

## **NARRATIVE STRATEGIES-535 POLL TOPLINES: AFFORDABILITY, CONGRESS, POPULISM, AND EMERGING ISSUES**

**Methodology:** The Narrative Strategies-535 Poll was conducted online among a national sample of registered voters using non-probability sampling. Respondents were recruited through an online sample exchange using demographic quotas to ensure balance across key groups. Quotas were set for gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, urban/rural residence, party-lean, household income, education, and political ideology to approximate the composition of registered voters.

Measures to ensure data quality included steps to prevent duplicate responses, screening questions designed to identify inattentive respondents, and the removal of respondents who completed a substantial portion of the survey significantly faster than typical.

The final sample was weighted to align with known population benchmarks for registered voters. Weighting dimensions included gender, age, and race/ethnicity. Because this survey uses a non-probability sample, a traditional margin of sampling error does not strictly apply. A comparable estimate is  $\pm 2.8$  percentage points. Sub-group sample sizes and margins of error may vary.<sup>1</sup>

This survey was fielded among N=1,210 registered voters nationwide. The survey was fielded from August 27-September 1, 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

## SECTION 1: AFFORDABILITY AND THE ECONOMY

**Q1. If you had to choose, which ONE of the following is the most important issue facing the country today?**

|                                    | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Cost of living/inflation           | 35%                            |
| Jobs and the economy               | 11%                            |
| Political corruption               | 10%                            |
| Democracy                          | 9%                             |
| Healthcare                         | 7%                             |
| Immigration                        | 6%                             |
| Crime                              | 5%                             |
| The environment and climate change | 3%                             |
| National security                  | 3%                             |
| Taxes                              | 2%                             |
| Foreign policy                     | 2%                             |
| Education                          | 2%                             |
| Data centers                       | 2%                             |
| Something else (Please specify)    | 3%                             |
| Not sure                           | 1%                             |

**Next, here are a few questions about the economy and the cost of living.**

**Q2. Thinking specifically about your own experiences, would you say your personal financial situation has gotten better or worse over the past year, or is it about the same?**

|                | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Better         | 18%                            |
| Worse          | 45%                            |
| About the same | 36%                            |
| Not sure       | <1%                            |

**Q3. Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?**

|                                                                 | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| The U.S. economy is working well for most people                | 26%                            |
| The U.S. economy is only working well for the wealthiest people | 67%                            |
| Not sure                                                        | 7%                             |

**Q4. Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?**

|                                                                                       | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| The economy CAN be considered strong, even if many families are struggling with costs | 28%                            |
| The economy CANNOT be considered strong if many families are struggling with costs    | 68%                            |
| Not sure                                                                              | 4%                             |

**Q5. Which of the following do you think Congress can realistically do to lower costs for people like you? Select up to two.**

|                                                      | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Lower healthcare costs                               | 40%                            |
| Reduce government spending                           | 35%                            |
| Reduce tariffs                                       | 34%                            |
| Expand tax credits for individuals and families      | 27%                            |
| Make it easier to build more housing                 | 14%                            |
| Expand energy production                             | 10%                            |
| Congress cannot realistically do much to lower costs | 5%                             |
| Not sure                                             | 4%                             |

**Q6. Who is more responsible for making everyday life more affordable?**

|                                                                                  | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>TOTAL Government/Both equally</b>                                             | <b>85%</b>                     |
| <b>TOTAL Companies/Both equally</b>                                              | <b>73%</b>                     |
| Government (through laws and public policy)                                      | 22%                            |
| Companies (through the prices they charge, wages they pay, and how they operate) | 10%                            |
| Both are equally responsible                                                     | 63%                            |
| Neither are responsible                                                          | 2%                             |
| Not sure                                                                         | 3%                             |

## SECTION 2: CONGRESS AND GOVERNING PRIORITIES

Next, here are a few questions about what you would like to see from your representatives in Congress ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.

