



September 24, 2019

Contact: PR@CATO.ORG | MAIN LINE 202-789-5200

Poll: 84% Say There's Nothing Wrong with Trying to Make as Much Money as Possible, 79% Say Economic Growth Will Better Help People Climb out of Poverty than More Welfare Spending, Democrats Turn Toward Socialism Under Trump

Democrats Say Trump Has Soured Their Views of Capitalism; Americans Support Raising Income Taxes on Rich but Not Wealth Redistribution, Democratic Coalition Divided over Socialism, Americans Say Billionaires Aren't "Immoral," Most Say Gov't Efforts to Fight Poverty Are "Ineffective," Americans Support Building More Housing, School Vouchers, Decriminalizing Drug Offenses

Washington, D.C. – The Cato 2019 Welfare, Work, and Wealth National Survey, a new national poll of 1,700 U.S. adults, finds that 84% of Americans say there is nothing wrong with trying to make as much money as one honestly can. The survey also finds the public believes that growing the economic pie benefits more than just the wealthy: 79% say economic growth will better help people climb out of poverty than more welfare spending.

Democrats Turn toward Socialism during Trump Era

More Democrats today have favorable views of socialism (64%) than capitalism (45%). But before Trump took office, polls found Democrats were about equally favorable toward capitalism (58%) and socialism (56%). Most Democrats credit Trump with this shift: 50% say Trump has made them "like capitalism less."

In contrast, most Americans have unfavorable views of socialism (59%) and positive views of capitalism (59% favorable). Similarly, most Republicans and independents have favorable views of capitalism (77% and 52%, respectively) and negative views of socialism (85% and 58%)

Americans Support Raising Income Taxes on the Rich but Are Wary of Wealth Redistribution

- 61% favor raising taxes on families earning over \$200K+
- 53% favor raising top marginal tax rates to 70% on income above \$10 million
- 62% oppose redistributing wealth from the rich to give to the poor

Wealth redistribution divides Democrats. While 69% of strong liberals agree that wealth should be redistributed from rich to poor, 53% of moderate liberals *disagree*. However, Democrats are united in support for raising top marginal tax rates (73%) and raising taxes on incomes above \$200,000 (81%). Republicans oppose all three: 70% oppose raising top marginal tax rates, 62% oppose raising taxes on incomes above \$200,000, and 83% oppose redistributing wealth. Independents support raising the wealthy's income taxes but do not support wealth redistribution.

55% Believe the Distribution of Wealth in the U.S. Is Unfair

A majority (55%) of Americans believe that the wealth distribution in the United States is “unjust.” Majorities of Democrats (79%) and independents (55%) agree, but 67% of Republicans disagree.

A Third of Young People Say Violence Against the Rich may be Justified

About a fifth (17%) of Americans agree that “citizens taking violent action against the rich” is sometimes justified. More than a third of strong liberals (36%) and Americans under 30 (35%) and nearly half (47%) of those with very favorable views of socialism say violent action against the rich may be justified.

Americans Believe Rich Create Value for Society; But Say People Admire the Rich Too Much

Americans admire the rich and believe they create value for society as they build up successful businesses that invent new products, create jobs, and provide value for customers.

- 71% feel more “admiration” than “resentment” toward the rich
- 69% agree billionaires “earned their wealth by creating value for others”
- 65% believe “we are all better off when people get rich” because “they invest their money in new businesses that create jobs and new technology”
- 75% say people admire rich people “too much”

Americans Don't Believe Billionaires Threaten Democracy or Are “Immoral”

Most Americans (62%) do not believe billionaires are a “threat to democracy,” including 79% of Republicans and 63% of independents. However, a majority of Democrats (54%) worry billionaires do pose a threat. Three-fourths (75%) of Americans also don't believe that “it's immoral for society to allow people to become billionaires.”

Socialism Divides the Democratic Coalition

The survey finds the Democratic coalition is divided about socialism and the rich, with implications for the 2020 Democratic primaries. Liberal Democrats are about 25 points more likely than moderate Democrats to have a favorable view of socialism (74% vs. 49%) and to strongly favor raising top marginal tax rates (60% vs. 38%). Conversely, moderate Democrats

are about 10-15 points more likely to feel more admiration than resentment towards the rich (65% vs. 48%), to believe the rich earned their wealth by creating value for society (64% vs. 48%), and to think “we’re all better off when people get rich” (58% vs. 41%).

