

WILL Messaging Experiment & Public Opinion Poll on K-12 Education Reform

In almost every context, words matter. Public opinion on particular issues can shift greatly depending on the language used, and K-12 education reform is no exception. To help further understand this, the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty commissioned Research Now Survey Sampling International to conduct a statewide survey experiment of 1,500 adults in Wisconsin. We tested a number of messages related to education reform, ranging from vouchers to Education Savings Accounts (ESA). We also surveyed public opinion on spending on K-12 schools and the impact of Act 10, the 2011 collective bargaining reform law, on teachers and students.

To conduct the school choice messaging study for vouchers, charter schools, and ESAs, respondents were randomized into one of several messaging conditions, exposing them to certain types of information. Following this randomization, respondents are asked about their level of support for school choice on a five point scale ranging from “strongly oppose” to “strongly support.” We learn which messages increase support by comparing the average responses of those in the control group to the average response of those in each treatment group.

We found that school choice is in fact popular, but the words that are used to describe it are of critical importance. For example, Republicans increase their support of vouchers when discussed in terms of civics and patriotism. Democrats and African Americans increase their support when discussed in terms of diversity. Surprisingly Education Savings Accounts have majority or plurality of support amongst all demographics, including Democrats, and suggest strong appetite for more school choice

In addition, our public opinion polling found that more than 80% of Wisconsinites underestimate how much the government spends on K-12 public schools. But when told of the average spending of \$10,439, 60% of Wisconsinites (including 80% of Republicans and 65% of independents) believe that the current funding level is either “too high” or “just right.” Walker’s budget with historic spending makes it more likely that 27.14% of people (including 26.48% independents) to vote for him. Also, the effect of Walker’s historic collective bargaining law, Act 10, on students and teachers depends on partisanship, but a majority of independents believe it has had a negative impact on teachers and students.

The sample is composed of 70% random digit dialing of landlines and 30% from a list of cellphone numbers kept by the surveying firm.¹ The cooperation rate for the survey was 31% using the standard calculations of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR 2017). The margin of error for reported topline results is ± 2.5 percentage points. For other findings, the margin of error varies based on the level of aggregation in a particular subgroup, but is generally less than ± 6.0 percentage points.

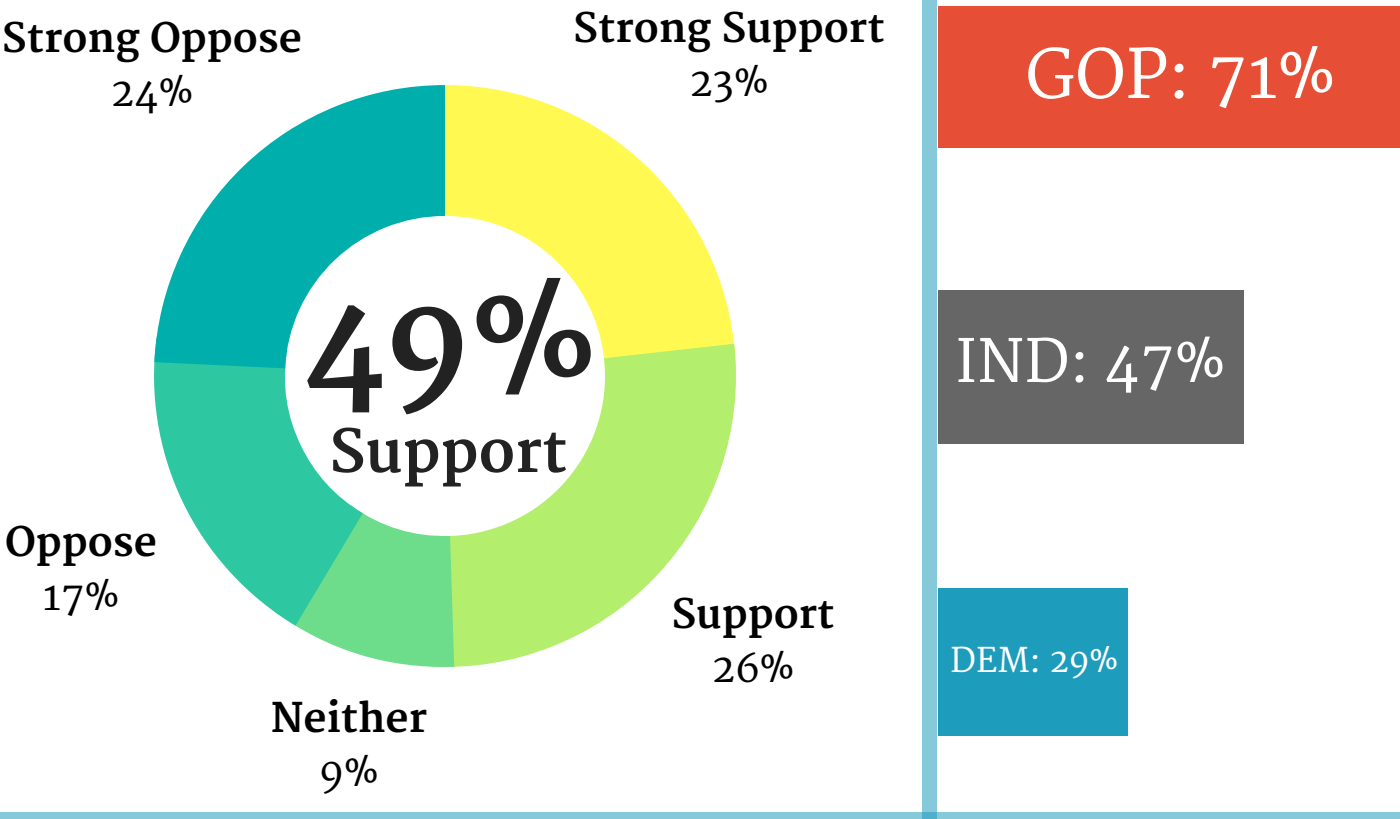
Our sample matches the composition of the state relatively well on a number of key demographic and geographic characteristics. The sample is 40.87% Democrats when leaners are included and 37.27% Republican. Excluding leaners, our sample 27.33% Democrats and 24.47% Republicans and 38.27% independents. These figures do not differ substantially from the long-term average