**Q7.** As you may know, Congress is currently debating “appropriations,” which is a process used to fund various priorities. If Congress were to increase federal spending in one area, where should that money go?

|                                                     | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Healthcare                                          | 30%                            |
| Congress should only try to reduce federal spending | 22%                            |
| Housing                                             | 13%                            |
| Education                                           | 7%                             |
| Border security                                     | 6%                             |
| Defense                                             | 5%                             |
| Energy infrastructure                               | 5%                             |
| Transportation and infrastructure                   | 4%                             |
| Science and research                                | 4%                             |
| Artificial intelligence                             | 3%                             |

**Q8.** **ASK ONLY IF REPUBLICAN W/ LEAN** When thinking about a candidate in your congressional district, do you prefer a candidate who will...

|                                                     | Republicans w/Lean<br>(n=530) |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Fully support President Trump and his policy agenda | 48%                           |
| Chart a new path forward for the Republican Party   | 42%                           |
| Not sure                                            | 10%                           |

**Q9.** **ASK ONLY IF DEMOCRAT W/ LEAN** When thinking about a candidate in your congressional district, do you prefer a candidate who will...

|                                                                                                           | Democrats w/Lean<br>(n=561) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Focus on stopping President Trump’s policy agenda, even if it means there’s gridlock in Congress          | 64%                         |
| Compromise with the other side to get things done, even if it means giving the Trump administration a win | 26%                         |
| Not sure                                                                                                  | 10%                         |

**Q10. When thinking about a candidate in your congressional district, do you prefer a candidate who will...**

|                                                                  | <b>Registered Voters<br/>(n=1,210)</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Stand firm on their positions, even if it means little gets done | 41%                                    |
| Compromise with the other side to pass legislation               | 48%                                    |
| Not sure                                                         | 12%                                    |

**Q11. Which political party do you trust more to handle each of the following issues?**

**Registered voters (n=1,210)**

|                          | <b>The Democratic Party</b> | <b>The Republican Party</b> | <b>Not sure</b> | <b>NET Trust</b> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Healthcare               | 52%                         | 33%                         | 15%             | D+19             |
| Education                | 50%                         | 36%                         | 14%             | D+14             |
| Cost of living           | 48%                         | 37%                         | 15%             | D+11             |
| Tariffs and trade policy | 47%                         | 39%                         | 14%             | D+8              |
| Political corruption     | 42%                         | 35%                         | 23%             | D+7              |
| Jobs and economic growth | 45%                         | 40%                         | 15%             | D+5              |
| Energy costs             | 45%                         | 40%                         | 15%             | D+5              |
| Foreign policy           | 45%                         | 41%                         | 14%             | D+4              |
| Artificial intelligence  | 37%                         | 34%                         | 29%             | D+3              |
| Immigration              | 42%                         | 46%                         | 11%             | R+4              |
| National security        | 40%                         | 46%                         | 14%             | R+6              |
| Crime                    | 39%                         | 45%                         | 16%             | R+6              |

# SECTION 3: POPULISM AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Next, here are a few questions about government and major institutions.

**Q12.** Some people say the federal government should be allowed to take an ownership stake in private companies when those companies are important to national security or the country’s economic future. Others say the federal government should not own pieces of private companies, regardless of how important those companies are.

Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

|                                                                                                                | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| The federal government should be allowed to take ownership stakes in strategically important private companies | 20%                            |
| The federal government should not own ownership stakes in private companies                                    | 71%                            |
| Not sure                                                                                                       | 9%                             |

**Q13.** In many communities today, there is discussion about whether and how to build data centers. If a state law required new data centers to:

- Pay the full cost of the energy, infrastructure, and public services they need
- Publicly report their energy use, water use, environmental impacts, and communications with government officials and hold regular community meetings
- Protect local water resources
- Prevent higher utility costs for existing residents
- Provide tax revenue and other direct benefits to surrounding communities
- And, face financial penalties for failing to meet these requirements

Would you support or oppose building data centers in your state?

|                      | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>TOTAL Support</b> | <b>55%</b>                     |
| Strongly support     | 23%                            |
| Somewhat support     | 33%                            |
| <b>TOTAL Oppose</b>  | <b>34%</b>                     |
| Somewhat oppose      | 13%                            |
| Strongly oppose      | 21%                            |
| Not sure             | 10%                            |

