ANALYSIS

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

WHO DECIDES THE ELECTION?

A study of decisive voter groups considering voting for Biden

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Conspiracy belief is not isolated to Trump voters. Many voters considering Biden also score high on the conspiracy belief dimension.

The 'Black Lives Matter protest movement' and 'Socialism' were the most polarizing topics between US-voters.

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FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

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In cooperation with

Kieskompas

Kieskompas – Election Compass,
commissioned by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

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Executive summary

Instead of carrying out a traditional demographic segmentation of voter groups that enabled Trump to win the presidency in 2016, this study applies advanced statistical clustering techniques based on psychological measures and political attitudes to segment crucial groups of voters that could tip the balance in the 2020 race in Biden's favour. To provide more in-depth insight into the diversity of this voter strata, we segment these crucial voters not by demographics, such as level of educational attainment, gender or skin colour, instead clustering respondents according to similar views toward measures like authoritarian attitudes, belief in conspiracies, feelings of American exceptionalism, left-right alignment, feelings of economic deprivation in relation to others, and – perhaps most importantly – whether their leaning toward Biden stems from more pro-Biden or more anti-Trump sentiments. We identify four distinct typologies of voters leaning toward Biden, and compare these with Trump's staunch supporters and more traditional core supporters of Biden and the Democrats.

Our main findings:

- Voters considering voting for Biden are heterogeneous in terms of their convictions, economic situation and outlook. Biden's broad potential lies in not simply swaying centrist swing voters, but in also convincing voters with ideologically close or more leftist views to actually turn out to vote, unlike they did in 2016 for Clinton.
- While support for Trump is largely driven by pro-Trump sentiment, we find that potential support for Biden is strongly rooted in anti-Trump sentiment.
- Although dissatisfaction with Trump is widespread among those contemplating voting for Biden, it is not omnipresent among all voter typologies leaning toward Biden. Significant proportions of likely Biden voters are uncertain regarding how they feel about Trump.
- Roughly half of those considering casting their vote for Biden call themselves Democrats. The other half are largely comprised of independent voters. Only a small proportion of Republicans intend to vote for Biden, which means that this election overrides partisan divides only to a limited extent.
- In this election cycle, contrary to popular belief, we find that voters considering Biden are more economically vulnerable and feel more deprived than those considering Trump or those strongly committed to either candidate. Voters considering Biden also rate their own psychological well-being lower compared to other groups. Hence Biden is not leading a coalition only made up of 'winners in the march of progress'.
- A belief in conspiracy theories is not a domain exclusively reserved for Trump voters. Many voters considering Biden also score high along the conspiracy belief dimension.
- We find that a sizeable portion of Trump voters also consider white supremacists and QAnon believers to be threats to the US. The 'Black Lives Matter protest movement' and 'Socialism' were the most polarising topics that distinguished Trump voters from those considering or committed to Biden.
- While most potential and committed Biden voters hold the US Federal Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic to be entirely insufficient, a substantial portion of voters thinking about casting their ballot for Biden think the Trump Administration's response is appropriate.
- While voters contemplating voting for Biden have a mixed assessment of Trump's leadership on qualities like empathy, honesty, and competence, almost all rate Trump as highly corrupt, indicating that accusations of corruption are a wedge issue.
- While the partisan rift in the US runs deep and wide, we observed numerous issues where voters were not divided along partisan lines, with opinions instead cutting across the partisan divide and not neatly coinciding with voting intentions for either candidate. Among potential Biden voters, different typologies aligned on different issues, indicating how complicated it is for Biden to appeal to all these crucial voters with a coherent message.

While these findings relate to the US, they are relevant for political and societal situations elsewhere in the world, particularly in Europe or Latin America. Populism, disinformation, polarisation, and feelings of deprivation are on the rise, and this study provides points of departure for comparison with situations outside the US. Generally, the manifestation of these tendencies is not as binary in multi-party systems as it is in the US. Such systems might have mitigating effects, but are not necessarily immune to these trends, which is at the same time both cause for hope and worrisome.

1

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Donald Trump won the presidency by carving out very narrow victories in three crucial 'swing-states', providing him with an Electoral College victory while losing the popular vote by a large margin. Undecided voters in the Rust Belt – particularly those who were white and did not hold college degrees – heavily went over to Trump in the final stretches of the campaign. In the last five Presidential Elections, the Republican party has won three times despite losing the popular vote 4 times (in 2000, 2008, 2012 and 2016) due to specific sections of the electorate supporting the Republicans in states that helped gain the Electoral College majority. This study focuses on crucial voter groups that may determine the outcome of the 2020 Presidential Election between Donald Trump (R) and Joe Biden (D).

If Presidential Elections can be determined by tiny slivers of the population – tens of thousands of people in a few battleground states – it is crucial to ask "who are these people?" and "why do they vote the way they do?" Pollsters that missed this late shift in 2016 had underestimated the impact of education or had assumed some states to be safe for the Democrats. The shift, especially by white college-educated voters in suburban areas to the Democratic Party, and by white non-college-educated voters in old industrial areas to the Republican Party, is an important transformation in US voting patterns that needs to be taken into account. A geographic development like the South turning 'Blue' is a salient shift that needs to be assessed closely as well. At the same time, the US is heavily polarised, meaning that a large number of voters will vote along 'party lines' almost regardless of the candidate on the ticket. However, demographics is not destiny. And although the number of 'vote-switchers', or swing voters, may be declining in the US, they can still determine the outcome of an election. Our study also focuses on another critically important but variable sliver of voters – those exhibiting low turnout numbers like young people and minority communities. We define these voters, along with swing voters, as "decisive" because neither candidate can safely count on their support at the polls, yet they often determine the outcome of the election in crucial battleground states.

Our research is grounded on the popular body of literature and polling that parses out the American electorate by demographic categories in order to better understand voters' political intensions. Yet, our study offers a fresh approach to understanding these crucial voters by clustering our survey respondents according to their psychographic and ideological opinion structures in our analysis, rather than by the rough demographic proxies. Consequently, we hope our exploratory analysis offers a more nuanced understanding of what issues and attitudes matter to decisive battleground state voters in this election cycle. Furthermore, our initial findings help indicate the types of messaging and political positionings that may convince these crucial voter groups to turn out and vote for Joe Biden or Donald Trump.

2

IDENTIFYING TRADITIONALLY DECISIVE DEMOGRAPHIC VOTER GROUPS

Donald Trump's unexpected victory in 2016 focused attention on voters in a few key battleground states whose voters either switched parties or stayed at home, enabling Trump to narrowly win the electoral college despite losing the popular vote to Hillary Clinton. The dynamics of this narrow victory, updated with recent polling, can offer an initial blueprint for identifying the relatively small group of Americans whose choice of vote could decide the 2020 election. While our survey questionnaire and analysis in later chapters aims to not only consider decisive voters' demography, ideological convictions and positions on issues, but also their particular mindsets, attitudes and life outlooks, in this chapter we must first ask the question: who are they? Then, secondly, what types of attitudes or issues matter to them and should be included in this survey?

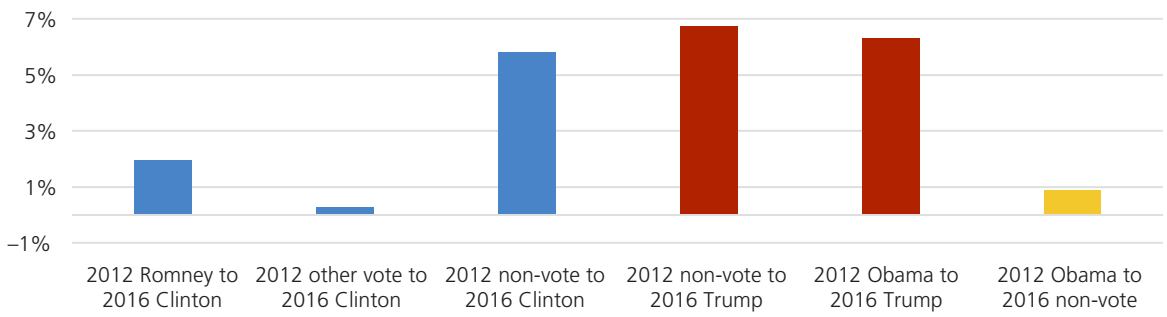
In the first part of this chapter, we comb through existing political datasets on past voter behaviour, such as the American National Election Study (2017). Then, in the second part, we draw on the extensive body of popular and academic literature, as well as recent polling, to identify five decisive demographic voter groups as a basis for both our targeted sampling outreach and our subsequent analysis.

2.1 WHO SWITCHED IN 2016…?

To identify the crucial voter groups that gave Trump his slight edge, we first identified relevant datasets that provide insight into the demographic structure and ideological convictions of these voter groups: the 2016 American National Election Studies (2017) and Kieskompas' US Democratic Primaries dataset (Etienne, Pasquier, et al., 2020). While in the next section we identify voter groups of interest predominantly based on demographic and geographic characteristics, in this section we initially do so along lines of voting behaviour.

The multidimensional nature of political space in the US allows for political cleavages to be cross-cutting, meaning people could hold unaligned preferences on different issue-dimensions that make up the American political landscape. Empirical evidence did show the political positions of a considerable proportion of American electorates differ between social and economic issues (Pasquier et al., 2020; Treier & Hillygus, 2009). People more likely to change their vote, split their vote, or swing from party to party across different elections are those who fall within these cleavages. However, having such 'incongruous' convictions itself does not exclusively affect swing-voting or turn-out decisions. The characteristics of candidates in the race and party platforms can determine whether potential swing voters would actually switch their votes (Hill, 2017). Besides attracting voters from the other side of the aisle, another possible path for electoral success is to mobilise a higher turnout of supporters. Turn-out effects will become fundamental in the next section, where we identify traditionally decisive demographic voter groups. Due to a heightened alignment of US voters based on issue preferences, ideological positions and partisan identity, strong partisans are less likely than independents to entertain

Figure 1
Voting behavior between 2012 and 2016 presidential elections



cross-cutting political convictions. Hence, strong partisans are least likely to change their party or candidate preference between two elections.

Looking at 2012 and 2016 voting behaviour, we selected the groups of interest in this study from the ANES 2016 dataset. We identify 6 interesting swing-voting patterns. These are the people that switched to a Clinton vote from (1) a 2012 Romney vote, (2) a third party or (3) a non-vote; 2012 non-voters that voted for Trump in 2016 (4); Obama to Trump voters (5), and Obama to non-voters (6). As we can see, non-voters from 2012 and turning out for Trump in 2016 were the most substantial, followed by voters that switched from voting for Obama in 2012 (and 2008) to Trump, while non-voters from 2012 turning out for Clinton in 2016 are also a substantial group. These percentages exclude people who were too young to vote in 2012. (Figure 1)

All in all, these groups amount to 22% of weighted respondents in the ANES 2016 data, which is a substantial proportion in a highly polarised and partisan environment. Research shows that as a result of a changing economic environment (Rehm, 2011) and heightened partisan alignment on social issues and education levels (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2019), Americans today have become more strictly aligned politically. Unlike several decades ago, the current American electorate is increasingly unlikely to adhere to a liberal ideology as a Republican, or as a conservative Democrat (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). Partly due to heightened social divisions, and the resulting stronger power of partisanship as a social identity (Mason, 2018), individuals could hold negative opinions regarding voters of other parties (Iyengar et al., 2019; Levendusky, 2010), even if there is little difference between their actual stance on substantive issues.

2.2 …AND WILL THEY AGAIN THIS NOVEMBER?

In the lead-up to the 2020 election, political strategists look back at 2016 and wonder what went wrong for Hillary Clinton. Trump's razor-thin margins of victory in decisive states like Pennsylvania and Michigan are scrutinised: who are the registered voters that switched sides or stayed home? And why?

