

Americans are searching for common ground. This poll finds it

OTHER VOICES

BY TOM Z. FREEDMAN AND JIM MCLAUGHLIN SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON POST

We've been friends for more than 30 years and political opponents in elections for the same amount of time. We've wondered whether our fellow Americans despair as much as we do about the great divides in our society.

A poll we recently conducted suggests that people from all political backgrounds urgently want politicians to try to heal the divisions in this country, even as they worry about whether it is possible.

An astounding 94% of voters agreed with the statement that "It is important that both Democrats and Republicans come together to solve the problems that are facing America."

When you get numbers like that, you know that the sentiment goes way beyond a simple partisan sensibility.

The results highlighted specific policy areas that voters supported across party. We saw strong bipartisan consensus on a wide range of issues,

including a tax credit for worker training, keeping teens and kids safe online, incentivizing businesses to expand child care, ensuring the safety of our food and drinking water, and more.

For example, 71% of Donald Trump voters favored a worker training tax credit and so did 69% of Kamala Harris voters.

On child care, the divide was close as well: supported by 66% and 68% of Trump and Harris voters, respectively.

On emerging issues such as children using tech, 84% of Trump voters favored bans unless there's parental permission for kids on social media, and so did 74% of Harris voters.

What explains the broad support around these specific issues?

In some ways, it is precisely because they have not become political footballs. If voters think an issue is simply one party's property, the other side might distrust an opponent's proposed solution.

But we also think clear solutions like these have great appeal to all types of voters. Every family worries about the effect of technology on their children – and how to afford child care. Millions of Americans know that they will need job training but that it is hard to afford.

Tax credits, bans and direct subsidies are specific, clear and understandable proposals, which is why we think they are appealing to voters (compared with new government programs that might seem opaque).

We also think many voters have more nuanced views than either party gives them credit for, or sees profit in acknowledging.

For instance, we saw voters who both supported and opposed Trump worried about the impact of artificial intelligence. Only 42% overall have a favorable impression of AI. But that didn't stop voters from both sides thinking AI is crucial to the country's economy and future security – with near-identical numbers of voters in the mid-70% range on both sides saying it was important.

A troubling part of the survey is the increasing concern among the public that the country can't be healed. When asked whether America "has become so polarized and divided that unfortunately it can't be fixed," 51% of voters

agreed, including a majority of Harris voters. If people on both sides assume it's not possible to heal our country, efforts to resolve differences might seem futile. That's a prophecy that might be self-fulfilling.

We know enough to believe that one survey doesn't explain or even fully chart a path that's needed. There is more research to be done on what these attitudes mean, what specifically people are hoping for and whether indeed the numbers are justified. But these findings do point a way that would make sense for our country.

An interesting cohort of voters – results-oriented, avowedly patriotic voters – might hold the key for a lot of elections in the next few years.

Jim McLaughlin is a GOP strategist and pollster who has worked for Donald Trump's three most recent presidential campaigns. Tom Z. Freedman is CEO of Freedman Consulting, a strategy firm, and was chief of staff for strategy on Bill Clinton's 1996 presidential campaign.