¹ No meaningful differences in responses were found in the results from the RDD portion of the sample and the cellphone portion.

of the Marquette Law School Poll, which has found 27% Republican, 30% Democrats and 41% independents.

The following pages provide a concise overview of the major topline findings of the poll. Only differences from the baseline that reached statistical significance are included in this these pages. A more thorough polling memo can be found on our website.

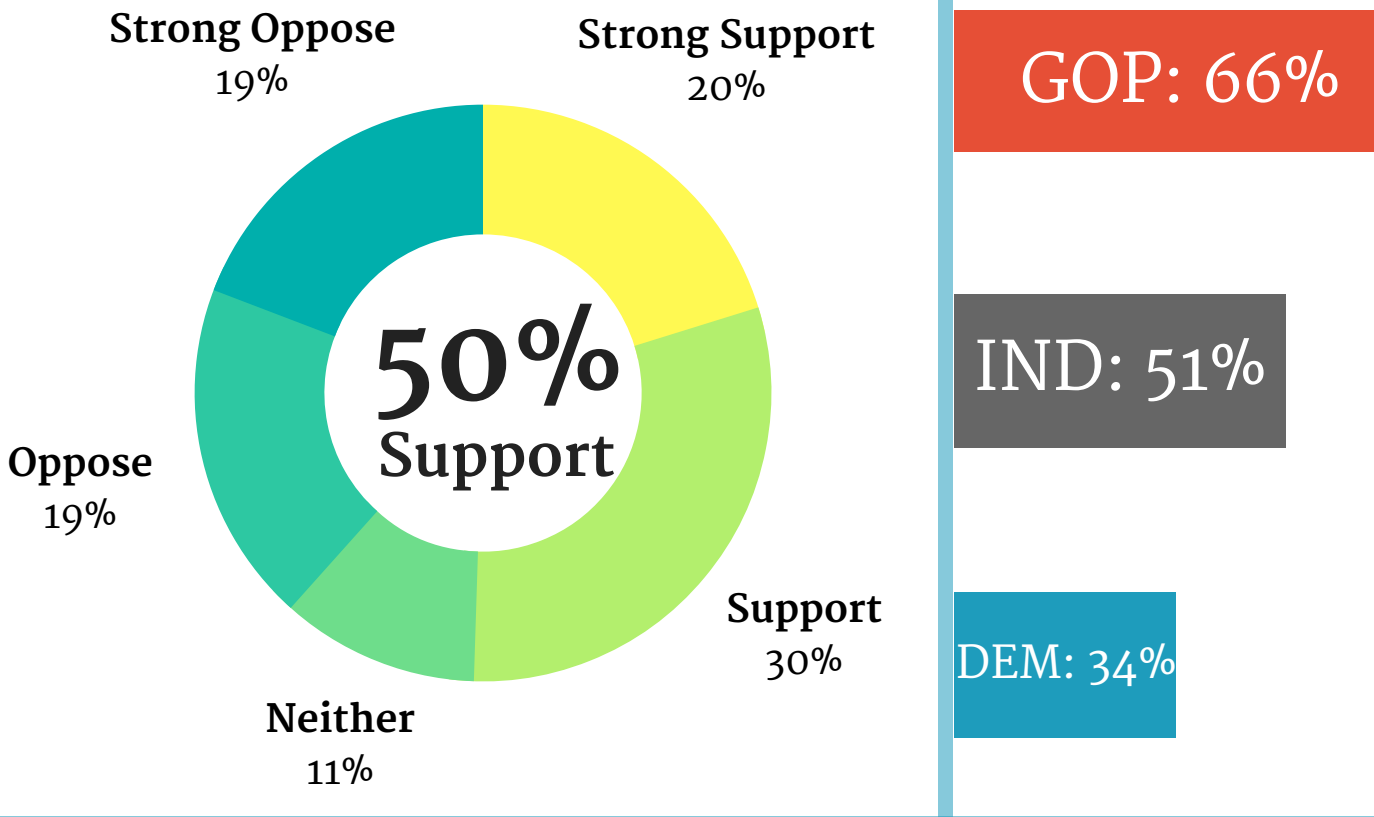
"School voucher programs provide a state-funded payment to families for their children to attend a private school"