Exit polling and election surveys can give us a good sense of who these consequential battleground voters (or non-voters) were in 2016. For example, a post-election study from the Center for American Progress (Rob Griffin et al., 2017) dug into these changes in vote composition, turnout, and party support rates by demographic group to predict which small shifts led to Clinton's loss. Running four simulations in which Clinton receives the same levels of support that Obama received in 2012 from various demographic groups, the study identifies two voter groups – black voters and non-college-educated whites – whose diminished support cost Democrats the presidency. Black voters abstained in margins that did not occur in 2008 and 2012, while non-college-educated white voters switched from Obama to Trump. Part of this development was due to the fact that both Clinton and Trump were among the least-liked candidates of their respective parties among broad strata of the electorate.

While demographics like race and education are inaccurate proxies for individual voting choices, recent literature shows that electoral party coalitions are becoming more polarised by race and education (Sides et al., 2017). As the demographic composition of the American electorate evolves, the political landscape will change dramatically if current divergent party support rates between demographic groups remain similar. For example, many Democrats assume that the increasing size of the non-white population will improve their electoral changes, but oftentimes expectations of demographic transition outpace reality (Robert Griffin et al., 2019). Many commentators have also sought to identify *why* decisive voter groups switched party in 2016 to hand Trump a narrow victory. Special attention has been paid to so-called "white working class" voters who abandoned the Democratic party for Trump in Rust Belt battleground states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Several studies argue that these voters were motivated not by economic hardship, but by perceived threats to their dominant group status "related to American global dominance and the rise of a majority-minority America" (Mutz, 2018), or that their behaviour related to their attitudes towards race and immigration (Reny et al., 2019). Building on this literature, we included a range of questions about economic and social attitudes – in particular sensitivities to perceived status loss and feelings of relative deprivation – in our survey that we explore in the analytical chapter.

Looking forward toward the 2020 election, we comparatively analysed polling from the current campaign with results from 2016 with a view toward shifts in voter support between parties. It is important to reiterate that because the Electoral College system in US presidential elections increases the relative importance of voting choices made by people in battleground states, geography is by default a core determinant of which voters are more decisive to the outcome of an election. According to the poll-aggregating site RealClearPolitics, Biden is unusually competitive in several southern "Sun Belt" states that are not typically battleground states, like Georgia and Arizona. Therefore, when identifying decisive voter groups in the following section, we make use of up-to-date polling trends to justify the likely decisiveness of a voter group within the evolving geography of battleground states in this election.

2.3 DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS THAT WILL DECIDE THE 2020 ELECTION

In the next paragraphs, we synthesise polling data, academic literature and journalistic accounts to identify five traditionally decisive demographic voter groups which we targeted with our survey sampling.

2.3.1 White Rust Belt Voters without a College Degree

The first voter group we analysed in depth are white voters without a college degree who live in "Rust Belt" battleground

states that experienced intense deindustrialisation over the past half-century. Many political commentators attribute Hillary Clinton's narrow electoral college loss to swing voters in this demographic group who used to reliably vote Democratic, but opted for Trump in 2016. According to recent polls, Biden is performing better than Clinton with this group in key states like Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan. In Pennsylvania, for example, Trump won by only 0.7% of the vote, yet white voters without a college degree make up 55% of the electorate over 25, underscoring this demographic group's power to swing any election with slight shifts in support (Dann, 2020). So far, Biden's direct appeals to these voters in his home state seem to be helping him a bit, with 40% indicating support for Biden in a recent NBC News/ Marist poll, compared with the 32% Clinton scored among this group in 2016 exit polls.

2.3.2 White Sun Belt Voters with a College Degree

Our second stratum of interest is white voters in the South and South-West, known as the "Sun Belt", with college degrees, whose votes have become increasingly contested and potentially decisive, as Biden's campaign tries to win in new battleground states like Georgia, Arizona, and Texas. A popular media narrative about this swing group holds that these well-educated voters are so turned off by Trump's divisive rhetoric, right-wing politics, and governing style, that they would consider voting for a centrist candidate like Biden. While Biden leads Trump nationally in support among college-educated white voters by 6%, there is big variance in polling at the state level (Yokley, 2020). In general, white voters with degrees in Sun Belt states are more conservative than in other regions, and polls find that majorities support Trump in Georgia, Texas, Florida, and North Carolina. Yet, polling has also detected a noticeable shift among white female voters away from Trump in many of these same states. If Biden is able to siphon off enough of these well-educated voters, despite their Republican voting history, it could push him over the edge in one or more of the Sun Belt battlegrounds.

2.3.3 Battleground State Black Voters

The Black Lives Matter protest movement and the disparate impact of Covid-19 on black communities has placed the interests of our third target group – black voters in battleground states – at the forefront of campaign discourse. Unlike the first two swing voter groups, black voters overwhelmingly support Democratic candidates (e.g. 90% support for Clinton in 2016). This group is potentially decisive in several battleground states with a large black electorate like Georgia, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, since high turnout among black voters will often push Democrats over the top in close races (Ray & Whitlock, 2019). Underscoring how slight changes in black voter turnout can swing an election, a Center for American Progress report (2017) calculated that Clinton would have won Michigan and Pennsylvania in 2016 if black voters in those states had supported her at the same rates as they supported President Obama in 2012 (90% vs. 95%). Additionally, while the Biden campaign is hopeful the choice of Kamala Harris as the first black Vice-President will mobilise this important voter group, recent polling data from Pew shows black support hovering around Clinton's 2016 level (Pew Research Center, 2020).

2.3.4 Battleground State Latino Voters

While demographic trends indicate that political influence of Latino voters will increase in future decades, the current collective political power of Latino voters is diminished by their relatively low turnout (46% in 2016). In our survey, we targeted outreach to Latino voters in battleground states where they are expected to make up a large percentage of the electorate, including Arizona (19%), Florida (18%), Nevada (18%) and Texas (23%). While a popular media narrative held that Trump's anti-immigrant and racist rhetoric will hurt him with Latino voters, recent polling confirms that about 30% of Latino voters plan to back Trump this November – a support rate comparable to the 2016 contest. The dynamics of intra-group political cleavages, such as the well-documented divide between Republican-leaning Cuban Americans and more Democratic-leaning Puerto Ricans in Florida, could be decisive in some of the competitive Sun Belt states.

2.3.5 Young Voters

Lastly, we targeted voters under the age of 30, whose unreliable turnout could determine the winner in close battleground races. Historically, youth turnout is lower than turnout among older generations, with only 50% of young voters (under 30) participating in the 2016 election. Yet, exit polls registered an impressive 11% turnout increase between the 2014 and 2018 mid-term elections, which could be indications of a "Trump effect" on political mobilisation that will drive youth turnout in this year's contest.

In conclusion, it is important to underscore that voter groups based on demographic variables like age, race, and education are far from monolithic in their political attitudes and voting patterns. Drawing on the literature and polling in this chapter, we have identified the five voter groups discussed above for the purpose of aligning our sampling with decisive voter groups. In contrast, the methodological approach we take in our survey analysis – such as clustering our survey respondents by shared attitudes – intentionally breaks from the practice of relying on telling, but imprecise, demographic and geographic categories as proxies for political beliefs.

3

SEGMENTATION OF TRADITIONAL DECISIVE DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS INTO LIKE-MINDED 'VOTER TYPOLOGIES'

The core aim of this study – it is important to reiterate – is to analyse those voters who are considering voting for Joe Biden. To micro-target our sampling to respondents that are members of the decisive voter groups in this election, we primarily used traditional demographic categorisation of decisive voter groups. Now, however, we apply statistical clustering procedures to identify and segment people considering voting for Biden into distinctive typologies, yielding the following categories: *core Trump voters,* those *considering voting for Trump,* then four clusters of *those considering a Biden vote (unaligned doubters, struggling moderates, intellectual liberal moderates, anti-trump progressives)* and *core Biden voters.* The psychographic variables used as dimensions in the cluster analysis are authoritarianism, American exceptionalism (or 'patriotism'), conspiracy belief, relative deprivation, and economic outlook. Crucially, another factor included is whether the motivation to vote for Biden stems more from a pro-Biden or an anti-Trump view.

The exploratory nature of this study should be emphasised. Even though we applied weighting procedures and reduced data biases on a considerable scale, particularly in demographics, our aim is not to provide precise proportions of different voter groups, but to analyse 'voter typologies' that are distinct from one another in terms of their political outlook above and beyond traditional demographic segmentation. We look into the hearts and minds of voters, not only at their location, skin colour, age or sex. Additionally, we at times still look back at the five traditionally decisive demographic voter groups identified in the first chapter, as well as potential differences between red, blue and battleground states.

3.1 DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SEVEN VOTER TYPOLOGIES

Segmenting the seven voter typologies by age reveals that younger people are less committed to any candidate than older generations. Both core Trump voters and core Biden voters are more prevalent among the older age categories. Notably, anti-Trump progressives are more numerous among the youngest age categories. They average 31 years of age, the youngest category along with unaligned doubters, compared to an average age of 55 for core Trump voters and 53 for Core Biden voters. (Figure 2)

As was often to be seen, there is an enormous gender gap between Trump and Biden voters. Core Trump voters are far more likely to be male. Also, the intellectual liberal moderates category is skewed heavily toward males. Women are far

Figure 2
Voter typologies by age

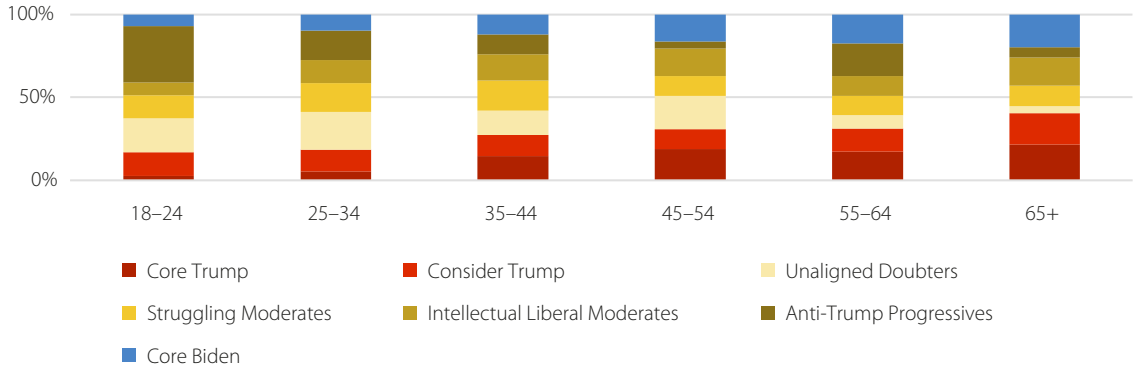


Figure 3
Voter typologies by education

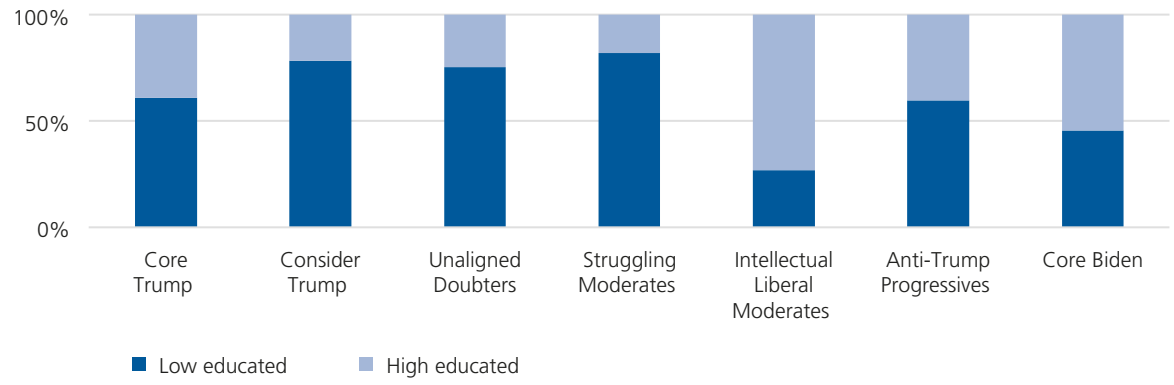
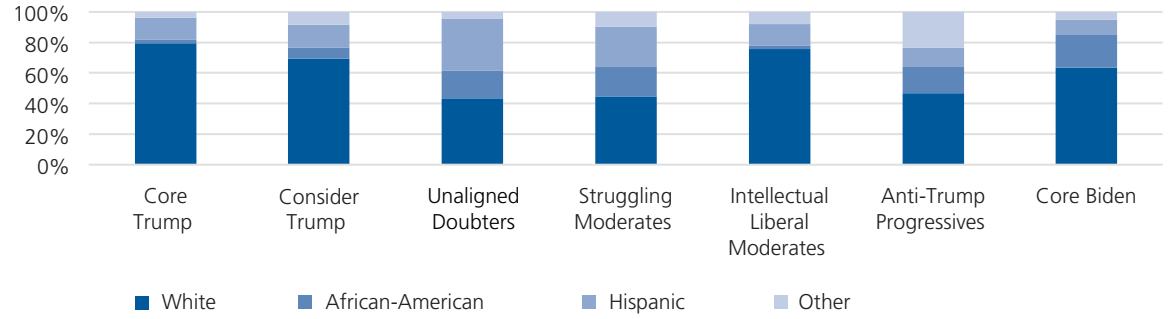


