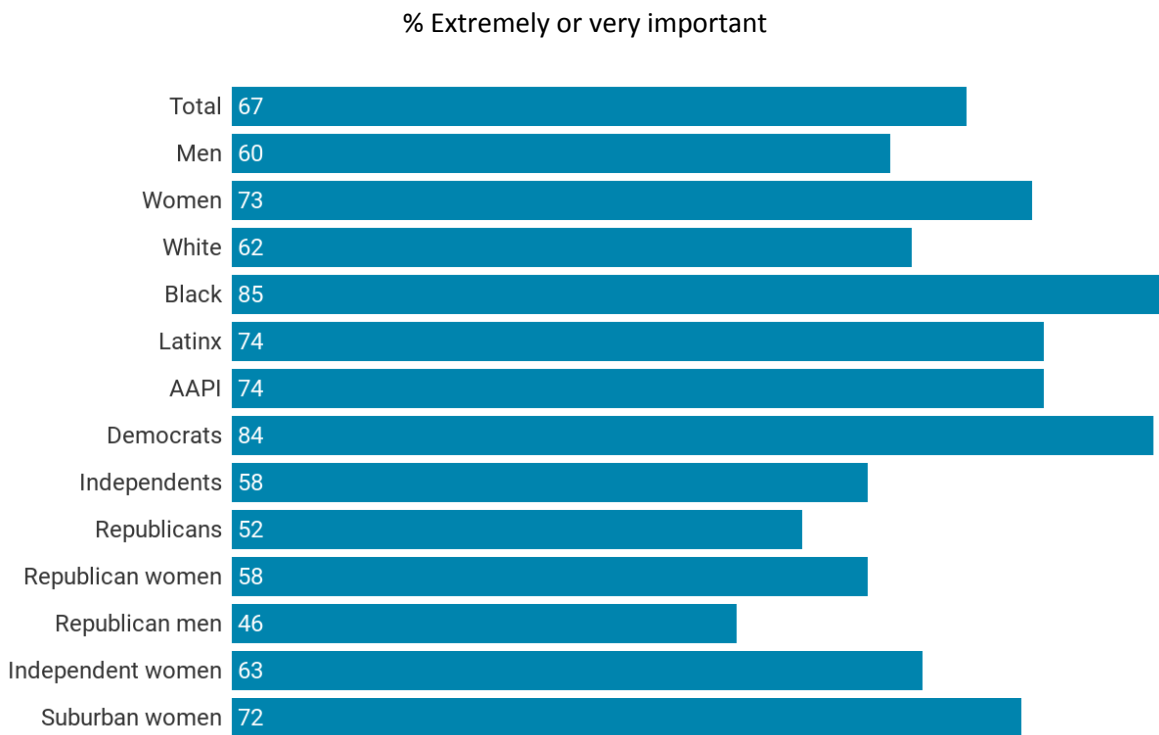
	%	
	NO, DO NOT	YES, OVERTURN
Total	73	25
Men	71	26
Women	75	24
18 to 29	70	27
30 to 44	73	24
45 to 59	81	17
60+	68	30
White	71	27
Black	79	17
Latinx	75	23
AAPI	77	20
Less than college	70	27
College+	77	21
Democrats	89	10
Independents	76	21
Republicans	49	48
Voted Dem for House	90	9
Voted Rep for House	50	47
Trump supporters	52	47

¹ From a PerryUndem [survey](#) of n = 1,319 registered voters conducted December 14 through 28, 2019, using Ipsos’ KnowledgePanel.

Improving Economic Opportunities for Women Is an Important Legislative Priority.

Nine in ten voters (90%) say it is important for Congress to work on “improving economic opportunities for women and families,” with two-thirds (67%) saying this is “extremely” or “very” important. Support for Congress to take action is both broad and deep. Majorities across gender, party, and racial lines deem the issue “extremely” or “very” important.

Two-thirds say it is “extremely” or “very” important for Congress to work on improving economic opportunities for women and families.



