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GLOBAL STRATEGY GROUP

# **Opportunities to Engage: Voter Attitudes on Sexual Harassment**

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# Methodology



\*Registered voters were surveyed to allow us to identify voters' priorities and assess their appetite for addressing sexual harassment and assault.

# Key Findings

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- Voters understand that sexual harassment and assault is about power
- Voters prioritize addressing harassment and assault and are favorable to TIME'S UP and #MeToo
- Thoroughly investigating claims of sexual assault or harassment is particularly important
- These issues translate to the ballot box and affect voters' decisions to support candidates

# Issue Landscape



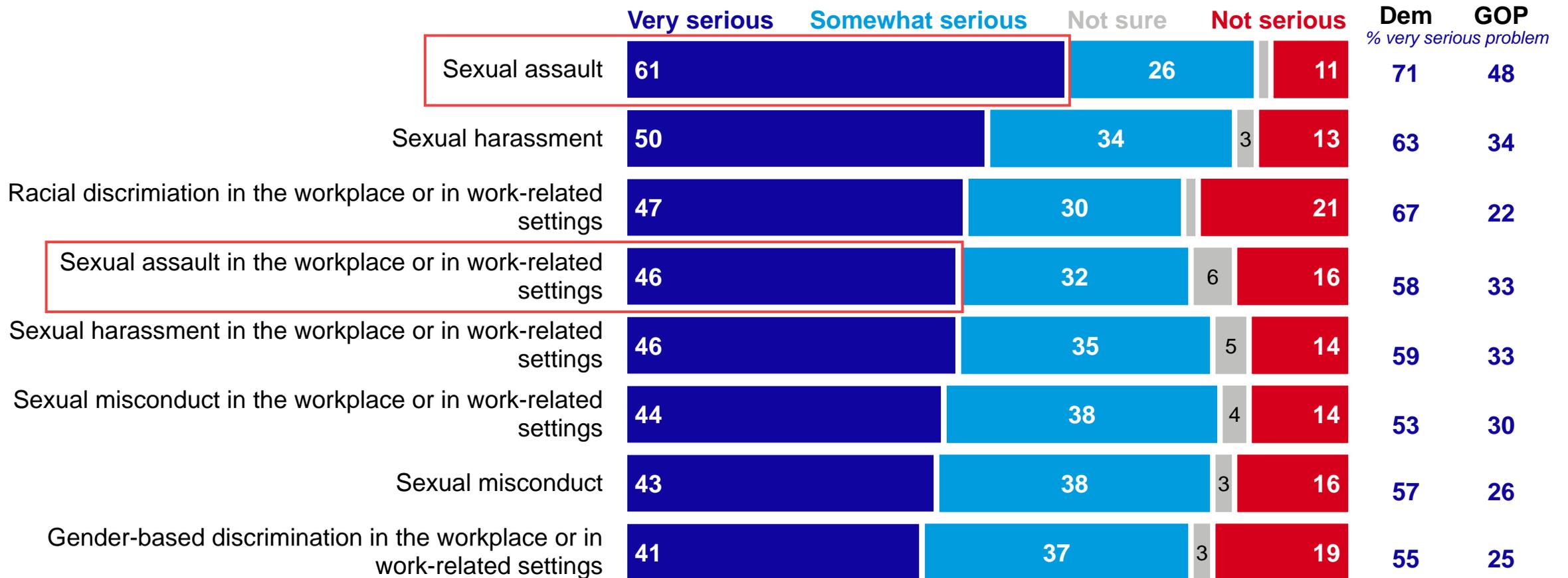
# More than half of women voters nationwide report being sexually harassed



Questions asked: "Have you ever been sexually assaulted?"  
 "Have you ever personally received unwanted sexual advances or verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature?"

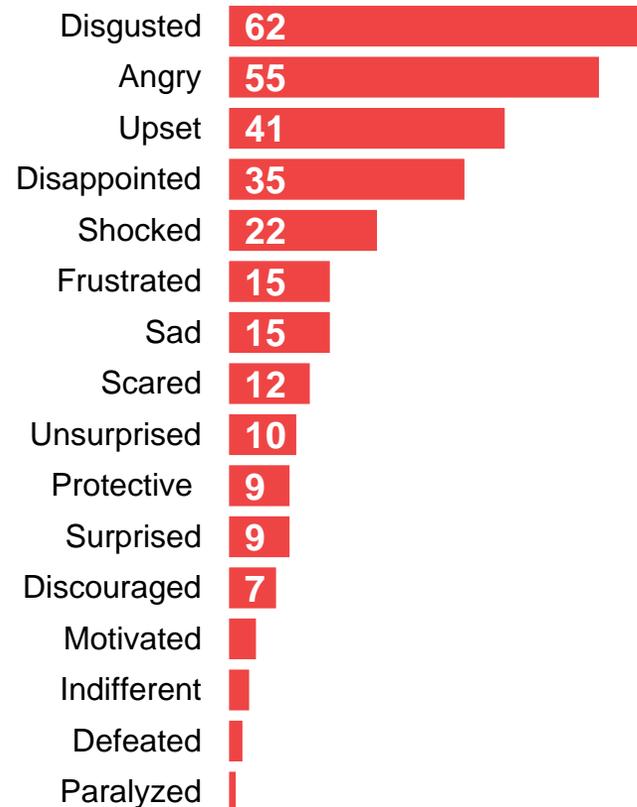
# Sexual assault on its own is viewed as intensely problematic across parties; half of voters say sexual harassment is a “very serious problem” today

Seriousness of Problems Today (Ranked by Net Serious Problem)

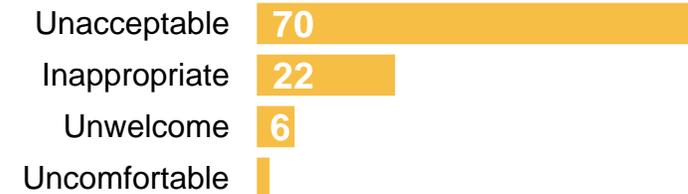


# Voters recoil at the thought of harassment or assault taking place in their workplace or community and describe it as unacceptable and wrong

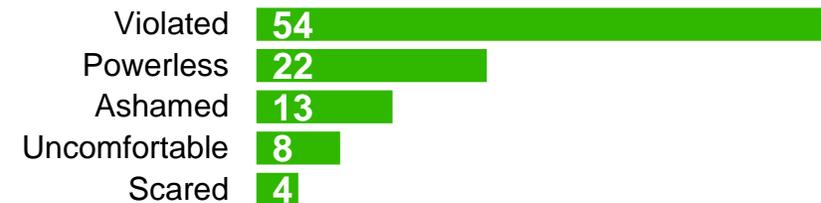
Imagine that you heard about sexual harassment or assault taking place at your place of work or in your community. Please pick the three words that best describe how you think you would feel.