Figure 4
Voter typologies by race



more likely to belong to the unaligned doubters type and to those who are considering voting for Trump.

Among core Trump voters, around 6 out of 10 have lower education levels, compared to 46% of core Biden voters. Owing their name to this characteristic, intellectual liberal moderates are by far the highest educated group (73%). Note, however, that all groups which are least politically aligned – considering voting for Trump, unaligned doubters and struggling moderates – have very high proportions of lower educated voters and all score below the national average in terms of educational attainment. (Figure 3)

When it comes to employment, every voter typology is dominated by employees, with the exception of the anti-Trump progressives, of whom slightly more respondents are unemployed than employed. This type also has the largest share of students (11%), together with unaligned doubters. This latter group also has the second highest proportion of unemployed. Both in the core Trump and core Biden typologies, roughly 30% are retired. The highest proportion of homemakers or full-time parents can be found among those considering voting for Trump and unaligned doubters (both 17%).

Core Trump voters and those considering voting for Trump are overwhelmingly white (80% and 70%, respectively), as are intellectual liberal moderates. Note that a majority of core Biden types are also white, yet less so than likely Trump supporters. Heavy support for Biden is also to be found among African Americans, as they tend towards the core Biden typology (32%), followed by the unaligned doubters and struggling moderates (both 20%). Latinos can be found mostly among unaligned doubters, followed by those considering voting for Trump. (Figure 4)

While we expected to see clearer patterns in terms of urban/rural divides among the different voter typologies, this pattern turns out to be on a rather limited scale. As shown in many studies, core Trump voters and those considering voting for Trump, together with unaligned doubters, are more likely to live in rural areas and small cities or towns. Unsurprisingly, most numerous among the urban typologies are struggling moderates, anti-Trump progressives, and core Biden voters.

Confirming Trump's appeal to religious voters, the most religious voter typologies by far are core Trump voters. More than 9 out of 10 core Trump voters say they are religious, compared to slightly more than 6 out of 10 core Biden voters. The next most religious typology is the struggling moderates. The two least numerous religious typologies are intellectual liberal moderates and anti-Trump progressives. Of the five traditionally decisive demographic voter groups, African Americans most often say religion is important in their life, followed by Latinos. Confirming the generational decline in religious conservatism, less than half of young people say religion is important in their life.

Figure 5
Cluster typologies' partisan self-identification

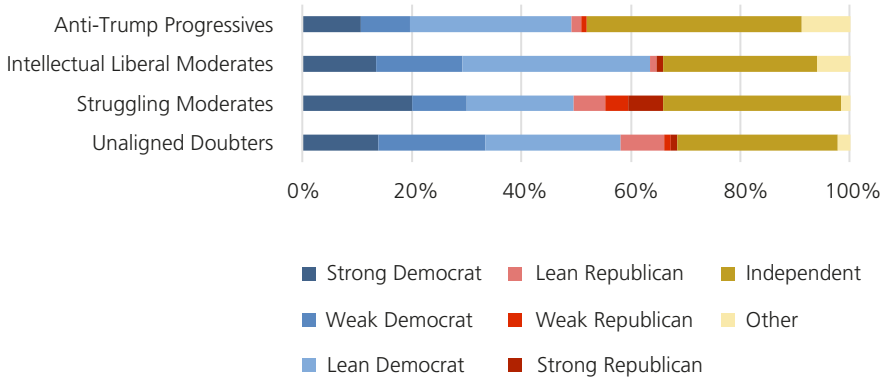
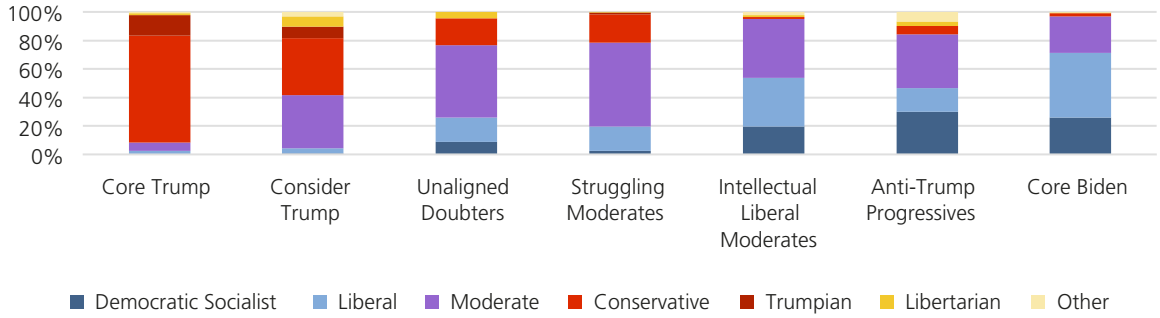


Figure 6
Voter typologies by ideological self-identification



3.2 POLITICAL ALIGNMENT

3.2.1 Partisan and ideological identification

Since our categorisation is based on partisan identification, we know that core Trump and core Biden voters are strongly partisan. However, it is important to highlight that of the 4 cluster typologies considering voting for Biden, anti-Trump progressives consider themselves least Democratic and most independent (or *other*). Struggling moderates identify mostly as Republicans, followed by unaligned doubters, of which 1 in 10 identifies as a Republican. Interestingly, struggling moderates mostly identify as *strong Democrats,* roughly followed by intellectual liberal moderates. (Figure 5)

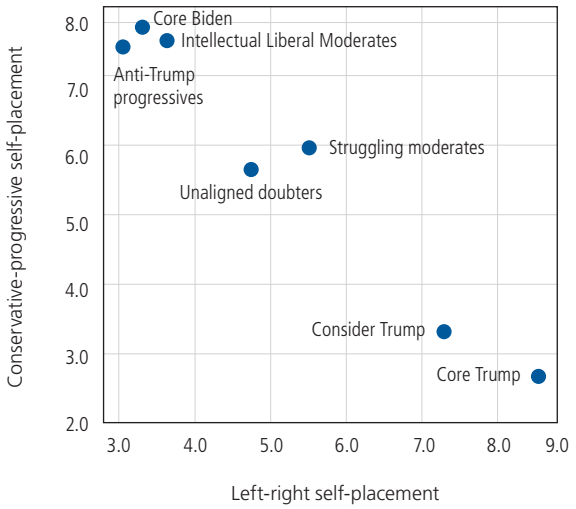
Nearly half of the African American demographic voter group consider themselves strong Democrats. Around ⅓ of white voters in both the Rust Belt and Sun Belt states consider themselves strong Republicans. Battleground young people considers themselves independent most often (37%), as do a quarter of African Americans and Latinos.

Clearly, partisan identification only tells us so much. People's self-stated ideology is far more telling, where the options included democratic socialism, liberalism, but also conservatism, libertarianism and Trumpism. Most importantly, nearly 90% of core Trump voters are conservative or Trumpian (75% of the former and 15% of the latter). Among those considering Trump are much fewer self-stated conservatives (40%), while almost an equal proportion consider themselves moderates (37%). They account for the largest share of libertarians, namely 7%. Libertarians also feature in relatively large numbers among unaligned doubters, who are at the same time the most moderate of all typologies after the struggling moderates. Clearly, the idea that Trump only appeals to hard-core conservatives is incorrect. Core Democratic support of Biden is actually made up of fewer moderates. Biden support has a completely different composition, consisting mostly of people that identify as liberal and democratic socialists. Democratic socialists are to be found mostly among anti-Trump progressives, core Biden voters and intellectual liberal moderates. Interestingly, the answer option of *Other* was opted for by 7% of anti-Trump Progressives. In the open-ended answer to this question, terms like '(anarcho-) communists', 'progressives', and 'socialists' are mentioned. (Figure 6)

With the exception of white college-educated Sun Belt voters, of whom a third identify as conservatives, all traditionally decisive demographic voter groups say they are mostly moderates.

To summarise the political alignment of the seven voter typologies, we plot their average score on a psychographic scale along two dimensions, constructing 'two-dimensional

Figure 7
Political landscape:
self-placement scores of voter typologies.



mentality landscapes'. In the first political mentality landscapes based on two axes – economically left versus economically right, and culturally liberal versus culturally conservative – core Trump and core Biden are at diametrically opposite ends. Unsurprisingly, core Biden voters are left-progressive, while core Trump voters are right-wing conservatives. Close to the core Biden coordinates are intellectual liberal moderates and anti-Trump progressives, while being slightly more right-wing and slightly more left-wing, respectively. Hovering between core Trump voters and the left-wing progressive front are the struggling moderates and unaligned doubters. Slightly less conservative, but certainly more left-wing than core Trump voters, are those considering voting for Trump. (Figure 7)

3.2.2 Voting behaviour

Looking at voting behaviour in the 2016 presidential election, most Trump voters are unsurprisingly to be found among the core Trump and considering voting for Trump typologies. Clinton voters feature mostly in the core Biden, intellectual liberal moderate and the anti-Trump progressive typologies. In this group, we also notice a large proportion of respondents stating they were too young to vote, confirming the youthful nature of this typology. In all typologies, except the Core Trump and Core Biden voters, non-voters feature prominently, although to a lesser extent among intellectual liberal moderates. Unaligned doubters were last election's largest non-voting typology. (Figure 8)

Between 2012 and 2016, most Obama to Trump swing voters are to be found in the two Trump typologies, as well as among struggling moderates. Turnout increased between 2012 and 2016 for core Trump voters, whereas it decreased for every other typology. Turnout among all of the five traditionally decisive demographic groups was around 40% or lower, with the exception of white college-educated Sun Belt voters, of whom 68% say they went to the polls in 2016. A majority of them voted for Donald Trump.

This leads us to 2020 voting proclivities. More than half of each cluster typology says they are (extremely) likely to go and vote in this presidential election. Anti-Trump progressives say they are the least likely to get out and vote. Unaligned doubters are by far most uncertain about whether they will vote. (Figure 9)

Sun Belt voters say they are most likely to vote in this presidential election. Rust Belt voters are not so sure; around a quarter of them state that it is (extremely) unlikely. Around ⅔ of other traditionally decisive demographic voter groups say it is (extremely) likely that they will vote.