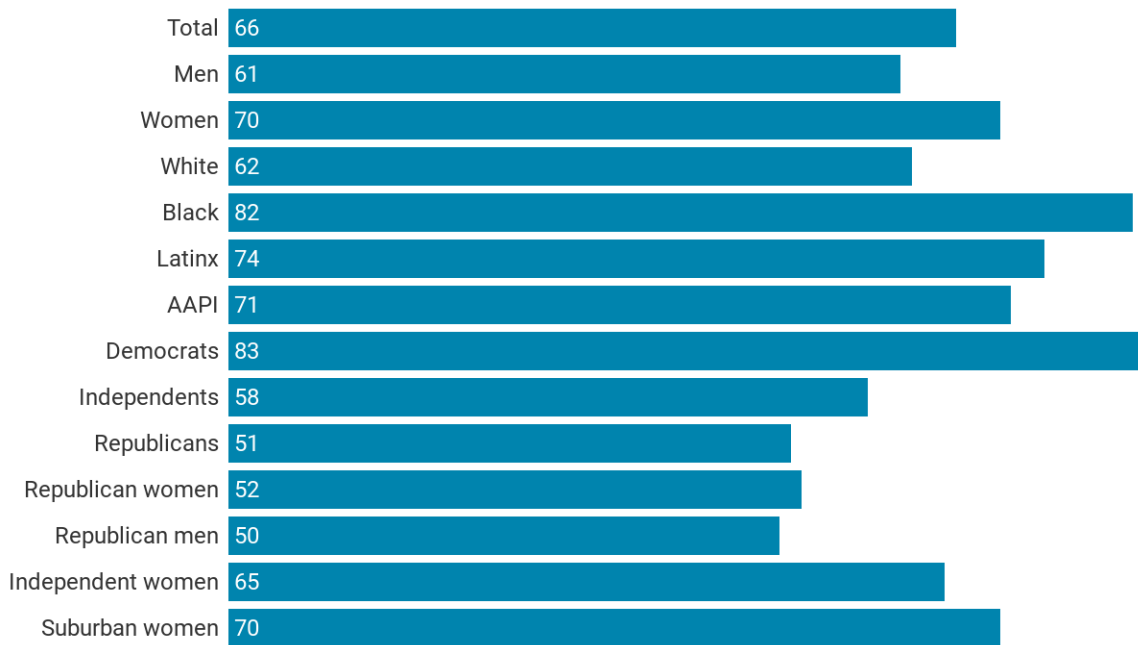
Compared to a long list of potential congressional priorities, economic opportunities for women is on par with reducing gun violence, lowering taxes, and protecting the environment. Among voters overall, only jobs and wages, civil rights, and health care are slightly higher in terms of priorities for Congress. Democrats place economic opportunities for women alongside jobs and wages.

Voters Also Prioritize Preventing Sexual Harassment and Assault.

Eighty-eight percent consider “preventing sexual harassment and assault” an important issue for Congress to work on. Two-thirds (66%) say it is an “extremely” or “very” important priority for Congress. Preventing sexual harassment and assault is a top priority among voters of nearly every background, including across gender, party, and racial lines.

Two-thirds say it is “extremely” or “very” important for Congress to work on preventing sexual harassment and assault.

% Extremely or very important



Specific Proposals Related to Women and Equality Receive Broad, Widespread Support.

Wide majorities of voters support a range of specific measures related to gender equality. Policy ideas around economic security, sexual harassment and assault, and reproductive rights all receive broad support transcending gender, party, and racial lines, with the strongest support coming from Democrats and voters of color.

	% Support		
	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
Strengthen protections against sexual harassment and sexual violence in the workplace and in schools	97%	86%	87%
Require employers to take steps to prevent harassment on the job	96%	86%	86%
Make sure employers can't prevent a victim of harassment from talking about his or her experience	95%	89%	85%
Require employers to make reasonable accommodations for pregnant workers who have a medical need for temporary changes at work	96%	85%	84%
Prevent employers from changing work hours at the last minute and not giving workers their schedules in advance	92%	80%	78%
Make sure women can't be fired or discriminated against because of their use of birth control, abortion, in vitro fertilization, or sex outside of marriage	96%	81%	72%
Make sure people who get tips, like servers, are paid at least the same minimum wage as other workers	92%	79%	70%
Ban employers from setting salaries and pay based on how much a person was paid at their last job, so that pay discrimination doesn't follow a person from job to job	90%	75%	70%
Require employers to report salary and pay data to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission so that it can better enforce equal pay laws	94%	74%	64%
Increase funding for programs that help families meet their basic needs, such as food, health care, and shelter	95%	75%	60%

These proposals also have wide appeal with swing groups, such as independent and suburban women.