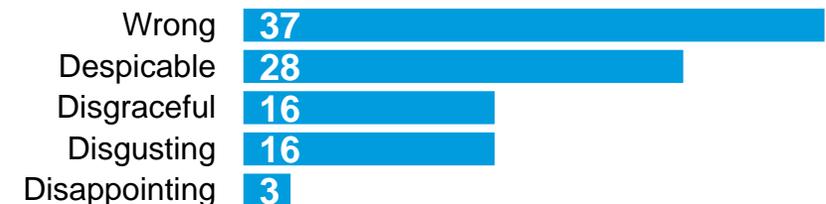
Complete the sentence: "Sexual misconduct is behavior that is \_\_\_\_."



Complete the sentence: "Experiencing sexual harassment or assault probably makes people feel \_\_\_\_."

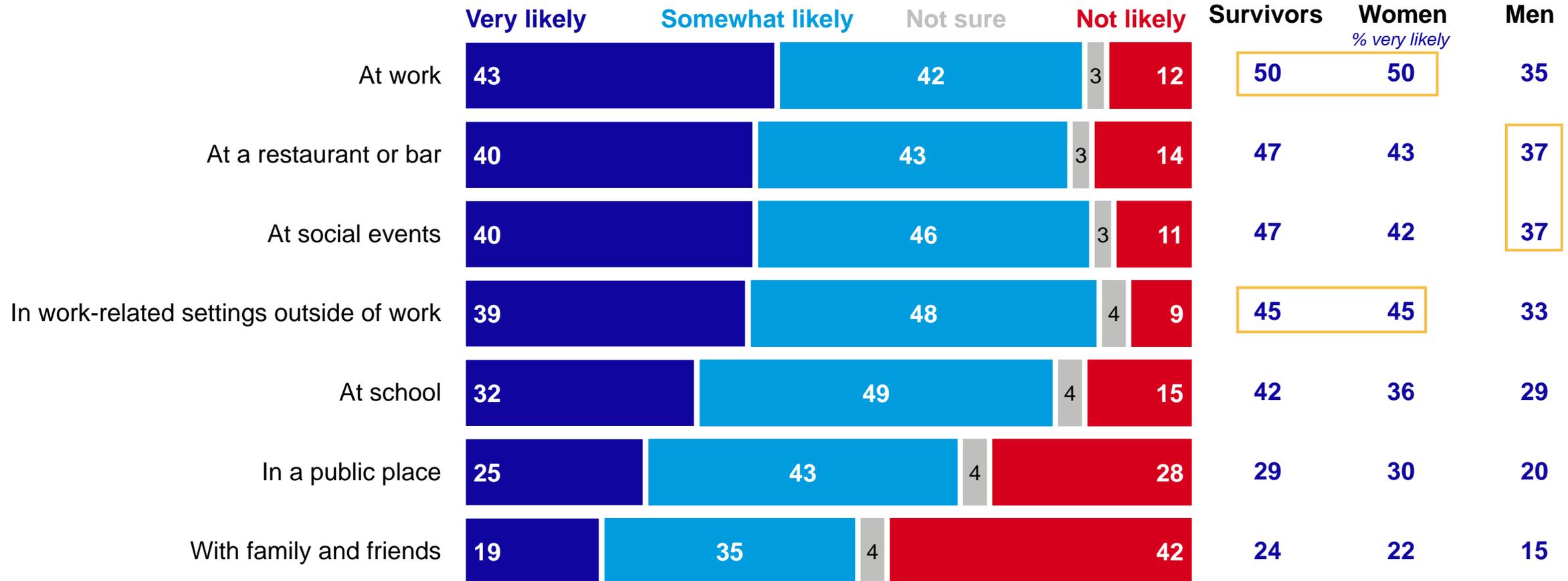


Complete the sentence: "Encouraging or allowing sexual misconduct in the workplace is \_\_\_\_."

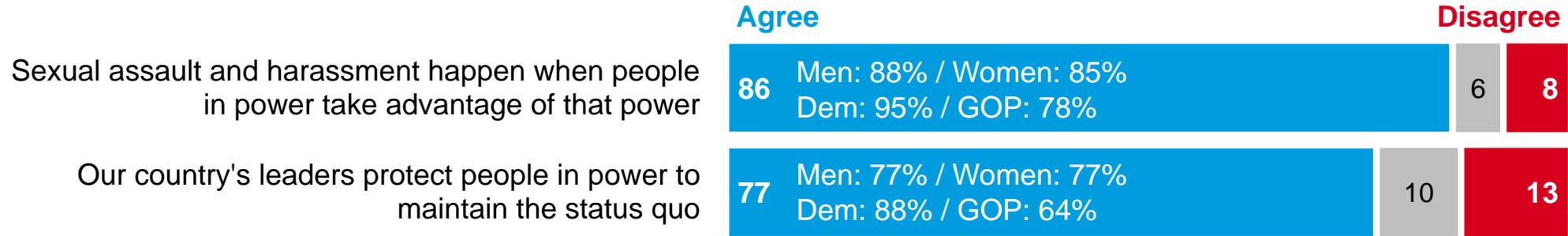


# Voters – including survivors of harassment or assault – recognize that work and work settings are likely settings for harassment or assault

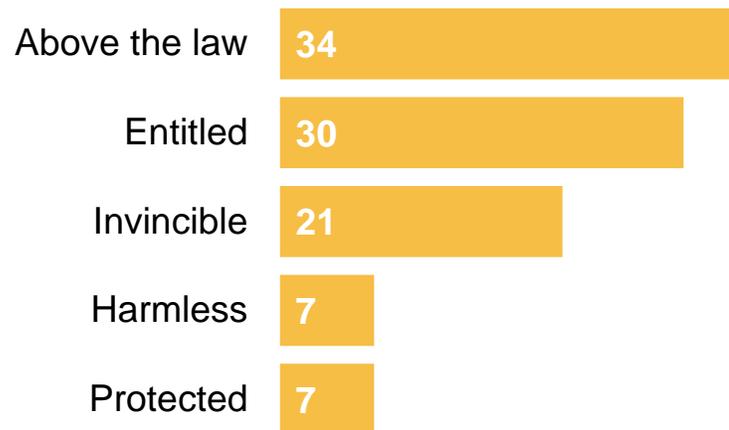
Places or Settings People Might Experience Sexual Harassment or Assault



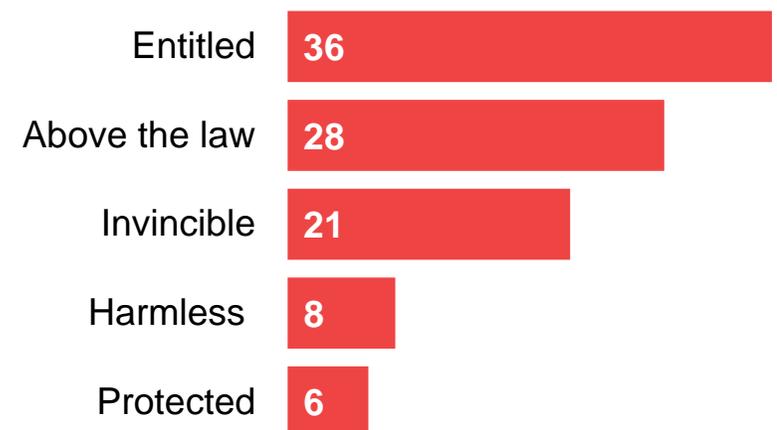
# There is widespread agreement among voters that sexual assault is about power and taking advantage of power without consequences



Complete the sentence: “People who commit sexual assault probably think they are \_\_\_\_\_.”