**Q14. And which THREE of the following requirements would be most important to you in deciding whether to support building data centers in your state? Please select up to three.**

|                                                                                                                                                      | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Pay the full cost of the energy, infrastructure, and public services they need                                                                       | 56%                            |
| Prevent higher utility costs for existing residents                                                                                                  | 50%                            |
| Protect local water resources                                                                                                                        | 40%                            |
| Publicly report their energy use, water use, environmental impacts, and communications with government officials and hold regular community meetings | 34%                            |
| Provide tax revenue and other direct benefits to surrounding communities                                                                             | 32%                            |
| Face financial penalties for failing to meet these requirements                                                                                      | 26%                            |
| None of these                                                                                                                                        | 6%                             |
| Not sure                                                                                                                                             | 5%                             |

## SECTION 4: EMERGING AND NEWS ISSUES

Here are a few questions about issues currently being debated in Washington.

**Q15. Do you support or oppose requiring powerful new artificial intelligence models to receive government approval before being released to the public?**

|                      | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>TOTAL Support</b> | <b>62%</b>                     |
| Strongly support     | 32%                            |
| Somewhat support     | 30%                            |
| <b>TOTAL Oppose</b>  | <b>26%</b>                     |
| Somewhat oppose      | 15%                            |
| Strongly oppose      | 11%                            |
| Not sure             | 12%                            |

**Q16. (SPLIT SAMPLE A)** Congress is considering legislation intended to improve railway safety. The proposal would increase the use of defect detectors, strengthen safety standards for trains carrying hazardous materials, improve emergency-response planning and first-responder preparedness, and strengthen railcar inspection requirements.

Do you support or oppose this policy?

|                      | Split Sample A<br>(n=604) |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>TOTAL Support</b> | <b>78%</b>                |
| Strongly support     | 40%                       |
| Somewhat support     | 38%                       |
| <b>TOTAL Oppose</b>  | <b>14%</b>                |
| Somewhat oppose      | 7%                        |
| Strongly oppose      | 7%                        |
| Not sure             | 8%                        |

**Q17. (SPLIT SAMPLE B)** President Trump is pushing Congress to pass legislation intended to improve railway safety. The proposal would increase the use of defect detectors, strengthen safety standards for trains carrying hazardous materials, improve emergency-response planning and first-responder preparedness, and strengthen railcar inspection requirements.

Do you support or oppose this policy?

|                      | Split Sample B<br>(n=606) |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>TOTAL Support</b> | <b>71%</b>                |
| Strongly support     | 34%                       |
| Somewhat support     | 37%                       |
| <b>TOTAL Oppose</b>  | <b>18%</b>                |
| Somewhat oppose      | 9%                        |
| Strongly oppose      | 10%                       |
| Not sure             | 11%                       |

**Q18. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each of the following?**

**Registered Voters (n=1,210)**

|                              | <b>TOTAL<br/>Favorable</b> | Very<br>favorable | Somewhat<br>favorable | <b>TOTAL<br/>Unfavorable</b> | Somewhat<br>unfavorable | Very<br>unfavorable | Not<br>Sure | Never<br>heard<br>of |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Free markets                 | <b>68%</b>                 | 35%               | 33%                   | <b>15%</b>                   | 8%                      | 7%                  | 14%         | 3%                   |
| Capitalism                   | <b>58%</b>                 | 29%               | 29%                   | <b>28%</b>                   | 13%                     | 14%                 | 14%         | 1%                   |
| Government<br>price controls | <b>35%</b>                 | 11%               | 25%                   | <b>48%</b>                   | 22%                     | 27%                 | 14%         | 2%                   |
| Socialism                    | <b>32%</b>                 | 11%               | 22%                   | <b>52%</b>                   | 16%                     | 36%                 | 15%         | 1%                   |

**Q19. Which ONE of the following comes closest to what “socialism” means to you?**

|                                                                     | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| A stronger social safety net within a mostly private-market economy | 27%                            |
| Government owning or controlling major companies and industries     | 25%                            |
| Government controlling prices for goods and services                | 18%                            |
| Eliminating most private ownership of businesses                    | 16%                            |
| Something else (please specify)                                     | 3%                             |
| Not sure                                                            | 12%                            |