We also asked people if they did get out and vote, how they would cast their ballot. Nearly 40% of all respondents said they would vote by mail-in or absentee ballot. Nearly 35% stated that they would vote in person on election day, and

Figure 8
Voter typologies by 2012 & 2016 Presidential vote

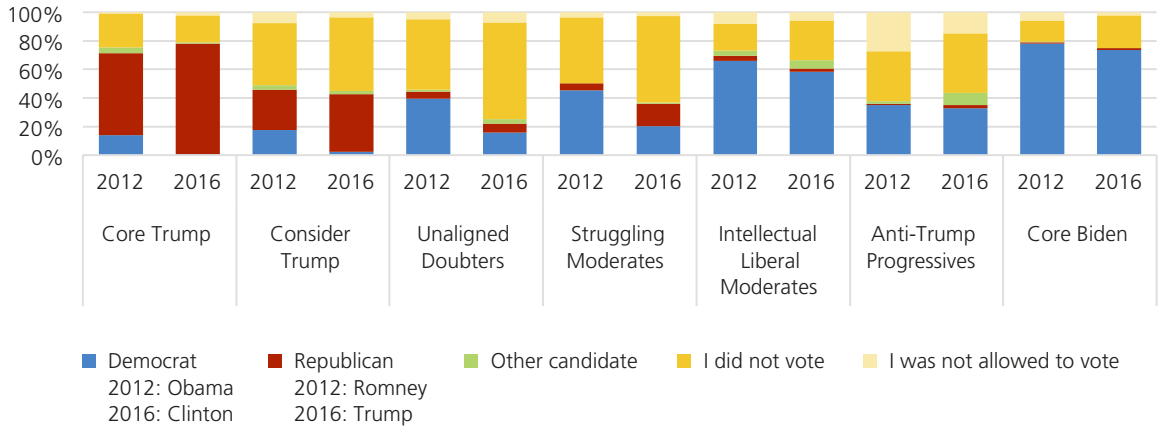


Figure 9
Cluster typologies by voting likelihood

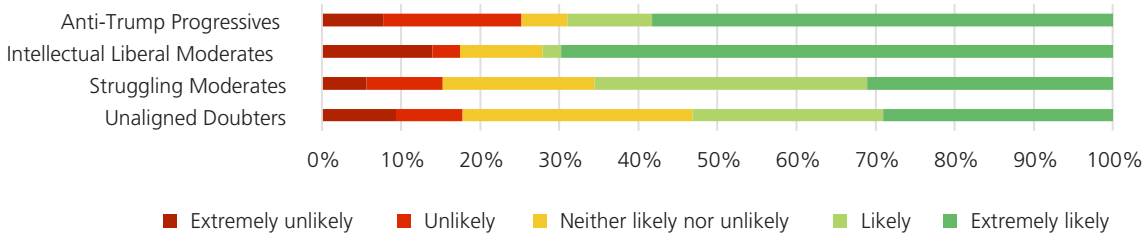
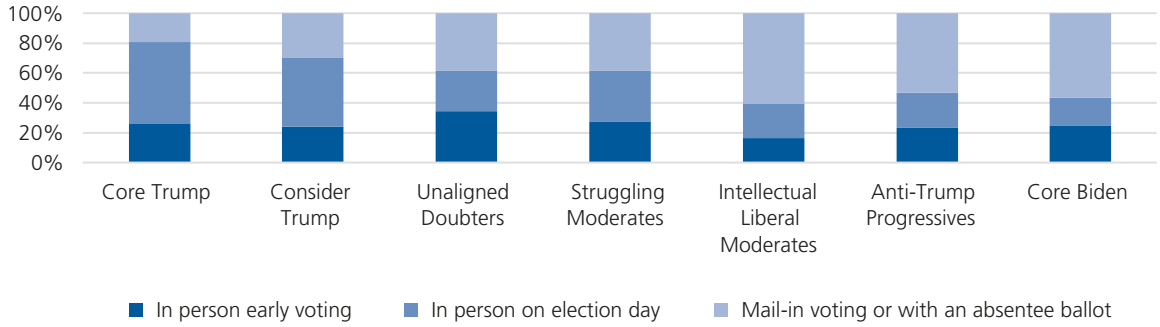


Figure 10
Voter typologies by voting method



26% said they would vote early in person. These proportions, however, differ drastically among groups. Core Trump voters least frequently say they will vote by mail-in or absentee ballot (20%, or half of the study's average). More than half of them say they will vote in person on election day, compared to a majority of intellectual liberal moderates, anti-Trump progressives and core Biden voters who state that they will vote by mail-in or absentee ballot. (Figure 10)

Over half of the traditionally decisive African American demographic voter group say they will vote by mail-in or absentee ballot. The group of young people exhibits the second highest proportion of mail-in or absentee voting. Nearly half of Rust Belt voters say they will vote in person on election day. In red states, more than half of respondents say they will vote in person on election day, compared to 57% of blue state respondents who state that they will vote by mail-in or absentee ballot. In battleground states, preferences for voting options are more evenly divided.

To conclude this section, the key question is: for which candidates do the cluster typologies indicate a preference? While a large majority of each cluster typology state they will vote for Biden, nearly a quarter of anti-Trump progressives say they will vote for another candidate (and nearly 20% state that they will not vote for Trump, Biden, Jorgensen or Hawkins, and instead for another candidate). Unfortunately, we did not provide for an open-ended answer option to this question, so we can only speculate that a certain portion of this group will still cast a Sanders vote. Of these four cluster typologies, only struggling moderates and unaligned doubters had respondents among them who indicated they would vote for Trump (8% and 14% state they would vote for Trump, respectively). (Figure 11)

Nearly 1 in 6 core Biden voters say they have already voted, compared to 1 in 25 core Trump voters. Nearly 10% of intellectual liberal moderates state the same. The typologies least sure of how they will vote are unaligned doubters and struggling moderates.

More than half of the traditionally decisive Latino demographic voter group says they intend to vote for Biden. More than 7 in 10 of the decisive African American voter group state the same, whereas more than half of white voters in the Sun Belt and Rust Belt voter groups say they will vote for Trump. In red states, still more than half of our respondents say they intend to vote for Biden. In blue states, this figure is more than ⅔. In battleground states, somewhat less than 4 in 10 say they would vote for Trump and somewhat more than 4 in 10 state they would vote for Biden. A substantial portion of around 1 in 7 is still undecided.

Unsurprisingly, anti-Trump progressives' vote for Biden is largely driven by anti-Trump sentiment. This is also the case for more than half of intellectual liberal moderates. Typologies who intend to vote for Biden and are the most pro-Biden and least anti-Trump are the core Biden voters and struggling moderates. (Figure 12)

Figure 11
Cluster typologies by 2020 vote intention

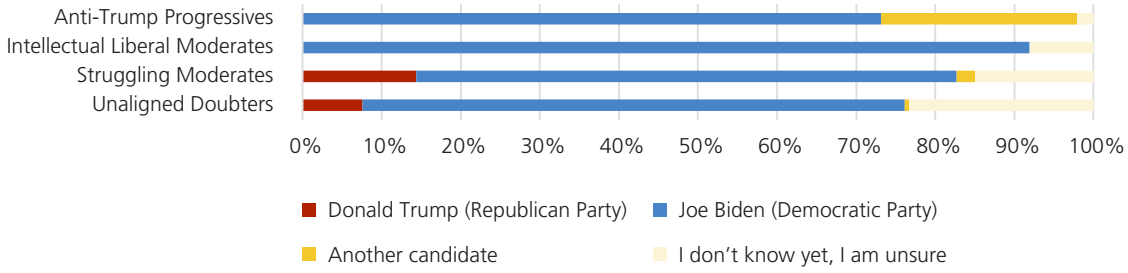
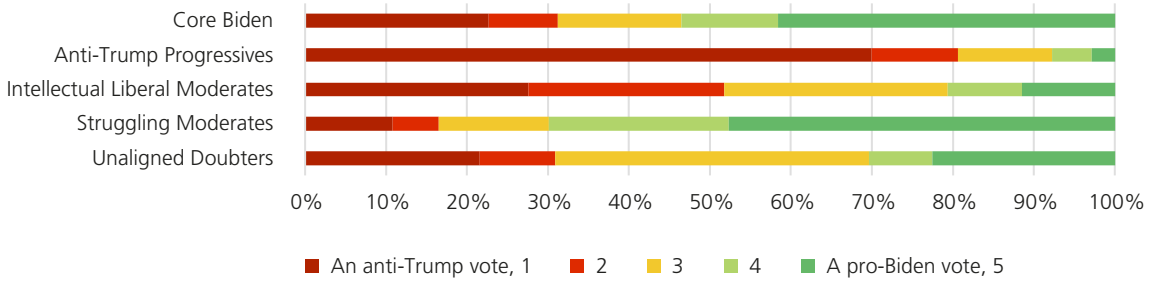


Figure 12
If you would vote for Biden, would your Biden vote be more anti-Trump or more pro-Biden?



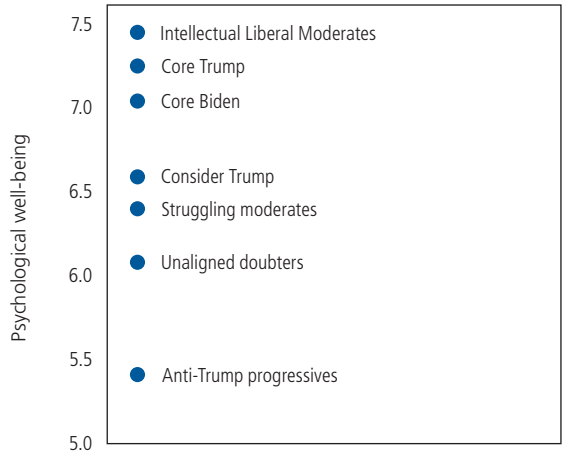
Across typologies, Biden's pick for Kamala Harris as running mate did not make a big difference in how likely it is that they would vote for Biden. The largest effect can be found among core Trump voters and those considering voting for Trump, where more than half said Biden's pick made it (a lot) less likely they would vote for him. Nevertheless, 14% of core Trump voters said having Kamala as a running mate made it (a lot) more likely they would vote for Biden. The largest positive effect can be found among core Biden voters (49% more likely), followed by the struggling moderates (40%) and the intellectual liberal moderates (38%). Interestingly, among anti-Trump progressives, where one could expect a woman of colour on the ticket to make a positive difference, 20% still say Kamala made it less likely they would vote for Biden. Presumably, her track record as Attorney General of California may not sit well with a portion of them.

3.3 MIND-SET AND PSYCHOGRAPHICS: MENTALITY LANDSCAPES

First of all, respondents placed themselves on a scale from 0 to 10 when asked to imagine a ladder, with steps numbering from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top, with the top level representing the best possible life for them, and the bottom representing the worst possible life for them. Anti-Trump progressives score lowest, with an average score of 5.4. The next lowest typology, unaligned doubters, score higher at 6.1. Intellectual liberal moderates score highest at around 7.5, followed by core Trump voters at 7.3 and core Biden voters at 7.0. Those considering voting for Trump score slightly about 6.5, and the struggling moderates score slightly below. (Figure 13)

More telling, in this section we visually compare all 7 voter typologies by plotting them in two-dimensional mentality landscapes, where each axis represents a standardised psychographic dimension. Standardisation means that a dimension's average is always 0, and a value of plus or minus 1 signifies a single standard deviation. First, we map these groups based

Figure 13
Psychological well-being ladder.



on their scores along dimensions of authoritarianism, conspiracy mentality, and American exceptionalism (in other words, how great is the US?).