Complete the sentence: “People who commit sexual harassment probably think they are \_\_\_\_\_.”



# Power dynamics are baked-in and women, especially younger women, work them into their definitions of assault and harassment

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## ha-rass-ment

/hə' rasmənt, 'herəsmənt/

“Sexual harassment is anytime someone feels they are being abused/assaulted in a sexual way-whether it be physically or emotionally. I think it takes place daily, even in “minor” ways. **It's usually a way to exhibit power, someone who thinks they are “stronger” or “better” than the other person.**”

– Democratic woman, age 47

## as-sault

/ə' sôlt/

“Assault is doing harm to another person in a sexual nature. Again, I think **it most often happens when there is a power dynamic** (a boss, an older family member, a teacher, etc.) at workplaces or other places where that dynamic is present. However, it also happens between peers (thinking mostly of college campuses).”

– Republican woman, age 21

## ha-rass-ment

/hə' rasmənt, 'herəsmənt/

“Anything (words or actions) that makes someone else feel uncomfortable or violated. Could be as simple as lewd comments, or physical touching. I think it still, unfortunately, occurs in the workplace... For those doing the harassing **I think of people in power like bosses** or sports personalities/celebrities. Those being harassed I think of employees or those with “lower” positions than someone else.” – Independent woman, 38

## ha-rass-ment

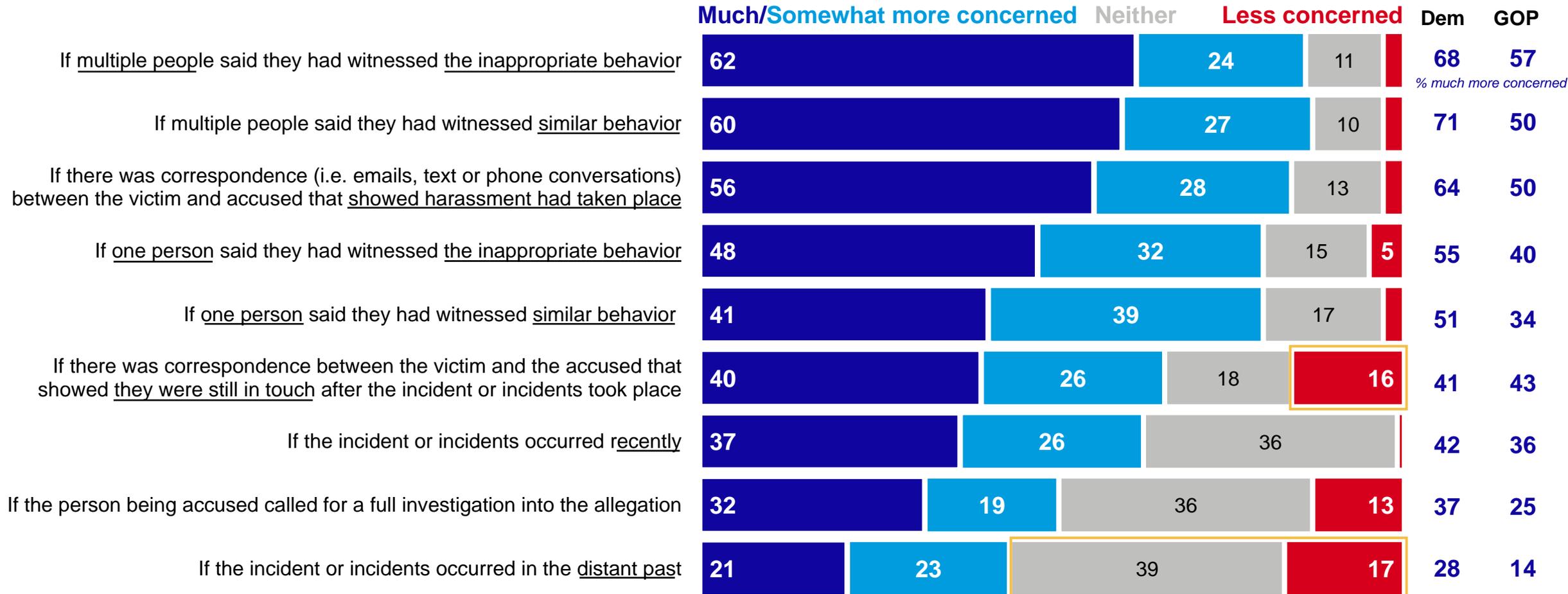
/hə' rasmənt, 'herəsmənt/

“When you receive unwanted physical advances of a sexual nature. I think it happens most often in the workplace or in the home. **I think of generally men, but not always, that have power over you.**”

– Republican woman, 28

# Having witnesses (plural) – even witnesses to similar behavior – and correspondence are the most important drivers of credibility

Below is a list of things that might happen surrounding an allegation of sexual harassment or assault. For each one, please indicate whether it would make you more concerned or less concerned about the allegation. (Emphasis added)



# Multiple accusations or multiple witnesses are important; many fixate on the need for “evidence” for claims to be considered credible

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“I think it is more credible if it occurred **more than once or to multiple people because usually when the perpetrator doesn't get caught they are likely to repeat the offense** on the same or another victim. I also think if there are **witnesses** the allegation becomes more credible because it's no longer his/her word against his/hers.” – **Democratic woman, age 44**

“I would say the **more times** the behavior is reported, the more credible. If there is a **witness** that's even more credible as long as it is a **credible person**. The more **evidence** you have the better...It doesn't matter how long ago depending on what it is. Sexual assault is sexual assault regardless of the time but then again **what exactly happened? Is this a sexual predator that just keeps sexually assaulting women who say no, or is this an immature 18-year-old that did something stupid and now has grown up** and understands what he did was wrong and is remorseful? I went to High School with a lot of dumb boys that did dumb things to girls but now have grown up and realized how stupid they were when they were younger. Sexual assault is NEVER right but I think it is possible for certain people to realize what they did was wrong and be remorseful and never do those things again.”  
– **Republican woman, age 52**