Messages That Increase Support and With Whom

- *"School voucher programs allow children to attend schools that are safer than their assigned district school."*
 ► Independents, Metro Milwaukee, Respondents without children
- *"School voucher programs increase the civic virtue and patriotism of participating students by exposing them to moral values and America's founding principles."*
 ► Republicans, Metro Milwaukee, Non-white
- *"School voucher programs increase school diversity by offering minority students an opportunity to attend schools that would otherwise be closed off to them."*
 ► Democrats
- *"School voucher programs increase the test scores and graduation rates of participating students."*
 ► Metro Milwaukee
- *"School voucher programs level the playing field for low income children by providing opportunities to attend private schools that would otherwise be closed off to them."*
 ► Metro Milwaukee, Democrats, Non-white

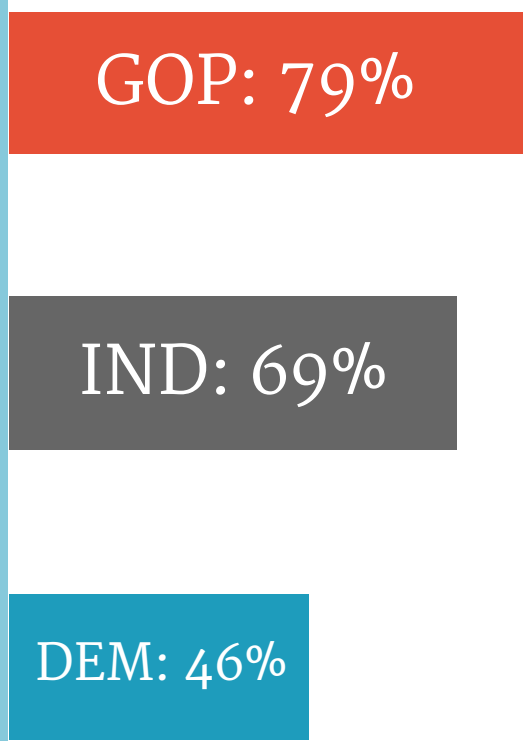
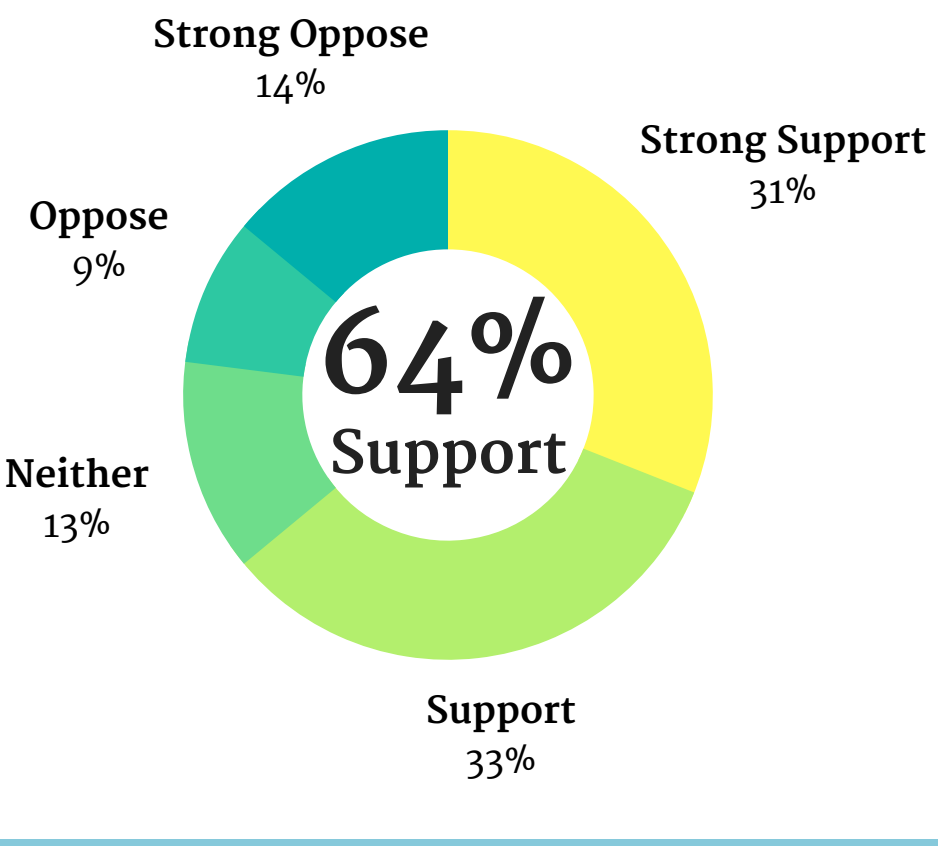
"Charter schools are schools that have freedom from some school district rules."