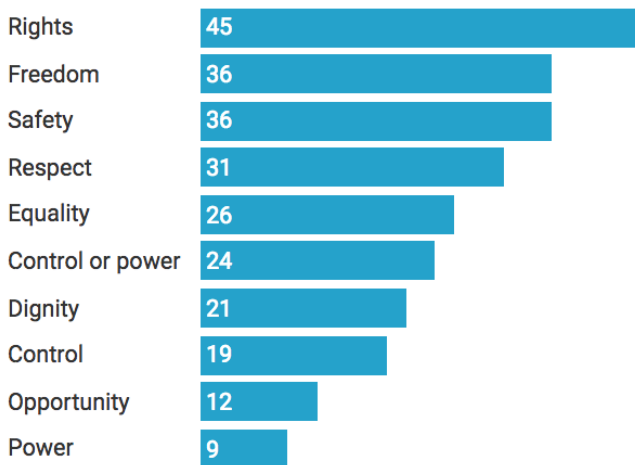
	% Support	Total	Suburban women	Ind. women
Strengthen protections against sexual harassment and sexual violence in the workplace and in schools		90%	93%	92%
Require employers to take steps to prevent harassment on the job		90%	94%	93%
Make sure employers can't prevent a victim of harassment from talking about his or her experience		90%	92%	91%
Require employers to make reasonable accommodations for pregnant workers who have a medical need for temporary changes at work		89%	92%	88%
Prevent employers from changing work hours at the last minute and not giving workers their schedules in advance		84%	86%	85%
Make sure women can't be fired or discriminated against because of their use of birth control, abortion, in vitro fertilization, or sex outside of marriage		83%	87%	84%
Make sure people who get tips, like servers, are paid at least the same minimum wage as other workers		81%	84%	86%
Ban employers from setting salaries and pay based on how much a person was paid at their last job, so that pay discrimination doesn't follow a person from job to job		79%	87%	83%
Require employers to report salary and pay data to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission so that it can better enforce equal pay laws		78%	83%	84%
Increase funding for programs that help families meet their basic needs, such as food, health care, and shelter		78%	81%	84%

Values Like Equality, Rights, and Respect Offer Ideas for a Shared Framework to Advocate for Gender Equality Issues.

We also examine the values people associate with reproductive rights, sexual harassment, and economic opportunity. We found “rights” and “equality” to be common associations, while other values – such as “safety,” “respect,” and “dignity” – also come to mind.

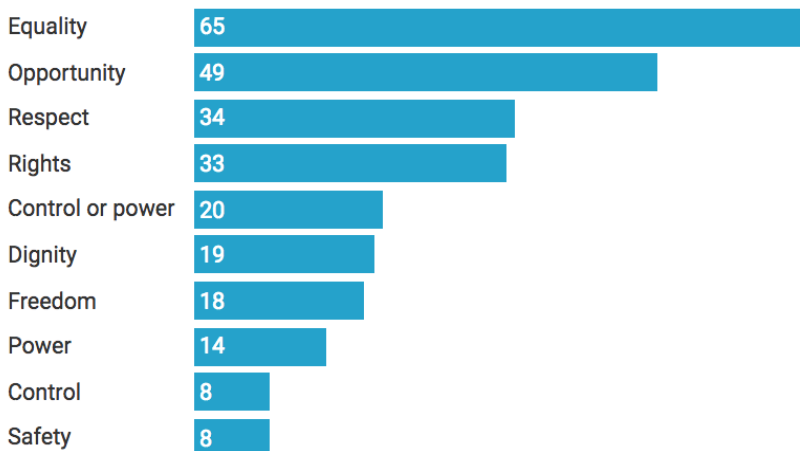
Respondents are most likely to personally connect reproductive rights with rights (45%), freedom (36%), and safety (36%). Women of color also connect the issue to respect. Democrats and Black voters are more likely than others to link reproductive rights to equality.