“If the behavior had been proven to **have occurred repeatedly**, then yes I personally would say the claim would be more credible. As far as **multiple victims having the same or similar allegations** against the one person that would make it more credible as well. **There would have to be evidence of some kind that can be proven** for an allegation to be considered credible at any level.”  
– **Republican woman, age 44**

“I believe they are more credible when **multiple people have reported or witnessed the conduct**. The more people who had the same or similar experiences make it harder for the person accused to deny. I believe **any evidence is a huge plus, but not necessary to be deemed credible. I believe people. Especially women**. We have been dealing with this kind of harassment for as long as I can remember. I do not care how long ago the incident occurred. Sometimes it takes years for people to have the courage to come forward.”  
– **Democratic woman, age 49**

# Investigating claims



# Investigation tops voters' lists of important outcomes, with Democrats, women, and survivors prioritizing privacy as their top choice slightly more

Below is a list of outcomes that might happen to someone who experienced sexual harassment or assault. Please rank these outcomes from 1 to 5, with 1 being what you think is the most important outcome and 5 being what you think is the least important outcome for survivors of sexual harassment and assault.

Overall Mean ranking		Overall % Rank #1	Dem	GOP	Men	Women	Surviv- ors
2.5*	<b>Investigation</b> – knowing that there was a process in place to formally evaluate the claims of the person who experienced harassment or assault	24%	22%	27%	27%	22%	19%
2.8	<b>Privacy</b> – knowing that the person who experienced harassment or assault can come forward and that their privacy wishes will be respected	24%	27%	22%	22%	26%	27%
2.9	<b>Speaking out</b> – knowing that the person who experienced harassment or assault was able to tell their story and be heard and acknowledged	24%	25%	23%	23%	25%	24%
3.1	<b>Consequences</b> – knowing that the person who was responsible has been reprimanded in some way or forced to come to terms with their actions	15%	15%	14%	15%	16%	17%
3.7	<b>Healing</b> – knowing that the person who experienced harassment or assault was able to move forward after what happened	12%	12%	14%	13%	11%	13%

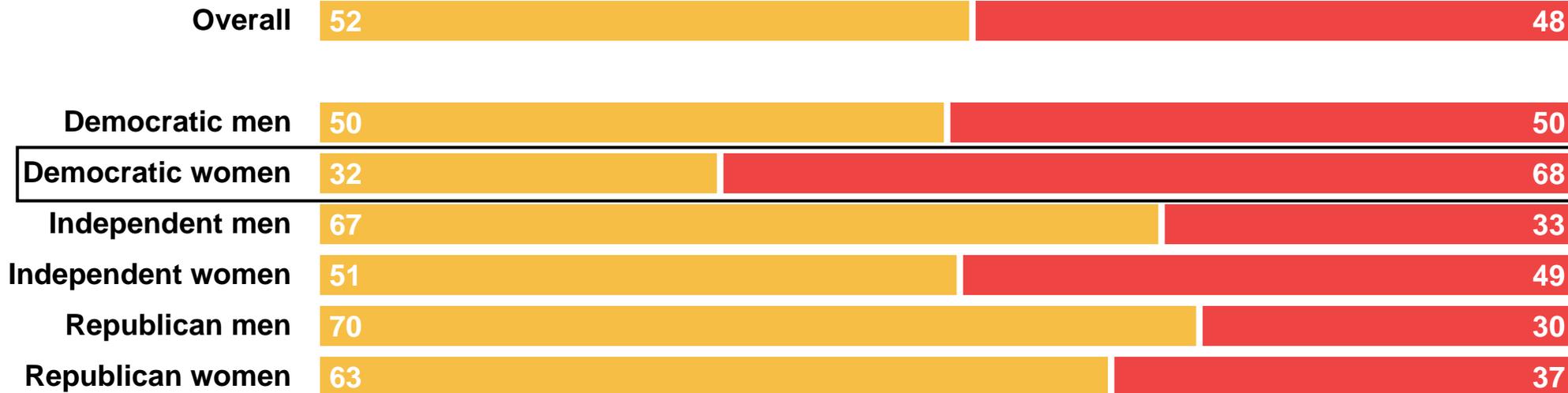
\*Investigation also has the lowest (most important) average ranking across all the demographic groups listed on this slide.

# Many voters – especially men and Republicans – prioritize investigating allegations to prevent false accusations over listening to survivors

Which of these do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?

The most important thing is thoroughly investigating allegations of sexual harassment and assault before any decisions are made, so that people are not falsely accused

The most important thing is listening to survivors of sexual harassment and assault, so that survivors feel comfortable telling their stories and know that they will be taken seriously



**Top values\* in each group:**

- Authority** oppose policies that challenge traditions/disrupt order
- Merit** take offense at people they think want to be rewarded without doing their fair share
- Nostalgia** motivated by “bringing back the good old days”
- Purity** oppose certain things they think violate common decency
- Security** value social order as a means of ensuring safety

- Achievement** value personal success and social approval
- Compassion** want to protect those who are vulnerable from harm
- Emotionality** a personality type that responds to emotions
- Equality** want to restructure government and the social order to support more equitable opportunities for marginalized groups
- Hedonism** motivated by a need to be happy; support socially liberal policies that allow for people to make decisions guided by this principle

\*Calculated based on scores from Grow Progress.