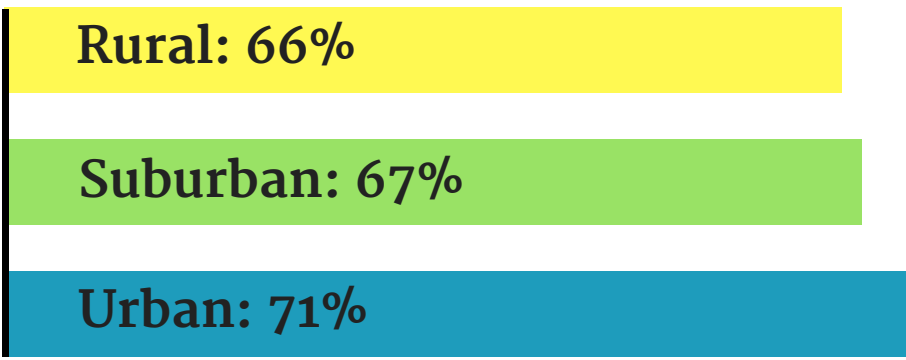
Messages That Increase Support and With Whom

- *"Charter schools can hire teachers who are not members of the teachers union."*
 - ▶ Low-income, Rural, Republicans
- *"Charter schools are public schools that are open to all students."*
 - ▶ Democrats, Independents, Republicans, Suburban, Low Income, Middle Income, High Income, Women, Men, Respondents with Children
- *"Charter schools are provided with the freedom to implement innovative educational techniques that may not be offered in public schools."*
 - ▶ Independents, Republicans, Suburban, Rural, Respondents with Children, Men, Low Income

"Education savings accounts allow parents to receive a portion of the money that would have been spent on their children in a public school. The money can be used to fund tuition at a private school."



ESA Support By Area



Messages That Increase Support and With Whom

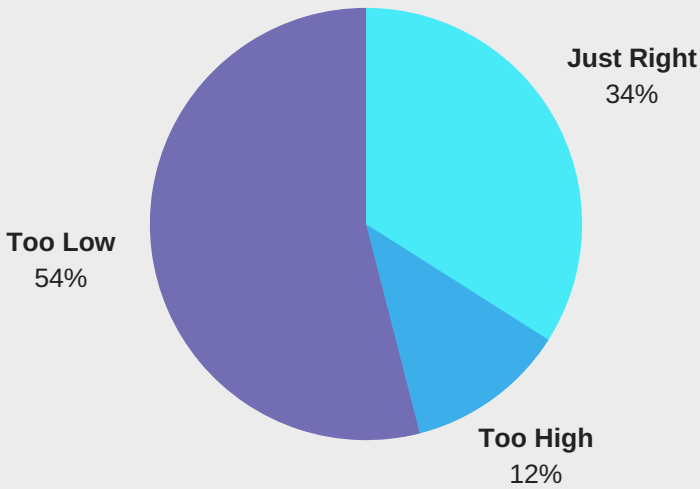
- *"ESAs can also be used to enroll a child in classes at a local college or university."*