% "Protecting reproductive rights and access to care" is about:



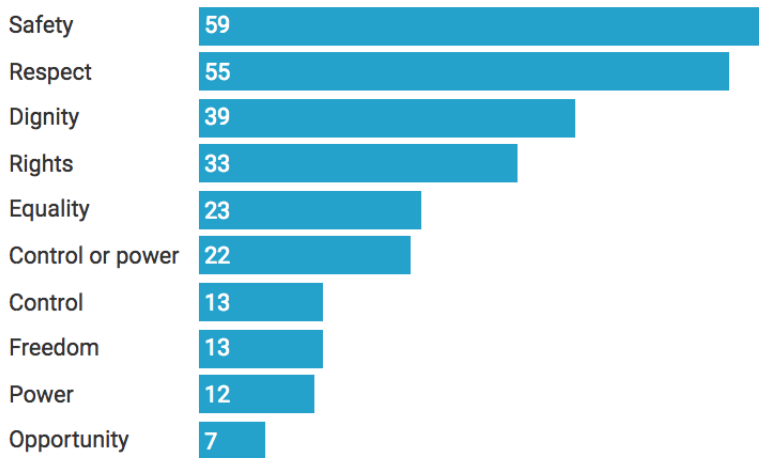
Among voters overall, economic security tends to be about equality (65%) and opportunity (49%). Voters of color are more likely than white voters to connect the issue to rights.

% "Improving economic opportunities for women" is about:



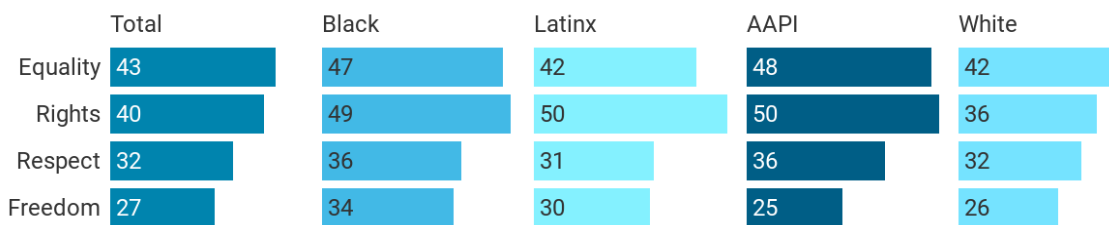
On sexual harassment, values of safety (59%) and respect (55%) top the list, followed by dignity (39%) and rights (33%). Women are more likely than men to connect the issue to safety.

% "Preventing sexual harassment and assault" is about:



When asked about all three issues collectively, voters are most likely to associate these issues with equality (43%) and rights (40%), followed by respect (32%) and freedom (27%). Voters of color are more likely than white voters to connect all three issues to rights.

When you think of America, what are these three issues really about?



It's important to note when thinking about language, the word "equality" may be salient in this context, but the term "women's equality" alone can sound partisan to some, particularly Republicans. Words such as "respect" and "safety" are also important to Republicans and sound less partisan.

A Narrative around Core Values Tests Well.

Based on the focus groups, we crafted the following narrative to connect core issues related to gender equality:

"Our country is based on ideas of equality, freedom, individual rights, and opportunity². These are our basic principles and what set us apart.

When our rights to control our own bodies and lives are restricted, we lose what makes our country special. When some people have freedom and opportunity and others do not, our society becomes even more divided.

We pride ourselves on equal rights, freedom, and opportunity and it's time to back it up. That means equal rights for women under the law. It means each of us has the freedom to make our own decisions, including on abortion. It means being safe in our own bodies and free from harassment and violence. It means equal opportunities to be economically secure and live a good, quality life.