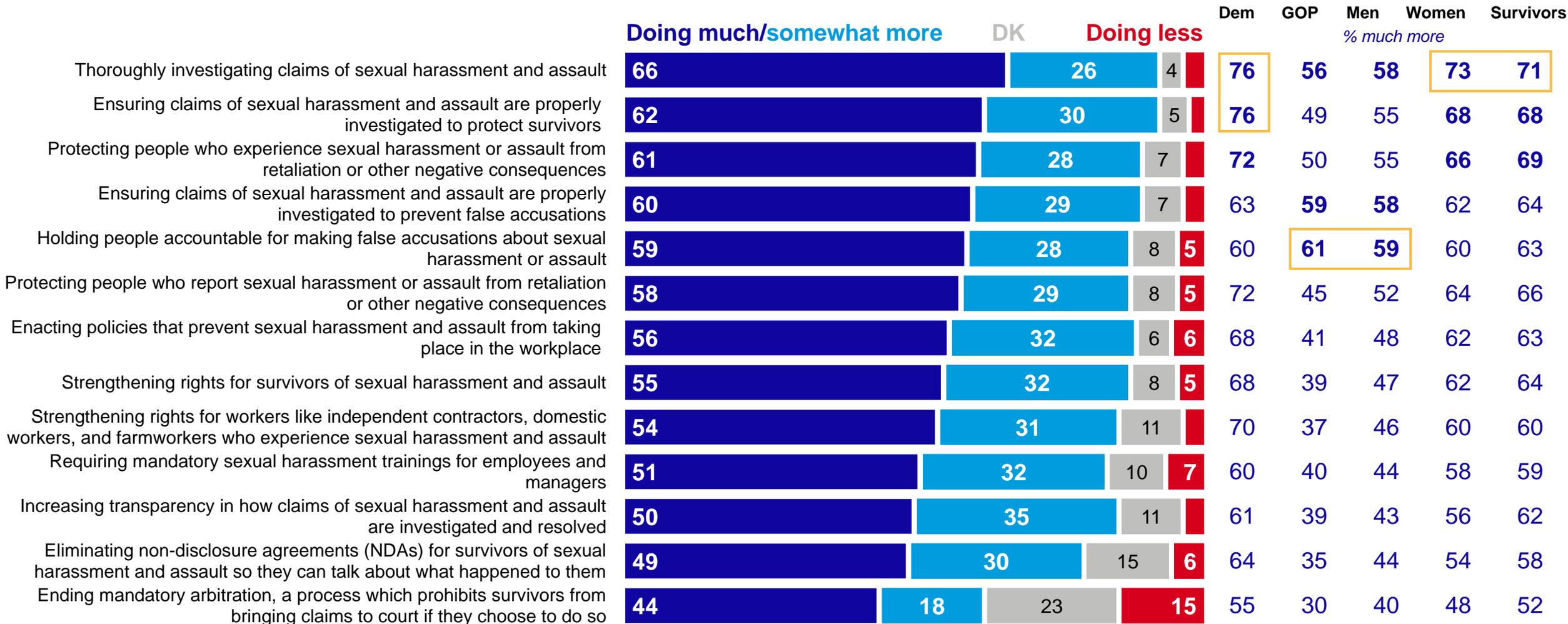
# Voters who emphasize investigating point to positive outcomes, such as due process and uncovering other offenses

Which of these do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right? (Discussion board responses)

The most important thing is listening to survivors of sexual harassment and assault, so that survivors feel comfortable telling their stories and know that they will be taken seriously	Both	The most important thing is thoroughly investigating allegations of sexual harassment and assault before any decisions are made, so that people are not falsely accused
<p>“Some survivors are <b>not ready to move forward with seeking justice, investigation, or involving law enforcement</b> yet because there are a lot of other emotions and tasks that would follow...” – <b>Democratic woman, age 38</b></p> <p>“If survivors don't feel comfortable telling their story they won't come forward and the assault continues with others. They need to feel <b>the compassion of others and know that their well being matters and they are further protected.</b>” – <b>Independent woman, age 51</b></p>	<p>“I agree with both, but the police should <b>listen to the survivors to do a proper investigation.</b> It seems like a lot of the time, survivors will be ignored or told that it didn't happen, and the harasser is let free to hurt others.” – <b>Republican woman, age 30</b></p> <p>“I think it's important to listen to survivors of assault or harassment, but I also think it's important to ensure that these allegations are true so that <b>someone's life isn't ruined over a false accusation.</b> I think everyone deserves <b>due process.</b>” – <b>Democratic woman, age 43</b></p>	<p>“I agree with properly investigating the allegations <b>so that it can be more credible.</b> It's important to listen because the victim is confiding in you, but proper investigation is need to collect evidence.” – <b>Democratic woman, age 41</b></p> <p>“Investigating...because <b>a proper investigation could uncover other offenses</b> and it is important that these issues are looked into properly.” – <b>Republican woman, age 40</b></p> <p>“<b>People's freedom is at stake</b> and that's not to be taken lightly. [Allegations] can make it hard to obtain employment, rent or buy a home, <b>it can alter someone's life.</b>” – <b>Democratic woman, age 43</b></p>

# Investigating claims is viewed as extremely important; voters do not connect to specific policies to prevent assault or harassment