The typologies scoring highest on a conspiracy belief mentality are the anti-Trump progressives, struggling moderates, and core Trump voters as well as those considering voting for Trump. These groups, however, differ drastically on how great they think the US is. Anti-Trump progressives are very critical of the notion of American exceptionalism, whereas struggling moderates are slightly above average, and those considering voting for Trump and core Trump voters are approximately one standard deviation above the mean. (Figure 14)

If we were to plot conspiracy beliefs against authoritarianism, it would once again be the core Trump voters, those considering voting for Trump, and struggling moderates are lumped together in the positive quarter of the graph. Anti-Trump progressives score high on conspiracy beliefs, but as low as core Biden voters and slightly lower than the unaligned doubters on authoritarianism. Both unaligned doubters and intellectual liberal moderates score low on conspiracy beliefs, but only intellectual liberal moderates are to be found in the extreme negative quarter of the graph.

Finally, plotting authoritarianism against the notion of American exceptionalism, core Trump voters score highest on both dimensions again. Slightly less extreme are struggling moderates and those considering voting for Trump. Around 9 out of 10 struggling moderates and core Trump voters (strongly) agree that 'this country needs a strong leader who can quickly decide on everything'. All other typologies score below average on authoritarianism, but the difference in scores on American exceptionalism remains. (Figure 15)

3.4 ECONOMIC EVALUATIONS

The three dominant modules in the economic evaluations block are precariousness, relative deprivation and an economic dimension constructed from items relating to government intervention and generic economic issue statements, where a lower score signifies a more left-wing position and a higher score signifies a more right-wing position.

What the graph shows is that core Trump, those considering voting for Trump, and core Biden voters all score relatively similar on both the precariousness dimension and the relative deprivation dimension, both ending up close to the average. Core Trump voters only feel marginally more economically deprived than core Biden voters. Struggling moderates and anti-Trump progressives, however, score high on both dimensions. These are the two groups that suffer most economically. More than 60% of anti-Trump progressives (strongly) agree that 'it is always other people who profit from all kinds of advantages offered in this society', and both of these typologies often agree that 'when there is an economic downturn, people like [them] are the first to be its victims'. Nearly 6 out of 10 anti-Trump progressives and 45% of struggling moderates generally find it (very) difficult to make ends meet. On the other extreme are intellectual

Figure 14
Mentality landscape:
American exceptionalism & conspiracy beliefs.

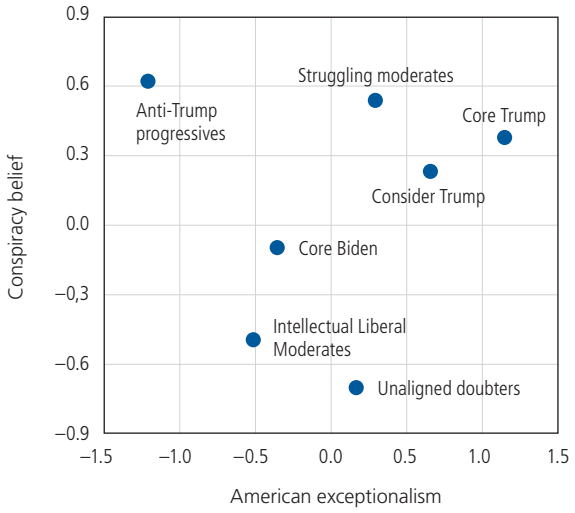


Figure 15
Mentality landscape:
American exceptionalism & authoritarianism.

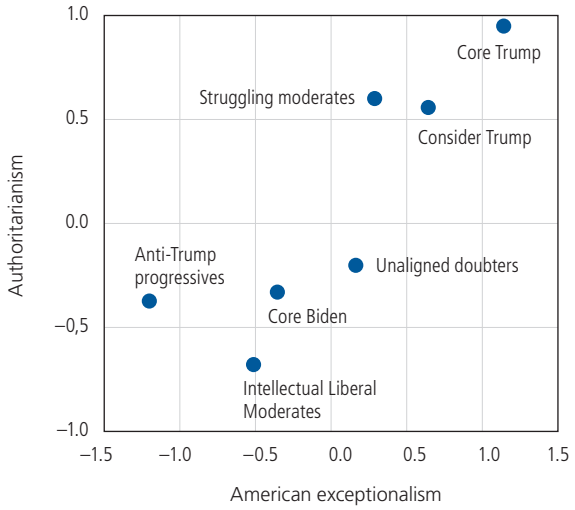
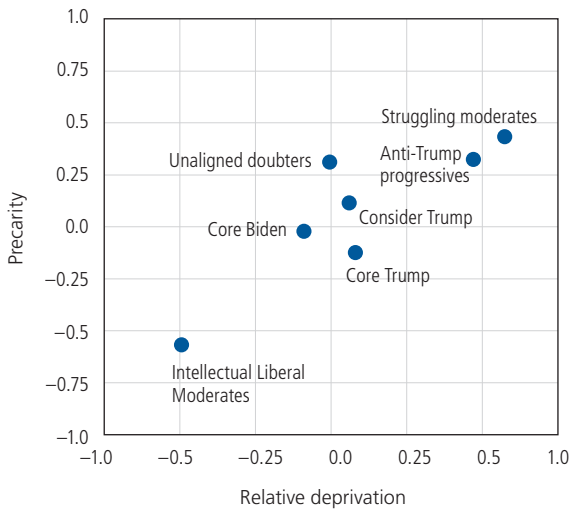


Figure 16
Economic mentality landscape:
precarity & relative deprivation.



liberal moderates, who score low on both precariousness and relative deprivation. More than 9 out of 10 of them deem it (very) unlikely that they will lose their job or a large part of their income in the coming year. (Figure 16)

Core Trump voters most often say the financial situation of their household has gotten better compared to what it was 4 years ago. Anti-Trump progressives and struggling moderates most often say it has gotten worse. More than 60% of struggling moderates say it is (very) likely there will be periods in the coming year when they will not have enough money to cover the necessary expenses for their household. In battleground states, more so than in blue or red states, people say it is (very) likely that they will lose part of their income next year. Nearly half of them state that it is generally (very) difficult to make ends meet, compared to a quarter of people in blue states and 18% in red states.

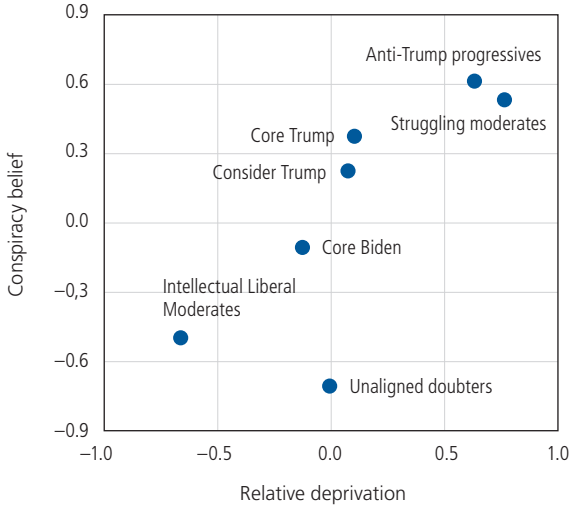
It is clear that typologies with more economically right-wing positions also score higher on the American exceptionalism dimension. Struggling moderates find themselves alone around the average of the left-right dimension, with unaligned doubters and the Trump bloc to their right and the intellectual liberal moderates, core Biden voters and anti-Trump progressives solidly to their left.

Comparing relative deprivation with the economic index, we can see that anti-Trump progressives, core Biden voters and intellectual liberal moderates all score roughly equally on the left side of the economic index, but very differently on relative deprivation, with anti-Trump progressives scoring high, intellectual liberal moderates scoring low, and core Biden voters in between, at around one-quarter standard deviation below average. On the economic left-right dimension, struggling moderates score close to the mean, but very high on relative deprivation. The Trump bloc and unaligned doubters are grouped on the right-wing end of the economic dimension, around the average on relative deprivation. Looking at precariousness compared with the economic index, the results are very similar, with the exception of core Trump voters scoring higher on relative deprivation than on precariousness. If these graphs show us one thing, it is that deprivation and precariousness are phenomena experienced on both sides of the economic left-right spectrum.

Plotting conspiracy beliefs against relative deprivation, the pattern is clear – the more deprived you are, the higher you score on conspiracy beliefs. The anti-Trump progressives and the struggling moderates score highest on both dimensions, followed by core Trump voters and those considering voting for Trump. Core Biden voters score slightly below average on both dimensions, and intellectual liberal moderates score in the negative quadrant again. Unaligned doubters score low on conspiracy beliefs and around average on relative deprivation. (Figure 17)

A different pattern emerges when we look at authoritarianism against relative deprivation. Struggling moderates score well above average on both dimensions. Core Biden voters have the unaligned doubters in their vicinity, scoring below

Figure 17
Economic mentality landscape: relative deprivation & conspiracy belief.



average on both dimensions. Anti-Trump progressives are relatively deprived, but score below average on authoritarianism. Intellectual liberal moderates score well below average on both dimensions. Very similar patterns emerge, offsetting American exceptionalism to relative deprivation.

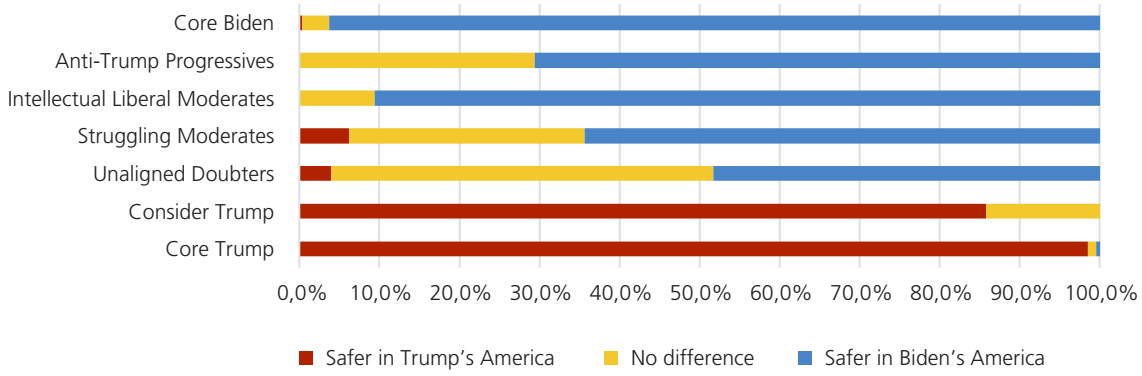
A little over half of respondents say that Trump has been a champion of corporate interests and slightly less than 4 in 10 say he has been a champion of workers. The progressive bloc largely disagrees with the latter, while they do predominantly agree that Trump is a champion of corporate interests. More than half of struggling moderates (strongly) disagree that Trump has been a champion of workers, while nearly half of them (strongly) agree he has been one for corporate interests. Nearly 4 in 10 unaligned doubters (strongly) agree with this statement, as do those considering voting for Trump. Of unaligned doubters, 40% (strongly) disagree that he has been a champion of workers.

More than 6 in 10 respondents (strongly) agree that taxes on the wealthy should be increased. This is an opinion widely held by all typologies, although less so by those considering voting for Trump and core Trump voters. Unaligned doubters are least likely to agree with this statement. As with most statements, they are largely neutral. In the Trump bloc, roughly ⅓ (strongly) disagree with the statement. A very similar pattern emerges when it comes to people agreeing that large companies in the US make too much profit at the expense of a decent wage for workers. Anti-Trump progressives agree the most with this statement (89%), followed by core Biden voters, then intellectual liberal moderates and struggling moderates. Unaligned doubters agree least.