**Q20. Which ONE of the following comes closest to what “economic populism” means to you?**

|                                                                                                                     | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Government doing more to protect working- and middle-class people from powerful corporations and wealthy interests  | 23%                            |
| Using government policy to favor American workers and industries over global markets and foreign competition        | 21%                            |
| Government intervening more directly in the economy through tariffs, price controls, subsidies, or ownership stakes | 16%                            |
| Government taking direct control over parts of the economy                                                          | 11%                            |
| Something else (please specify)                                                                                     | <1%                            |
| Not sure                                                                                                            | 28%                            |

## SCREENER QUESTIONS

**S1. Are you registered to vote?**

|     | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| Yes | 100%                           |

**S2. What state or territory do you live in now?**

|                                                                            | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Northeast (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT)                             | 18%                            |
| Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI)                   | 23%                            |
| South (DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV, AL, KY, MS, TN, AR, LA, OK, TX) | 39%                            |
| West (AZ, CO, ID, NM, MT, UT, NV, WY, AK, CA, HI, OR, WA)                  | 20%                            |

**S3. What is your current ZIP Code?****S4. What is your age?**

|             | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|-------------|--------------------------------|
| 18–24       | 5%                             |
| 25–29       | 4%                             |
| 30–34       | 9%                             |
| 35–44       | 15%                            |
| 45–54       | 16%                            |
| 55–64       | 16%                            |
| 65 or older | 35%                            |

**S5. What gender do you identify with?**

|                | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Male           | 48%                            |
| Female         | 52%                            |
| Something else | <1%                            |

**S6. What is your race or ethnicity? Select all that apply.**

|                                           | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| White                                     | 76%                            |
| Black or African American                 | 14%                            |
| Hispanic or Latino                        | 12%                            |
| Asian                                     | 3%                             |
| Native American or Alaska Native          | 2%                             |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | <1%                            |
| Other race or ethnicity                   | <1%                            |

## QC\_ ETHNICITY

|                                                         | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| White, non-Hispanic                                     | 70%                            |
| Black, non-Hispanic                                     | 12%                            |
| Hispanic                                                | 12%                            |
| Asian, non-Hispanic                                     | 3%                             |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic | <1%                            |
| Other/2+ races, non-Hispanic                            | 3%                             |

**S7. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?**

|             | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Republican  | 38%                            |
| Democrat    | 37%                            |
| Independent | 24%                            |
| Other       | 1%                             |
| Don't know  | 0%                             |

**S7A. ASK ONLY IF SELECTED INDEPENDENT, OTHER, OR DON'T KNOW** Even if neither political party perfectly represents your views, who do you agree with more often on issues that are important to you?

|                    | Independent/Other/Don't Know<br>(n=300) |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Democrats          | 36%                                     |
| Republicans        | 24%                                     |
| Both equally often | 28%                                     |
| Unsure             | 12%                                     |

## QC\_ PARTY CONSOLIDATED

|                               | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Democratic/Democratic-leaning | 46%                            |
| Republican/Republican-leaning | 44%                            |
| Independent/Other/Unsure      | 10%                            |

**S8. In general, do you think of yourself as...?**

|                           | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>TOTAL Liberal</b>      | <b>28%</b>                     |
| Very liberal              | 14%                            |
| Somewhat liberal          | 15%                            |
| <b>Moderate</b>           | <b>31%</b>                     |
| <b>TOTAL Conservative</b> | <b>38%</b>                     |
| Somewhat conservative     | 19%                            |
| Very conservative         | 19%                            |
| Other                     | 1%                             |
| Not sure                  | 2%                             |
| Prefer not to answer      | 1%                             |

**S9. Which of the following best describes the area you live in?**

|                            | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Urban                      | 22%                            |
| Suburban                   | 53%                            |
| Small town not near a city | 8%                             |
| Rural                      | 17%                            |
| Don't know                 | <1%                            |

**S10. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

|                                                                   | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Some high school or less — no diploma or GED                      | 2%                             |
| High school graduate — high school diploma or the equivalent, GED | 22%                            |
| Vocational or technical school                                    | 4%                             |
| Some college, no degree                                           | 14%                            |
| Associate's degree                                                | 12%                            |
| Bachelor's degree                                                 | 28%                            |
| Master's degree                                                   | 14%                            |
| Professional or doctorate degree                                  | 3%                             |