## Priorities for Elected Officials (Ranked by % Should Be Doing Much More)

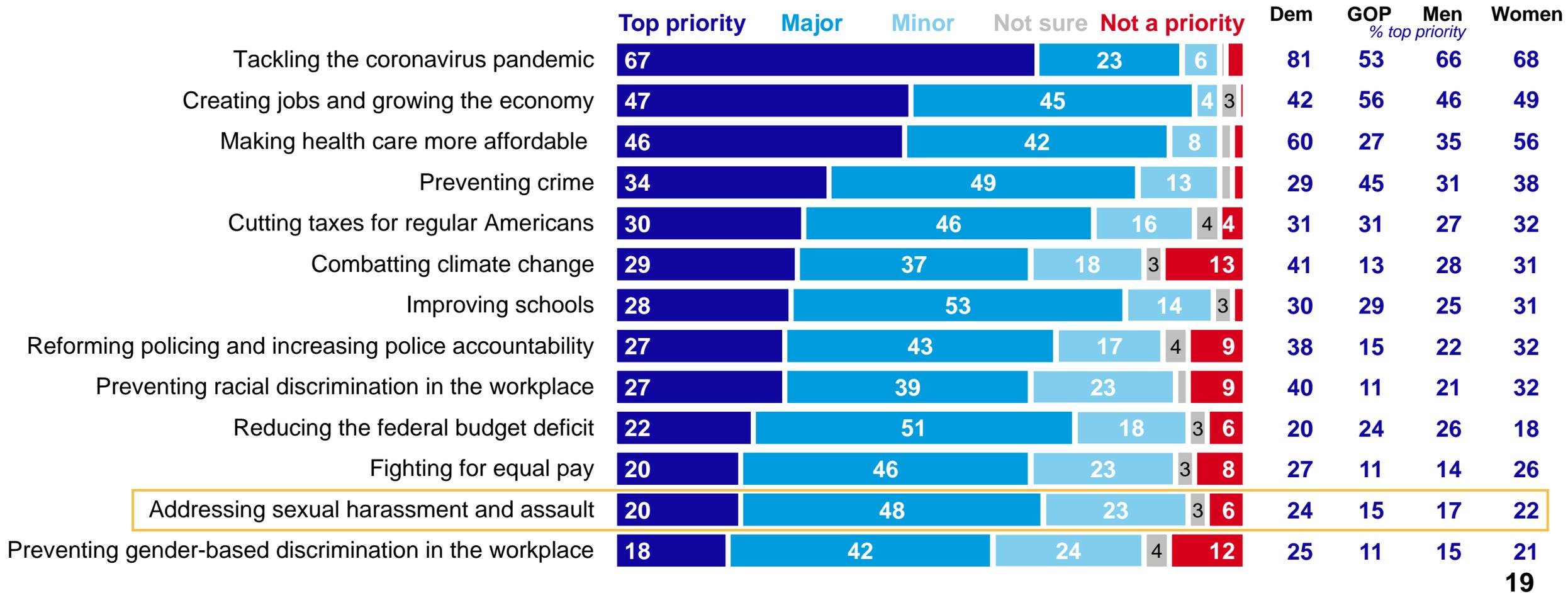


# **Political Landscape**



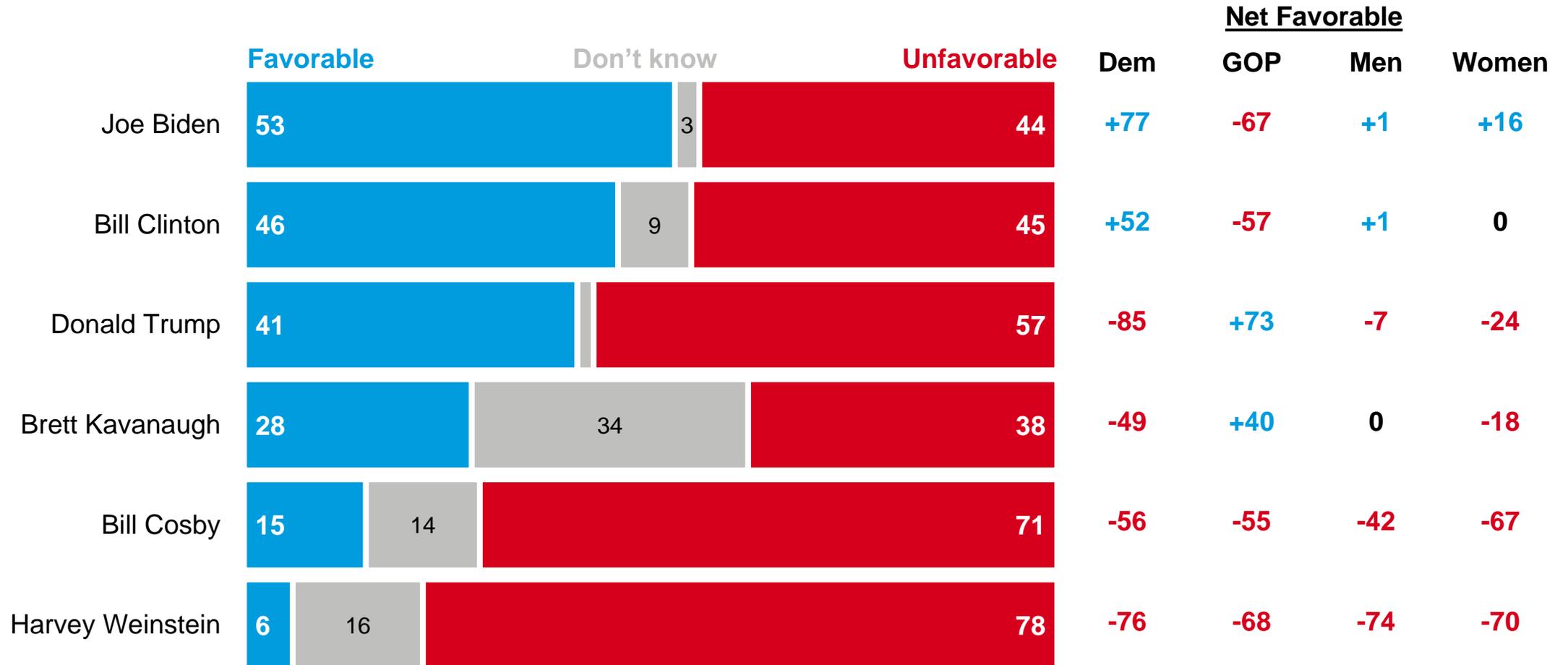
# One in five voters think addressing harassment and assault should be the top priority for elected officials to address – even in a crowded environment

Priorities for Elected Officials to Address



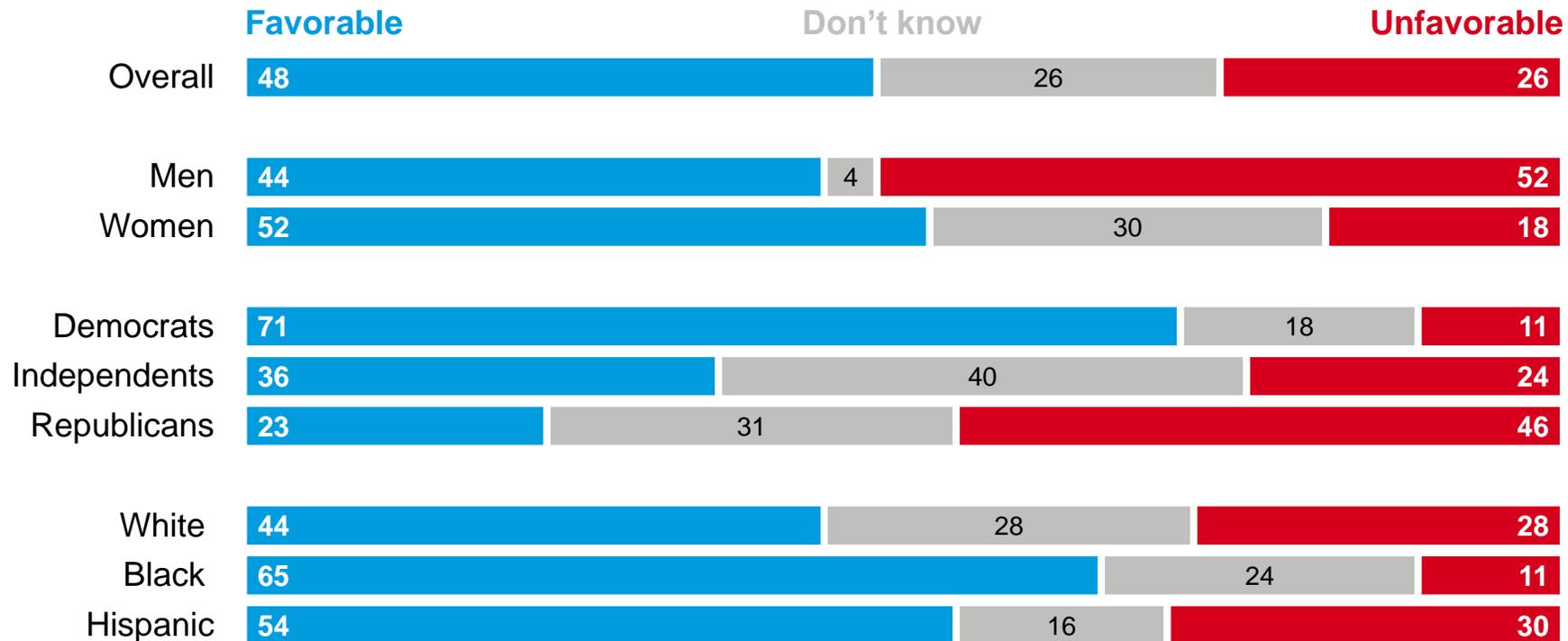
# Partisanship largely drives attitudes towards political figures accused of misconduct; non-political figures are more universally disliked.