3.5 POLITICAL ATTITUDES

In the political attitudes module, we ask about satisfaction with the Trump administration, the direction in which the country is headed, and whether respondents would feel safer in Trump's America or Biden's America. Furthermore, we ask

Figure 18
Would you feel safer in Trump's America or Biden's America?



a set of questions about threat perception and opinions regarding debasement of the US presidency. The next block of questions pertains to leadership evaluations, in which both candidates are scored along an eleven-point Likert scale on 5 personality traits (competence, patriotism, honesty, corruption and empathy). The campaign evaluation block seeks to map media usage, exposure and attention paid to ads from or about either candidate, as well as an 11-point grading of both campaigns.

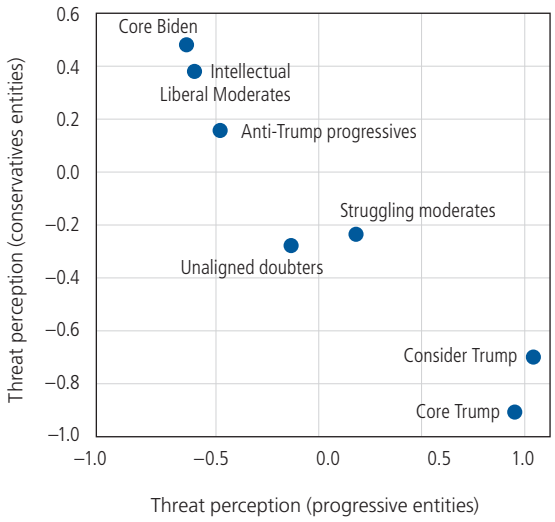
3.5.1 Threat perception

Both media and societal narratives during the campaign have focused on safety, particularly at the onset of the Black Lives Matter protests in the largest cities in the US. Throughout the population at large, and particularly in inner cities, the situation was, and still is, very tense. We asked respondents "Would you feel safer in Trump's America or Biden's America?", followed by a risk allocation to different entities.

The results are not surprising. Core Biden voters and intellectual liberal moderates overwhelmingly report they would feel safer in Biden's America, compared to 86% of those considering voting for Trump and 98% of core Trump voters saying the opposite. Interestingly, nearly 3 out of 10 anti-Trump progressives say it would make no difference. The same proportion of struggling moderates say so as well, and even nearly 50% of unaligned doubters. (Figure 18)

We then asked how much risk respondents think the following pose to the US: Russia (P), China (C), Antifa (C), QAnon (P), Immigrants (C), Black Lives Matter protesters (C), Socialism (C), and White supremacists (P). The factor analyses conducted indicated that this scale shows two separate dimensions, a progressive entities threat dimensions (P), and a conservative entities threat dimensions (C). Both show similar, although opposing patterns. Core Trump voters and those who consider voting for Trump perceive progressive entities as a high risk, struggling moderates and unaligned doubters score around average, and intellectual liberal moderates, anti-Trump progressives and core Biden voters barely consider these a threat. On the other hand, core Trump voters and those who are considering voting for Trump vote do not perceive conservative entities as high risk, while struggling

Figure 19
Threat perception mentality landscape: progressive entities & conservative entities.

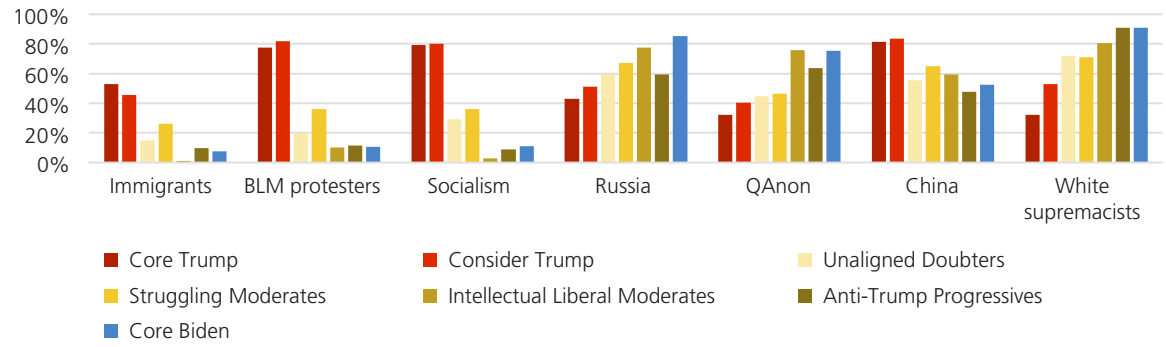


moderates and unaligned doubters once again score around average, and intellectual liberal moderates, anti-Trump progressives and core Biden voters consider conservative entities to be a threat. (Figure 19)

White supremacists are, on average, deemed to be the highest risk to the US. Over ⅔ of respondents say so. China is a close runner-up, with slightly below ⅔ considering the country to pose a high risk to the US. Immigrants are, on average, considered the least risk to the US, although notably more by the Trump bloc than the other typologies. Core Trump voters consider China, socialism, and Black Lives Matter protesters to pose the highest risks to the US. (Figure 20)

Correlations are strong with along the American exceptionalism dimension, less strong with authoritarianism, and relatively weak with conspiracy belief and relative deprivation. Those who think of America as a great country also perceive progressive entities as threats, whereas these entities do not instil fear in those who question America's greatness. Plotting threat perception of conservative entities, such as

Figure 20
Proportion of people thinking items pose a high risk to the US.



white supremacists, QAnon and Russia, intellectual liberal moderates, anti-Trump progressives and core Biden voters all score relatively high. The Trump bloc scores nearly one standard deviation lower than the average.

3.5.2 Institutional trust

Similarly to the threat perception questions, the institutional trust scale was split up into two dimensions: the military (C), media (P), trade unions (P), police (C), congress (P), NATO (P), the Justice System (C), big corporations (C), the American dream (C), the UN (P), and the WHO (P). The threat perception dimensions and institutional trust dimensions correlate strongly, and so do the conservative entities' trust dimension with authoritarianism and American exceptionalism. Interestingly, the correlation between the progressive entities' trust dimension is a lot less pronounced. (Figure 21)

Core Trump voters score highest on conservative entities' trust dimension, followed by a set of those considering voting for Trump, struggling moderates and unaligned doubters. Core Biden voters and intellectual liberal moderates score slightly below average. Anti-Trump progressives score, on average, on the opposite end of core Trump voters on this dimension.

Institutional trust in progressive entities (the media, trade unions, Congress, NATO, the WHO and the UN) is highest among core Biden voters, closely followed by intellectual liberal moderates. Struggling moderates score higher than average as well. Unaligned doubters and anti-Trump progressives score slightly below average, while core Trump voters and those considering voting for Trump score lowest. (Figure 22)

On average, big corporations are characterised by the least trust, with anti-Trump progressives trusting them least (3%) and core Trump voters trusting them most (58%). Two-thirds of people trust the police, with once again anti-Trump progressives trusting them least (22%) and core Trump voters trusting them most (96%). The justice system is trusted by over half of the respondents. The most trusted entity is the military, which is trusted by three-quarters of respondents. Nearly 6 out of 10 have faith in the American dream.

Predominantly anti-Trump progressives do not trust the US government to take care of its citizens. More than 9 out of 10

Figure 21
Mentality landscape: American exceptionalism & institutional trust in conservative entities.

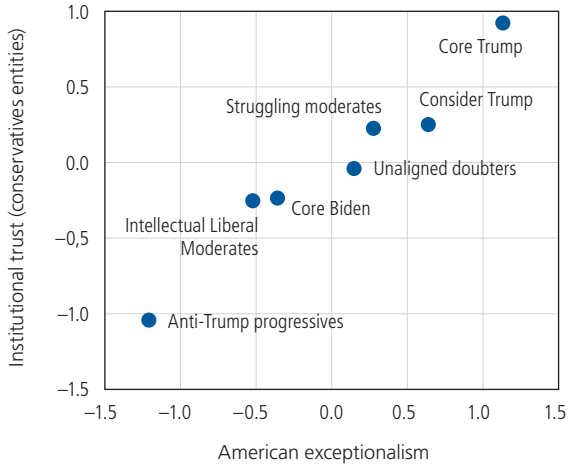


Figure 22
Mentality landscape: American exceptionalism & institutional trust in progressive entities.

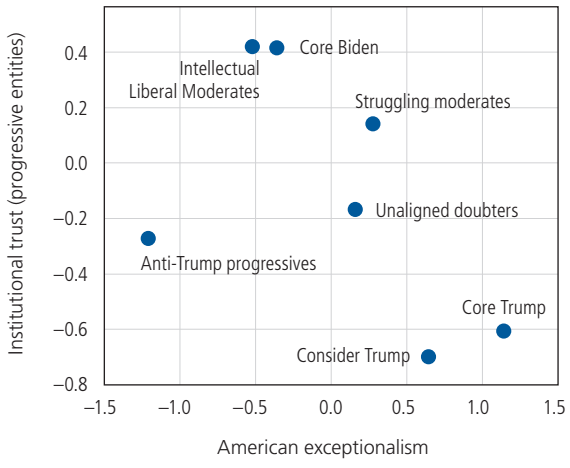


Figure 23
The US federal government response to the current coronavirus pandemic is...

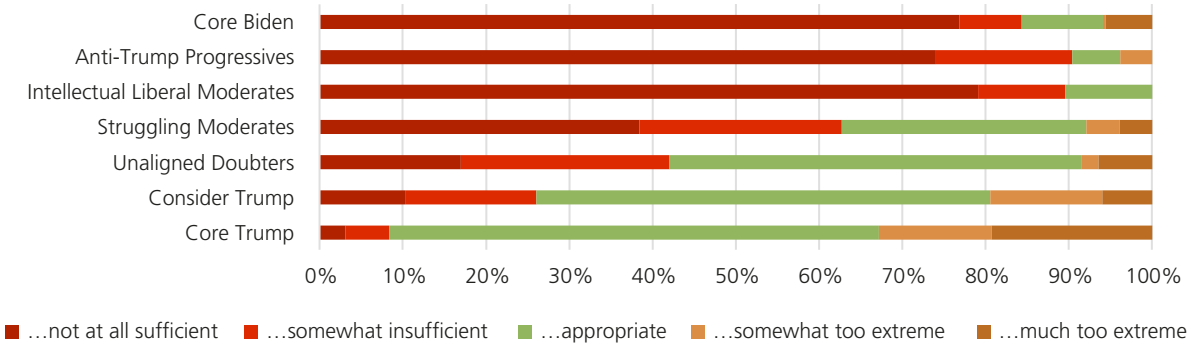
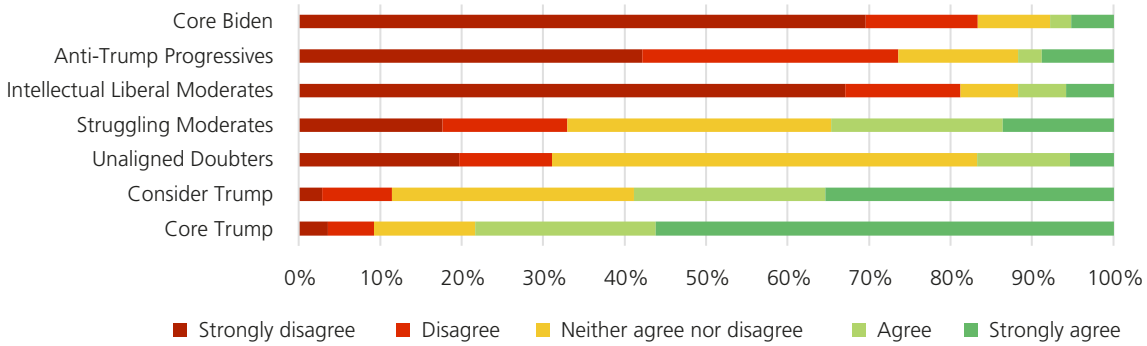


Figure 24
Mail-in ballots will lead to election fraud



say they (strongly) distrust the government doing so. Around ⅔ of core Biden voters (strongly) distrust the government, compared with over 7 in 10 of intellectual liberal moderates. In comparison, 6 out of 10 core Trump voters (strongly) trust the government to take care of its citizens, while this applies to 3 out of 10 struggling moderates. Asked about the coronavirus pandemic, more than half of core Trump voters and those considering voting for Trump, as well as half of unaligned doubters say the US federal government's response is appropriate. Between 84% and 90% of intellectual liberal moderates, anti-Trump progressives and core Biden voters say the government's response is (somewhat) insufficient. (Figure 23)

3.5.3 Elections, democracy, and culture

More than 8 out of 10 core Biden voters believe that Russia is interfering with the US election in favour of Trump. Three-quarters of intellectual liberal moderates (strongly) agree. Between 5 and 6 out of 10 anti-Trump progressives and struggling moderates also agree. Of these typologies, almost no one disagrees with this statement. Disagreement can be found among those considering voting for Trump (more than 4 of 10) and among core Trump voters (nearly 6 of 10). A large majority of respondents agree that corporations should not fund election campaigns. The strongest opponents here are anti-Trump progressives and intellectual liberal moderates, followed by core Biden voters, struggling moderates and core Trump voters.