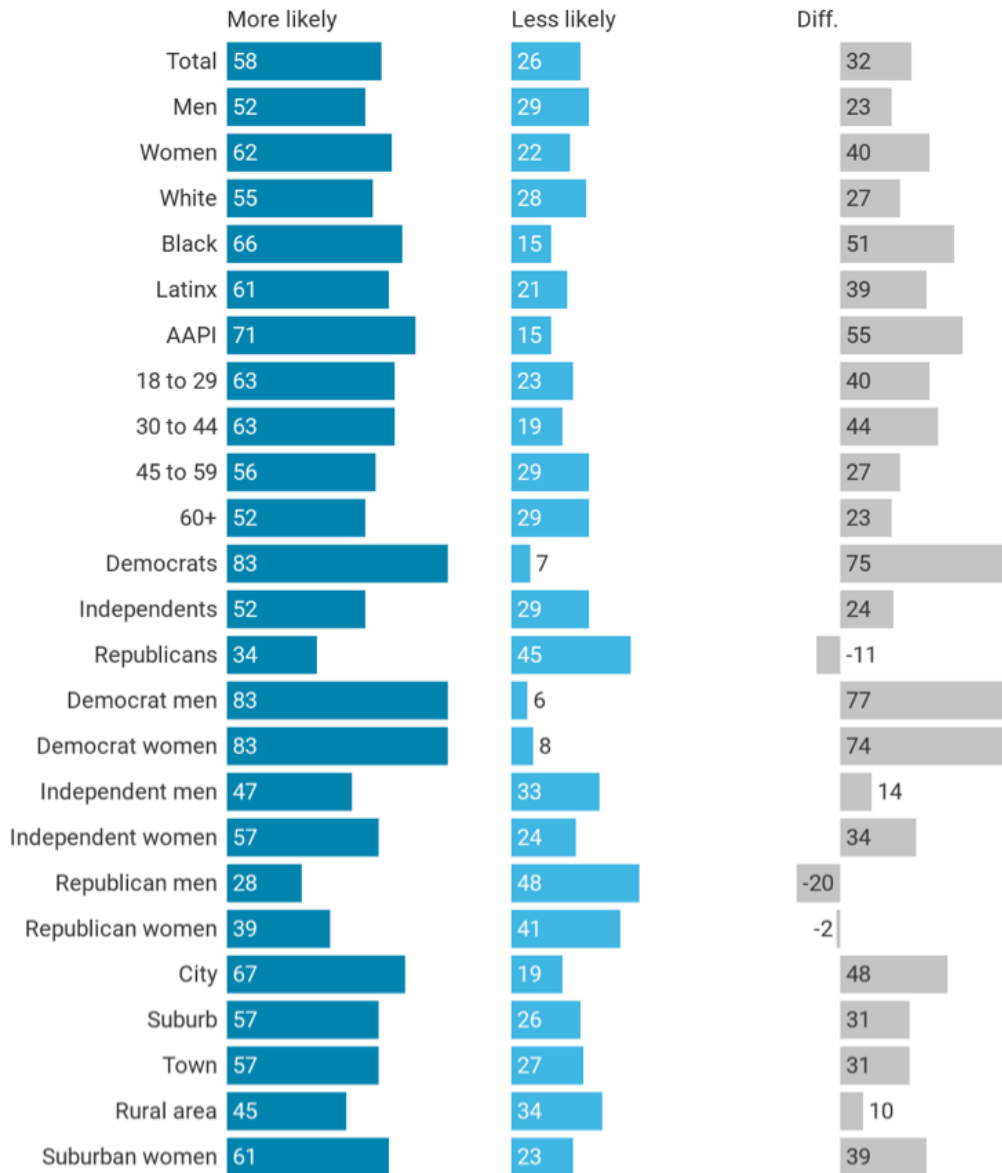
When women have full equality, we can provide for our families with dignity and give our children a better chance to succeed. Equality means safer workplaces and schools, healthier families, stronger communities, and a better economy. By joining together to work toward full equality, we all benefit and can strive toward a more peaceful and prosperous society."

The narrative has broad appeal, with 70% of voters agreeing with the statement. Language around individual rights, freedom, equality, and opportunity resonate strongly.

² Respondents were asked to mark any phrases with which they strongly agree. The highlighted phrases were most likely to resonate strongly.

We asked voters how they would feel if they heard their state or federal lawmaker make this statement. Across nearly all segments, voters say they would be more likely to support their lawmaker by a 32-point margin (58% v. 26%). Swing groups such as independent women and suburban women are also much more likely to support rather than oppose their lawmaker after hearing the statement.

Let's say this statement came from your state or federal lawmaker. Would you be more or less likely to support him or her, or would it not make a difference?



Conclusions.

- Voters want Congress to protect core women’s issues:
 - More than seven in ten support the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* ruling - and want Congress to work on protecting reproductive rights.
 - Voters support strengthening economic opportunities for women.
 - Voters also prioritize preventing sexual harassment and assault.

- Specific policy proposals that would protect women’s reproductive rights, improve economic opportunities for women, and prevent sexual harassment and assault are widely popular, further solidifying bipartisan support for proactive legislative action.

- We examined the interconnectivity among the issues and found that voters are most likely to associate the value of “equality” with the women’s issues examined here (protecting reproductive rights and access to care, improving economic opportunity for women, and preventing sexual harassment and assault).
 - “Rights, “respect” and “dignity” are also salient values across these issues.