Favorability of People and Groups



# #MeToo is viewed more favorably among Dems, women, and people of color

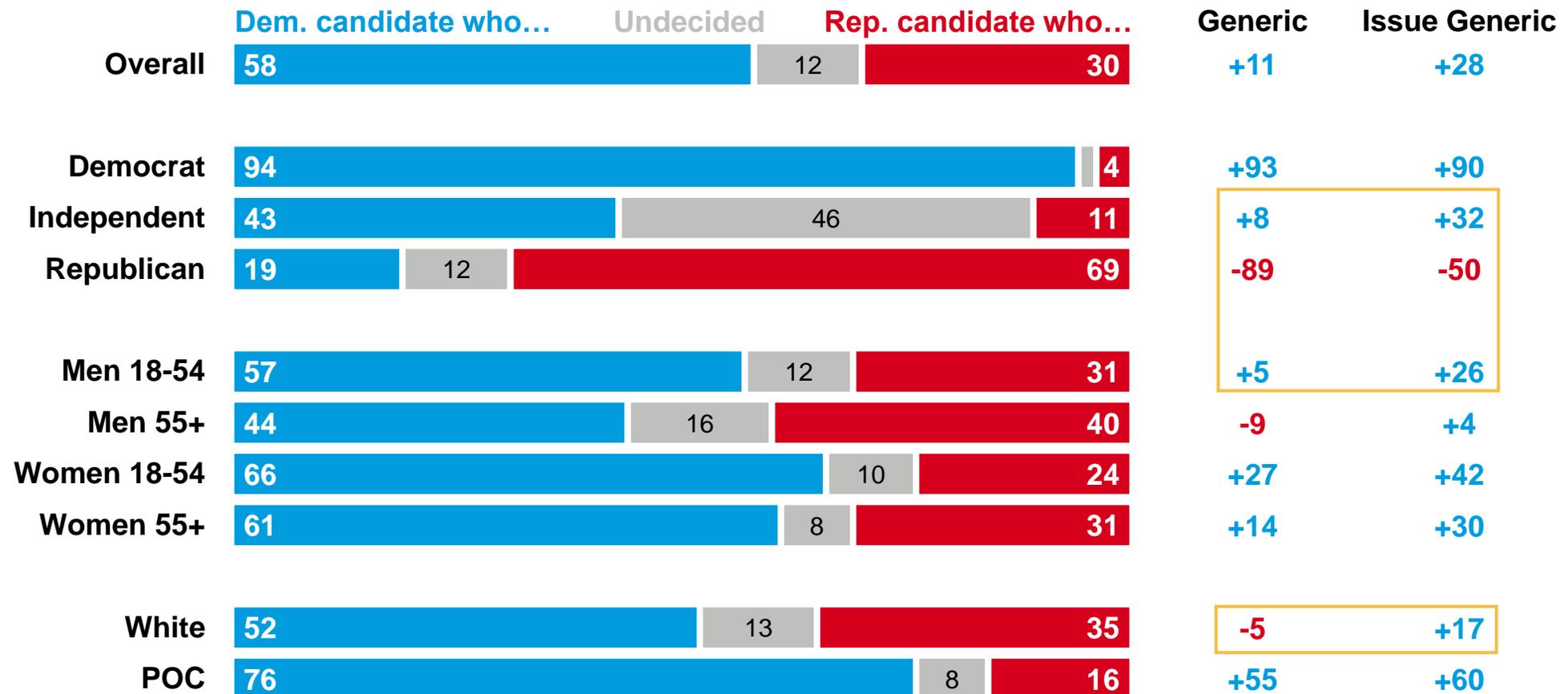
#MeToo Favorability



Positive perceptions are driven by **Black women** (69% fav / 7% unfav) in particular.  
Negative perceptions are driven by **Republican men** (24% / 52%).

# Speaking out against sexual harassment and assault is an issue that can translate to the ballot box and engage right-leaning voters

If the election for Congress were held today between the Democratic candidate who will make it a priority to speak out against sexual harassment and assault and the Republican candidate who will not make it a priority to speak out against sexual harassment and assault, for whom would you vote?



# **Messaging Recommendations**

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# Issue audience

## Issue Audience



### Strongest supporters

Always says addressing sexual harassment and assault is the top priority

Voters 18-24 (31%)  
 Voters of color (25%)  
 • Black voters (30%)  
 Democratic women (25%)  
 Non-college women (20%)

#### Top values:

*Compassion (58%), equality (46%), hedonism (47%), independence (44%), in-group care (35%)*

### Easily Engaged

Always says addressing sexual harassment and assault is the top or a major priority

Women (54%)  
 • College women (61%)  
 • Women 55 and older (57%)  
 • White women (57%)  
 Democratic men (52%)

*Compassion (40%), equality (41%), independence (33%), in-group care (30%), achievement (30%)*

### Persuadable

Sometimes say addressing sexual harassment and assault is a top or major priority

Independents (31%)  
 Republican women (27%)  
 Men (25%)  
 • Men 55+ (32%)  
 • White men (27%)

*Patriotism (39%), security (38%), nostalgia (36%), authority (35%)*

### Detractors

Never say addressing sexual harassment and assault is a top or a major priority

Independent men (33%)  
 Republican men (21%)  
 Conservatives (21%)

*Merit (49%), patriotism (48%), security (40%), nostalgia (35%), authority (35%)*

# A message about investigation rises to the top among persuadable voters, while the most gettable gravitate more toward a power-focused message

## Effective Messages Encouraging Elected Officials to Address Harassment & Assault

Overall  
% extremely important (7 on 1-7 scale)

Overall	Easily Engaged	Persuadable	Zero Tolerance
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58	59	54	62	<p><b>Justice + Investigation</b> Everyone who experiences sexual harassment or assault deserves to be heard and get justice, but in order to live in a society where everyone is treated fairly, we need to ensure claims of sexual harassment and assault are thoroughly investigated so that people are not falsely accused.</p> <p><i>Top-testing among men (57%)</i></p>
57	64	46	63	<p><b>Power</b> No matter how important someone is or how many other good things they have done, we need to put politics aside and hold people who abuse their power at every level of industry accountable for sexual harassment, assault, retaliation, or discrimination.</p> <p><i>Top-testing among younger voters (59%), Black voters (68%), and survivors (64%)</i></p>
53	59	40	58	<p><b>Higher Standard</b> It's time that we hold each other to a higher standard and refuse to allow people to continue to be in power if they have abused that power or acted badly – no one should be allowed to think that they are above the law.</p>
53	58	43	56	<p><b>Right Thing</b> Changing policies in Congress, in state legislatures, and in workplaces across the country to prevent sexual harassment and assault so everyone can feel safe and respected at work isn't just smart policy – it's the right thing to do.</p>
51	59	40	56	<p><b>Accountability</b> Sexual harassment and assault happens inside our government, in the entertainment industry, in professional sports, and in our own workplaces and communities, and we all have a responsibility to speak out and demand change at every level of society, business, and government.</p> <p><i>Top-testing among Hispanic voters (66%)</i></p>
50	58	40	56	<p><b>Broken Systems</b> Our elected officials are chosen by voters to represent and protect us – we need to demand that the people we put in power make preventing sexual harassment a priority and fix the broken systems that prevent survivors from pursuing justice.</p>