Nearly 8 out of 10 core Trump voters (strongly) agree that mail-in ballots will lead to election fraud, as do nearly 6 out of 10 of those considering voting for Trump. Struggling moderates and unaligned doubters are split on the issue, whereas the progressive bloc is convinced that mail-in ballots will not lead to election fraud. Of those voting with a mail-in or absentee ballot, 17% (strongly) agree that voting in this manner will lead to election fraud. More than half of the people voting on election day think that this is the case. (Figure 24)

Asked if the president elected on 3 November should appoint the next Supreme Court justice, only the majorities of unaligned doubters and the two typologies in the Trump bloc do not agree (strongly). Seventy percent or more of the other 4 typologies (strongly) agree that the president elected in November should appoint the next Supreme Court justice.

Nearly a quarter of the Trump bloc (strongly) agree that the US is structurally racist. So do a similar proportion of unaligned doubters. As with most statements, the latter are largely neutral, which makes for a big difference in disagreement with this statement between the Trump bloc, of which more

Figure 25
The US is structurally racist

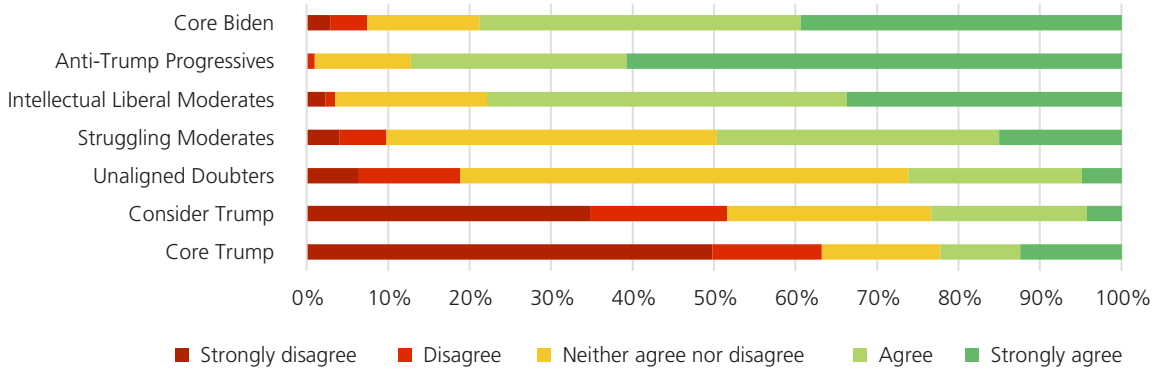
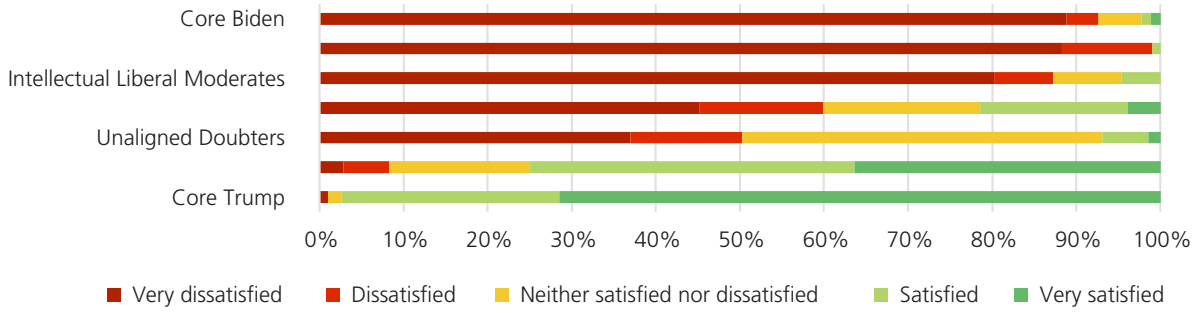


Figure 26
How satisfied are you with the overall performance of the Trump Administration?



than half (strongly) disagree with this statement, compared to 19% of unaligned doubters. Exactly half of struggling moderates (strongly) agree with this statement, and nearly 8 in 10 of intellectual liberal moderates and core Biden voters do so. Even a larger proportion of anti-Trump progressives agree with this statement. (Figure 25)

Considering their other opinions, it is surprising that anti-Trump progressives are not the most supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement as a way of combatting racism, with 18% of them saying they (strongly) disagree with this statement. Still, nearly 7 out of 10 of them say they (strongly) agree that the BLM movement is a justified way to combat racism. Only core Biden voters and intellectual liberal moderates agree to a larger extent. Exactly half of struggling moderates agree as well. Around 70% of core Trump voters and those who are considering voting for Trump (strongly) disagree with this statement.

Asked whether the mainstream media is trying to indoctrinate the public with liberal ideas, nearly 9 out of 10 core Trump voters, and nearly 7 out of 10 of those considering voting for Trump, (strongly) agree. The next highest proportion agreeing with this statement can be found among struggling moderates, among whom nearly 4 out of 10 (strongly) agree. Unaligned doubters seem rather undecided, whereas intellectual liberal moderates, anti-Trump progressives and core Biden voters for the most part (strongly) disagree.

3.5.4 Debasement of the presidency

Setting the tone for this section is the question of how satisfied respondents are with the overall performance of the Trump administration. As expected, three typologies are overwhelmingly dissatisfied, namely core Biden voters, anti-Trump progressives, and intellectual liberal moderates. More ambivalent are struggling moderates and unaligned doubters, whereas those considering voting for Trump and core Trump voters are for the most part (very) satisfied. A very similar pattern emerges when we ask if the country is going in the right or wrong direction. (Figure 26)

In order to measure to what extent different typologies consider Trump to be debasing the office of the president, we asked whether 1) people thought he had abused his power for personal benefit, 2) the US needs a president that gets things done, even if that means breaking the rules, and 3) if things in the country would be much better if all government officials would be a bit more like Trump.

A third of the respondents (strongly) disagree that Trump has abused his power as president for personal gain, while half (strongly) agree. Anti-Trump progressives agree most (98%), followed by core Biden voters and intellectual liberal moderates. Interestingly, nearly 15% of core Trump voters also (strongly) agree, whereas only 10% of those considering voting for Trump agree. Nearly half of unaligned doubters are neutral regarding this statement. (Figure 27)

Figure 27
Trump has abused his power as President of the US for personal benefit

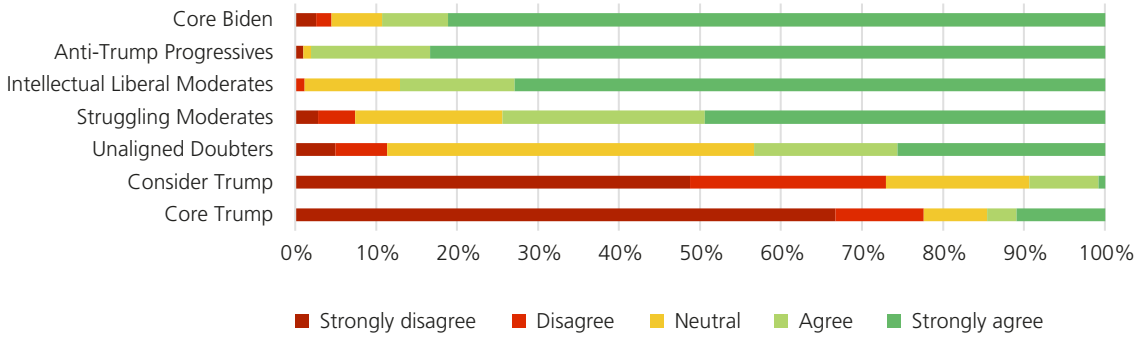
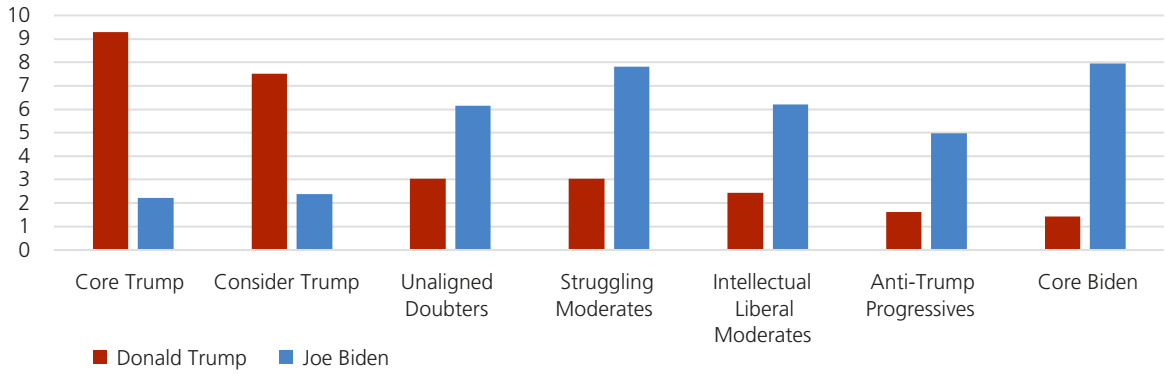


Figure 28
How do you evaluate the different candidates' campaigns so far?



Combining these three items into a dimension measuring debasement, three blocks of typologies emerge. The Trump bloc scores roughly one standard deviation lower than average. Unaligned doubters and struggling moderates score around the average, and intellectual liberal moderates, anti-Trump progressives and core Biden voters score around a ¾ standard deviation above average.

Asked whether the US needs a president who gets things done even if this means breaking the rules, the Trump bloc is divided. Nearly a third of those considering voting for Trump, and over a quarter of core Trump voters, disagree with this statement.

3.5.5 Campaign and leadership evaluations

Unsurprisingly, core Trump voters and those considering voting for Trump have the most positive opinion of Trump's campaign. Core Biden voters have a similar opinion with regard to Biden's campaign, closely followed by struggling moderates, who award an average score of 7.8. All other cluster typologies give Biden's campaign a rather positive score, with anti-Trump progressives giving it precisely a 5 out of 10. Trump's campaign is not well-received by any voter typology other than those in the Trump bloc. (Figure 28)

Of the qualities featured in the survey, Donald Trump's highest score is on corruption, for which all typologies except for the Trump bloc give him the highest score by far. Corruption is the trait on which the Trump bloc typologies score him lowest. These typologies give him very high scores on the other positive qualities. Core Trump voters give the president empathy and honesty scores higher than 8, and patriotism and competence scores higher than 9. Unaligned doubters and struggling moderates give Trump around 3 out of 10 on the positive qualities. With the exception of patriotism, for which Trump still gets scores of roughly 2 out of 10, the other typologies score the remaining qualities of empathy, honesty and competence around 1 or lower. (Figure 29)

Joe Biden's evaluation is much more positive overall. While the two Trump typologies give Biden a corruption score of around 6 out of 10, all other typologies give him a 4 or lower. He is thought to be most competent by core Biden voters, followed by intellectual liberal moderates and struggling moderates. Biden seems to generally be considered relatively empathetic and patriotic. (Figure 30)

In general, Trump scores higher than Biden only on corruption, with Biden leading in the positive qualities. The difference between the two candidates is largest with regard to empathy, and smallest in terms of competence, for which they score nearly the same.