**S11. What was your total household income from all sources, before taxes, in 2025?**

|                     | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Less than \$30,000  | 16%                            |
| \$30,000–\$49,999   | 12%                            |
| \$50,000–\$74,999   | 20%                            |
| \$75,000–\$99,999   | 11%                            |
| \$100,000–\$149,999 | 24%                            |
| \$150,000–\$199,999 | 9%                             |
| \$200,000 or more   | 9%                             |
| Prefer not to say   | 1%                             |

**S12. Please rate the likelihood that you will vote in the November 2026 midterm elections on a scale from 1 to 10. If 1 represents someone who definitely will not vote and 10 represents someone who definitely will vote, where on this scale would you put yourself?**

|                            | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1-Definitely will not vote | 2%                             |
| 2                          | <1%                            |
| 3                          | 1%                             |
| 4                          | 1%                             |
| 5                          | 4%                             |
| 6                          | 4%                             |
| 7                          | 4%                             |
| 8                          | 8%                             |
| 9                          | 8%                             |
| 10-Definitely will vote    | 66%                            |
| Not sure                   | 2%                             |

**S13. How many people under the age of 18 live in your household?**

|    | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|----|--------------------------------|
| 0  | 61%                            |
| 1  | 16%                            |
| 2  | 17%                            |
| 3  | 4%                             |
| 4+ | 2%                             |

## DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Lastly, here are a few questions for background purposes. Your answers will remain confidential.

**D1. Did you vote in the November 2024 presidential election?**

|                    | Registered Voters<br>(n=1,210) |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Yes, I voted       | 91%                            |
| No, I did not vote | 7%                             |
| Unsure             | 1%                             |

**D1A. ASK ONLY IF SELECTED VOTED IN 2024 ELECTION** For which candidate did you vote in the 2024 presidential election?

|                                                                  | 2024 Voters (n=1,106) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Kamala Harris, the Democratic candidate                          | 46%                   |
| Donald Trump, the Republican candidate                           | 51%                   |
| Jill Stein, Green Party candidate                                | <1%                   |
| Robert F. Kennedy Jr., independent candidate                     | 1%                    |
| Chase Oliver, the Libertarian candidate                          | 1%                    |
| Cornel West, independent candidate                               | <1%                   |
| Claudia De la Cruz, the Socialism and Liberation Party candidate | 0%                    |
| Someone else (please specify)                                    | <1%                   |
| Unsure                                                           | <1%                   |

**D2. ASK ONLY IF SELECTED REPUBLICAN/NO LEAN** Do you generally support the Make America Great Again movement, commonly known as MAGA?

|                                          | Republicans/No Lean<br>(n=459) |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Yes, strongly                            | 45%                            |
| Yes, with some minor reservations        | 29%                            |
| Sometimes, but I have major reservations | 14%                            |
| No, not at all                           | 12%                            |

**D3. ASK ONLY IF SELECTED DEMOCRAT/NO LEAN** Do you generally consider yourself to be 'progressive' politically?

|                                          | Democrats/No Lean<br>(n=452) |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Yes, strongly                            | 29%                          |
| Yes, with some minor reservations        | 36%                          |
| Sometimes, but I have major reservations | 17%                          |
| No, not at all                           | 18%                          |

**D4. In prior elections for President, U.S. House, and/or U.S. Senate, in general, what is most true for you?**

|                                                                     | <b>Registered Voters<br/>(n=1,210)</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| I always vote for Democratic candidates                             | 24%                                    |
| I usually vote for Democratic candidates, but also some Republicans | 17%                                    |
| I'm about 50/50 on voting for Democratic and Republican candidates  | 15%                                    |
| I usually vote for Republican candidates, but also some Democrats   | 16%                                    |
| I always vote for Republican candidates                             | 25%                                    |
| Not sure                                                            | 4%                                     |

**D5. Which of the following best describes your current housing situation?**

|              | <b>Registered Voters<br/>(n=1,210)</b> |
|--------------|----------------------------------------|
| Own my home  | 70%                                    |
| Rent my home | 27%                                    |
| Other        | 3%                                     |
| Not sure     | 1%                                     |