# Equity-focused messages are less compelling to voters overall

## Messages Encouraging Elected Officials to Address Harassment & Assault

Overall    Easily Engaged    Persuad-able    Zero Tolerance

*% extremely important (7 on 1-7 scale)*

49	54	42	55	<p><b>Survivors</b> Survivors of sexual harassment and assault across every level of industry and government stood up broke the silence, demanding an end to sexual harassment and assault – we need to honor their bravery and do everything we can to ensure sexual harassment and assault end now.</p>
48	55	35	55	<p><b>Power</b> We need to act now to stop people in power to from taking advantage of people who for them and rely on them so everyone can be feel safe at work and free from sexual harassment, assault, discrimination, or retaliation.</p>
48	55	33	51	<p><b>Safety</b> Up to 85% of women in the United States report having experienced sexual harassment at work – we need to do more to ensure everyone is safe and free from sexual harassment, assault, retaliation, and other forms of discrimination on the job.</p>
45	51	30	50	<p><b>Racism/Sexism</b> Women of color, on average, are paid less and are more economically insecure, which makes them less likely to be able to leave jobs where they feel unsafe – we need to end these unfair disparities so everyone can have the same chances of success. <i>More effective among women of color (57%) and Black voters overall (60%)</i></p>
43	50	27	45	<p><b>Equity</b> Women are under-represented in leadership and over-represented in low wage jobs, and we need to address sexual harassment, hostile work environments, the gender pay gap, and lack of paid leave now so women can reach their full potential. <i>More effective among women (49%)</i></p>
37	40	29	42	<p><b>Progress</b> We have made real progress in the last few years, but there is more work that needs to be done to put a stop to sexual harassment, assault, retaliation, and other forms of discrimination at work and beyond.</p>

# Conclusions

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- **Talk about power.** Voters, including the voters who are most easily engaged to prioritize addressing sexual harassment and assault at higher levels, recognize the power dynamics at play and understand these imbalances. This framing is powerful, impactful, and relatable to voters.
- **Talk about investigations – including false accusations.** Even the friendliest of voters prioritize investigating claims over all other outcomes or policy actions. It is also a top priority for self-identified survivors of assault or harassment. Mentioning that thoroughly investigating claims protects survivors and protects against false accusations is important and brings more people to the table.
- **Talk about what it means to make progress on this issue.** Voters react viscerally to the thought of sexual assault and harassment happening to someone they know, in their communities, or at their place of work. They describe encouraging misconduct as wrong. Yet, aside from the importance of investigating claims, voters' perceptions of good policy are not that defined, leaving room to fill that gap.
- **Urge elected officials to put politics aside.** Yes, partisan views drive perceptions of public figures who have been accused of misconduct, but addressing harassment and assault is an issue that transcends partisanship and party politics for voters.

# Language to use and lose

## What not to say

Sexual assault and harassment in the workplace or in work-related settings

People who commit assault or harassment think they are:

- **Harmless**
- **Protected**

Sexual misconduct is behavior that is...

- **Unwelcome**
- **Uncomfortable**
- **Inappropriate**

Allowing misconduct to take place is...

- **Disgusting**
- **Disgraceful**
- **Despicable**

People accused of harassment or assault should:

- **Call for** a formal inquiry or investigation
- **Acknowledge** the pain and difficulty they caused
- Challenge the **credibility** of the accusation

## What to say

Sexual assault and harassment

People who commit assault or harassment think they are:

- **Above the law**
- **Entitled**

Sexual misconduct is behavior that is...

- **Unacceptable**

Allowing misconduct to take place is...

- **Wrong**

People accused of harassment or assault should:

- **Submit to any** formal inquiry or investigation
- **Apologize** for the pain and difficulty they caused
- **Take allegations seriously** and respond to them publicly
- Affirm that women deserve to be treated with **dignity & respect**

# A call to action for elected officials

## Our Message

No matter how important someone is or how many other good things they have done, we need to hold people who abuse their power at every level of industry accountable for sexual harassment, assault, retaliation, or discrimination. There should be **consequences** when these **abuses of power** occur.

Everyone who experiences sexual harassment or assault **deserves to be heard and get justice**. Justice starts with ensuring that claims of sexual harassment and assault are thoroughly investigated to **protect survivors and ensure people are not falsely accused**.

In addition to thoroughly investigating all claims of sexual harassment and assault, we need to protect people from retaliation and other negative consequences, strengthen rights for survivors, and enact policies that prevent sexual assault from taking place – **particularly in workplaces** and in work-related settings.

Changing policies in Congress, in state legislatures, and in workplaces across the country to prevent sexual harassment and assault so everyone can **feel safe and respected at work** isn't just smart policy – it's **the right thing to do**.

## Why it Works

- ✓ **Top-testing message**
- ✓ **Invokes power dynamics and imbalances**
  
- ✓ **Top-testing framing**
- ✓ **Includes reference to false accusations as well as protecting survivors**
  
- ✓ **Top-testing policy goals**
- ✓ **Specifies workplace, but later on in the message**
  
- ✓ **Top-testing message**
- ✓ **Counters “wrong” finding in language test**

# In obituaries for harassment, women note the imbalances of power its “death” would correct and universally celebrate its passing, regardless of party

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## Obituaries for Sexual Harassment



“Sexual harassment, age 3,569 passed away unexpectedly last night after a long battle with humanity. It was surrounded by family members but no friends. There will be no services. Donations in memory can be made to any nonprofit that helps its victims. **Most people have expressed concern that it will remain dead. Great strides in equality have been taken to watch it go away from the planet. Those who may be sad are people in a position of power** who need to understand to respect others. Most are happy. Anyone who has ever been victimized would be able to give the eulogy.

– **Independent woman, age 38**



“**In lieu of a eulogy, a dance party is planned for its victims.** The party will begin at 9 pm on the grave and last until the final victim is all danced out...

– **Democratic woman, age 40**



“We are here to celebrate the end of life of sexual harassment and the world that came with it. **Some of you will be sad for its passing, because the way of life as you knew it was rooted in power that while you were used to it, was ultimately unjust.** We know now that sexual harassment is only one symptom of an imbalance of power between dominant and submissive groups in our society. Thankfully, those within the group of power that began to wake up and set aside their power, comfort, and advantages to lift others up began to raise other generations of people who handled power with leadership and servanthood. We are here today to thank those people, and for **those who rose up against the norms and helped open the eyes of others.**”

– **Republican woman, age 21**