▶ Democrats, Women, Respondents with Children, Suburban

K-12 School Funding

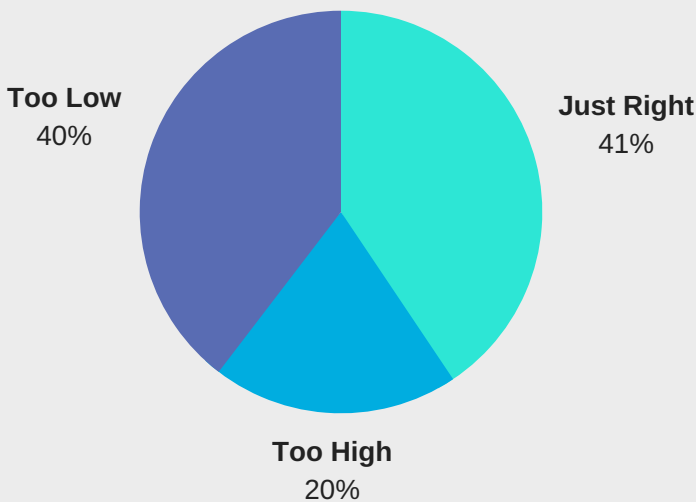
Is the amount spent per student in Wisconsin too low? too high? or just right?

Before Respondents Are Told Statewide Average Spending (\$10,400 per student)