Vast Majority of Americans Are Skeptical of Government Efforts to Fight Poverty

A majority (72%) Americans say that even if government were to “spend whatever is necessary” to eliminate poverty it doesn’t “know enough” about how to actually accomplish that.

- 77% say government efforts to fight poverty have been “ineffective”
- 79% say economic growth will better help people climb out of poverty than more welfare spending
- 60% don’t think welfare programs are designed to lift people out of poverty
- 68% of Republicans believe welfare creates dependency; 71% of Democrats think welfare helps people get back on their feet
- 70% say government should try to eliminate causes of poverty rather than increase welfare benefits
- 25% favor cutting government food assistance, 41% favor increasing it, 33% want to keep it the same

Americans Say Housing Is Too Expensive; 59% Support New Construction in Their Own Neighborhoods

A majority (56%) of Americans say that expensive housing costs have prevented them from moving to a better neighborhood and 44% rate housing costs in their current neighborhood as “bad.” This may help explain why a solid majority (59%) favor building more houses, condos, and apartments in their own neighborhood.

58% Favor Vouchers for K-12 Private School; African Americans, Republicans, Low-Income Americans, and High School Graduates Are Most Supportive

A solid majority (58%) of Americans favor a proposal that would allow parents of children in public school “to use a voucher to enroll their children in a private school” with “government helping to pay the tuition” while 40% oppose. African Americans (69%), Republicans (68%), households earning less than \$20,000 annually (73%), and high school graduates without a college degree (64%) are much more supportive of school vouchers. Although majorities favor, White and Latino Americans (56%), college graduates (52%), and those with annual incomes above \$20,000 (55%) are comparatively less likely to support school vouchers. Democrats are skeptical with 47% who favor and 50% oppose the proposal.

55% of Americans Favor Decriminalizing Drug Offenses

A majority (55%) of Americans favor and 44% oppose recategorizing drug offenses from felonies to civil offenses, such that they would be treated as minor traffic violations rather than crimes. Republicans stand out with 59% opposed. In contrast, majorities of Democrats (69%) and independents (54%) support decriminalizing drug offenses.

Americans Who Value Work, Responsibility, and Personal Agency Find Most Meaning in Their Lives

The survey found that 83% of Americans report finding purpose and meaning in their lives, while 46% strongly feel they have meaning. Some are more likely to strongly agree:

- Conservatives (58%) vs. liberals (39%)
- Very frequent churchgoers (68%) vs. nonchurchgoers (36%)
- Protestants (55%) and Catholics (51%) vs. atheists or agnostics (29%)
- Americans over 65 (59%) vs. Americans under 30 (36%)
- Volunteers (54%) vs. nonvolunteers (37%)
- African Americans (57%) vs. White (45%) and Latino (43%) Americans

The survey also found that people with the following personality traits and beliefs are also more likely to find more purpose and meaning in their lives: those who strongly believe hard work is it's own reward (74%), to strongly believe they have personal agency (68%), and to strongly believe in personal responsibility (60%), are very compassionate (58%), and are not very envious (70%) or resentful (63%).

Liberals Say Wealth and Poverty Is Largely Due to Chance; Conservatives Believe Wealth and Poverty Is Largely Due to Personal Choices

- Liberals say the top reasons for people's wealth: family connections (48%), inheritance (40%), and getting lucky (31%)
- Conservatives say top reasons for people's wealth: hard work (62%), ambition (47%), self-discipline (45%)
- Liberals say the top causes of poverty are discrimination (51%), an unfair economic system (48%), and lack of educational opportunities (48%)
- Conservatives say the top causes of poverty are poor life choices (60%), a lack of work ethic (52%), breakdown of families (47%), and drugs and alcohol (47%)

Methodology

The Cato Institute 2019 Welfare, Work, and Wealth National Survey was designed and conducted by the Cato Institute in collaboration with YouGov. YouGov collected responses online March 5 to 8, 2019 from a national sample of 1,700 Americans 18 years of age and older. Restrictions are put in place to ensure that only the people selected and contacted by YouGov are allowed to participate. The margin of error for the survey is +/- 2.2 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence.

The topline questionnaire, full methodology, and report of the survey findings can be found here. If you would like to speak to Dr. Ekins on the poll's results, please contact pr@cato.org or 202-789-5200.