Figure 29
How would you rate Donald Trump on the following qualities?

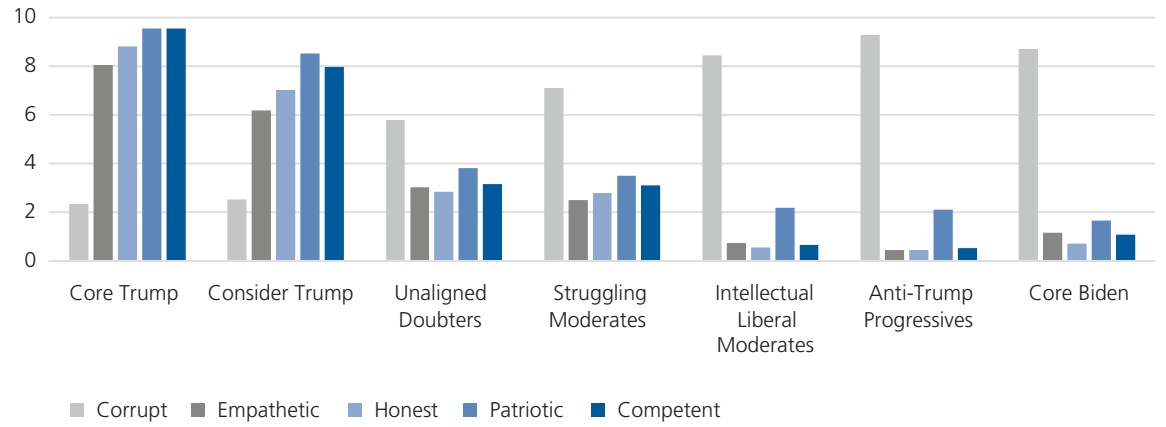
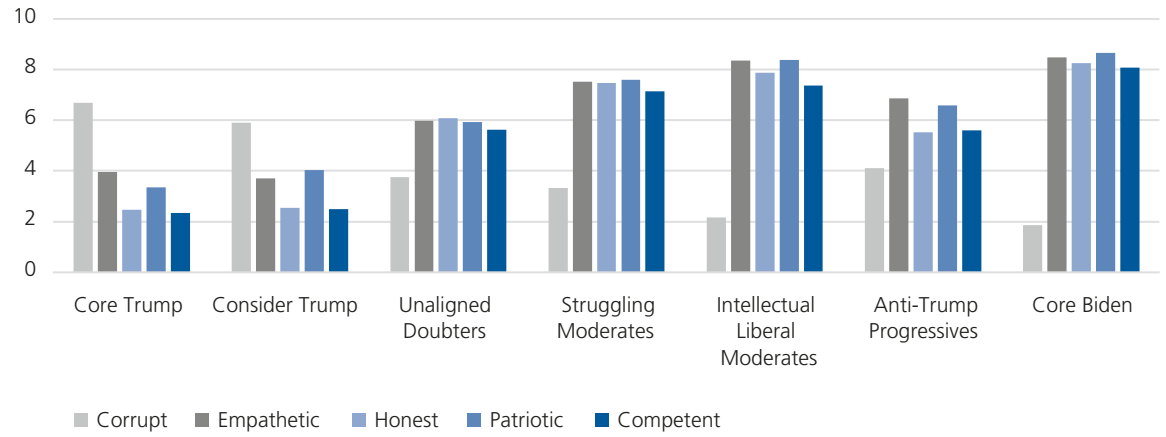


Figure 30
How would you rate Joe Biden on the following qualities?



4

CONCLUSION

In summing up, no single defining attitude or silver bullet issue that would help Biden win over decisive voter groups emerges from our analysis. Instead, our findings reinforce just how divergent and cross-cutting political and personal beliefs are among voters considering supporting the same candidate. Rather than a cohesive group of moderate voters between the two-party ideological poles, the sliver of voters whose choices we predict may determine the outcome this November is extremely heterogeneous. For the sake of analytical clarity, we have focused our analysis on people who are considering voting for Biden, but a similar clustering methodology could be applied to voters considering voting for Trump.

As stated above, the four cluster typologies we identify often express opinions that diverge in opposite ways from the responses of core Biden supporters. While this muddles the conclusive strategic value of our research for a Biden campaign advisor trying to craft an appeal to our mix of decisive voters, it also underscores the difficulty of the candidates' task in wooing such divergently-minded potential voters. For example, when we asked respondents whether a vote for Biden would be more of an affirmative vote for the candidate or a negative vote against Trump, two of the cluster typologies indicated the former and two the latter, providing an unclear verdict on whether negative campaigning would help or hurt Biden's electoral strategy.

Our study also reinforces the importance of appealing to lower turnout voter groups in addition to the much-vaunted moderate swing voter. For example, within the "struggling moderate" cluster typology there is a sizable portion of Obama-to-Trump voters who are now again considering voting for Biden in 2020. Yet, there are actually more potential gains for Democrats among "anti-Trump progressives" who either voted for a third party candidate in 2016 or who did not vote at all. Looking toward the future, we find that younger voters are less likely to be committed to one candidate than older voters, with younger voters considering voting for Biden most likely to be clustered within the "anti-Trump progressive" typology. Additionally, contrary to popular belief, we find that conspiracy beliefs are not exclusively linked to support for Trump, and instead align with levels of relative deprivation.

While studying divergences between cluster typologies considering voting for Biden may not offer clear-cut strategic guidance for his campaign, noting areas where his core supporters are to one side of his potential voters may help clarify useful messaging in the final stretch of the campaign. For instance, our survey recorded overall more negative psychographic and economic views among 3 out of 4 of the cluster typologies considering voting for Biden. Rather than lead with anti-Trump messaging that resonates strongly with some of his potential voters, but not others, he could more openly criticise structural issues that are driving people's sense of economic deprivation and vulnerability.

At the start of our research, we relied on traditional polling data and literature to identify demographic groups based on age, geography, income, and education for the sake of sampling a sufficient number of respondents whose voting choices we predicted could prove decisive. In a second step, however, we applied a more original approach using statistical clustering procedures to segment people considering voting for Biden into typologies based on shared beliefs. Contrary to the way many people talk about demographic identities and political beliefs in the US, the colour of someone's skin or their educational attainment is a shallow indicator of their attitudes and voting habits. In conclusion, we believe that our approach, which segments people into like-minded clusters for analysis, significantly refocuses attention on issues and feelings that motivate voters to go to the polls and vote for a candidate in a given election.

5

METHODOLOGY

Here we briefly discuss the methodology we used in this study. A more elaborate discussion of methodological aspects is provided in the technical report.

To identify and analyse psychographic and ideological opinion structures of the decisive voter contingent that is considering voting for Joe Biden in 2020, we initially conducted a multi-faceted review of recent election data, opinion polling, political journalism and academic literature to ground our research on ongoing debates and critical understandings of the US electorate (see previous chapter).

Based on these analyses, we developed a questionnaire that was fielded between 25 September and 5 October 2020. Kieskompas relied on its own non-probability panel members who voluntarily signed up through voting advice applications for the 2016 Presidential Election, and the 2020 Democratic primary and Presidential Elections (Etienne, Furstein, et al., 2020; Etienne, Pasquier, et al., 2020; Krouwel & Kutiyski, 2016). In order to micro-target important voter groups, we subsequently recruited respondents through Facebook and made use of Qualtrics' panels, specifically aiming at the five traditionally decisive demographic groups described above.

The questionnaire included demographics and items relating to political alignment and identification and four randomised question block modules. First, we mapped the psychographics of respondents, asking about authoritarianism, patriotism, and conspiracy beliefs. A second block enquired about economic evaluations, including items measuring feelings of relative deprivation, economic precariousness, the role of government and economic intervention. A third question block included political attitudes, leadership evaluations, campaign evaluations and institutional trust. Furthermore, we asked about threat perception, opinions about debasement of the US presidency by Trump, leadership and campaign evaluations. A last module contained COVID-19 related questions, as well as positions on salient political issues.

While this study is exploratory and therefore does not aim to make representative claims regarding the US voting age population, a limited weighting procedure was executed on the data in order to reduce key biases. A raking procedure was applied to the dataset (unweighted n = 2.039) on the parameters of age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, and vote recall for the 2016 presidential elections. A geographic variable was purposefully not made part of the weighting procedure so as not to negate the focus on battleground states in this study. Weights have been assigned to 1,622 respondents. The maximum margin of error at the 95% confidence level is 4.0%.

Subsequently, we grouped respondents in four broad categories based on which candidate they were more likely to support. Importantly, the voter contingent considering voting for Biden was thereafter statistically clustered to identify the most homogeneous clusters within the cohort based on psychographics.

Voter typologies	
1. Core Republican Trump voters (n = 220)	
2. Considering (only) voting for Trump (n = 260)	
3. Unaligned doubters (n = 157) 4. Struggling moderates (n = 164) 5. Intellectual liberal moderates (n = 147) 6. Anti-Trump progressives (n = 117)	Considering voting for Biden (or considering both voting for Trump and voting for Biden) (n = 621)
7. Core Democratic Biden voters (n = 476)	

The psychographic variables used as dimensions in the cluster analysis are authoritarianism, American exceptionalism (or 'patriotism'), conspiracy belief, relative deprivation, and economic outlook. Crucially, another factor included is whether the motivation to vote for Biden stems more from pro-Biden or anti-Trump sentiment. Where clustering on demographics would lead one to assume homogeneous beliefs within demographic strata, our analysis transcends any demographic coalescence of people that may not be alike politically. This approach makes it possible for the analysis to reflect the different attitudes prevailing within the contingent of voters considering voting for Biden.

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Kieskompas is an independent scientific research institute specialising in quantitative data analysis, opinion polling and voter profiling. Kieskompas was established by political scientists and is embedded in the academic community of VU University Amsterdam. Over the years, the institute has developed an expertise and rely on a broad international network of academics in the fields of political psychology, electoral behavior and party studies. Our best-known tool is the Kieskompas (Election Compass) voting advice application (VAA). Our VAAs are completely independent and based on a novel, yet well-established scientific methodology. In this way, we primarily inform citizens about where parties stand with regard to salient policy-related issues, but also generate a great deal of party-level and opinion data, which is used to conduct scientific research. Our large panels offer invaluable insights into the psychographics, motivations and dynamics of specific voter groups.

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WHO DECIDES THE ELECTION?

A study of decisive voter groups considering voting for Biden

Voters considering a Biden vote are heterogenous in their convictions, economic situation and outlook. Roughly half of those considering a Biden vote call themselves Democrats. The other half is largely comprised of independent voters.

Conspiracy belief is not isolated to Trump voters. Many voters considering Biden also score high on the conspiracy belief dimension.

Populism, disinformation, polarization, and feelings of deprivation are on the rise, and this study provides anchor points for comparison with situations outside of the US.

The 'Black Lives Matter protest movement' and 'Socialism' were the most polarizing topics that distinguished Trump voters from those considering or committed to Biden.

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