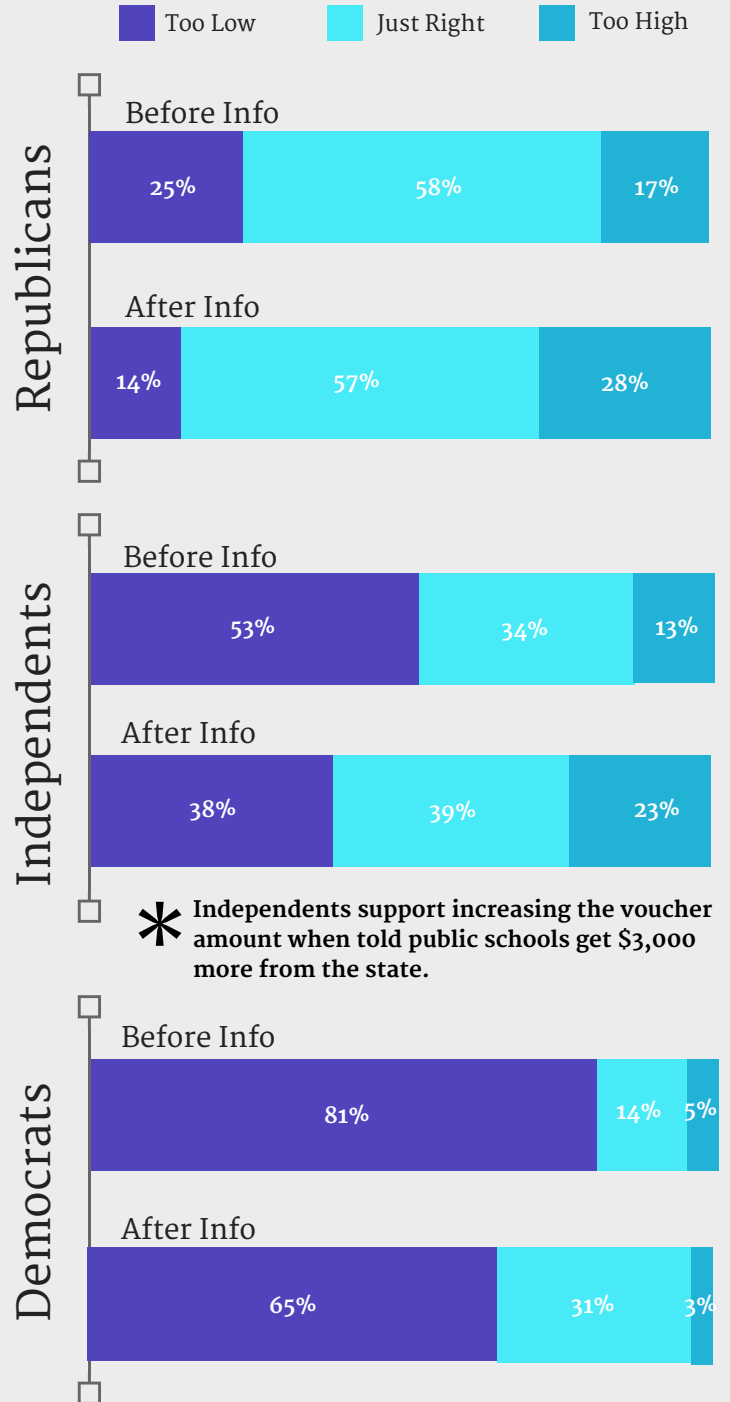


*** Just 8% of respondents knew the correct amount of per pupil spending (between \$10,000 and \$12,000).**

After Respondents Are Told Average Statewide Spending (\$10,400 per student)



School Funding By Party ID

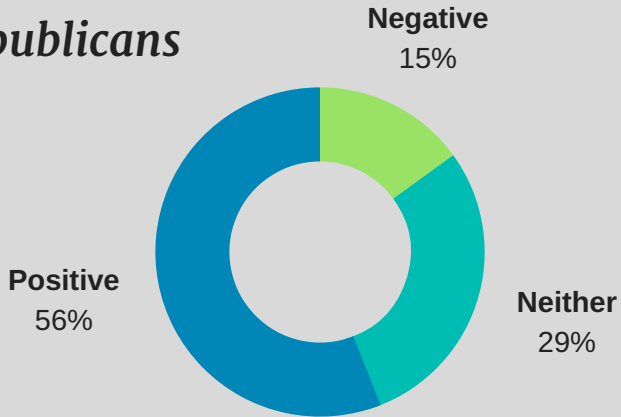


"What is the effect of Act 10..."

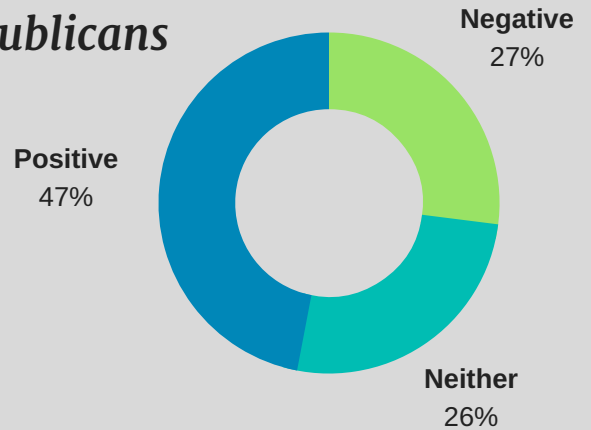
"...on students?"

"...on teachers?"

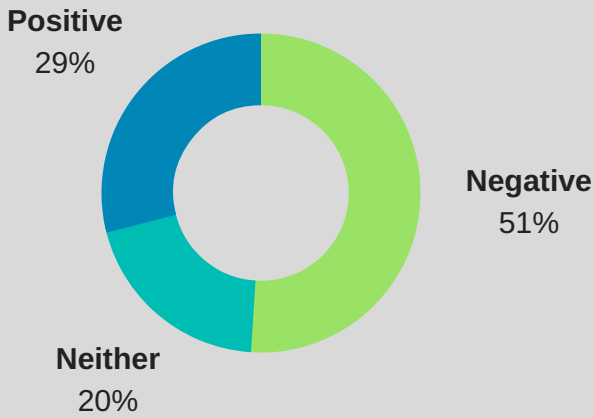
Republicans



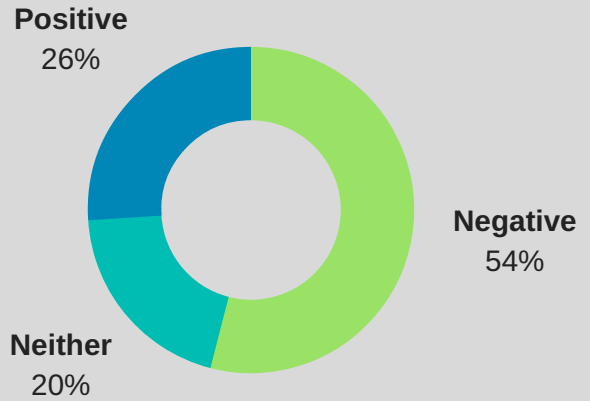
Republicans



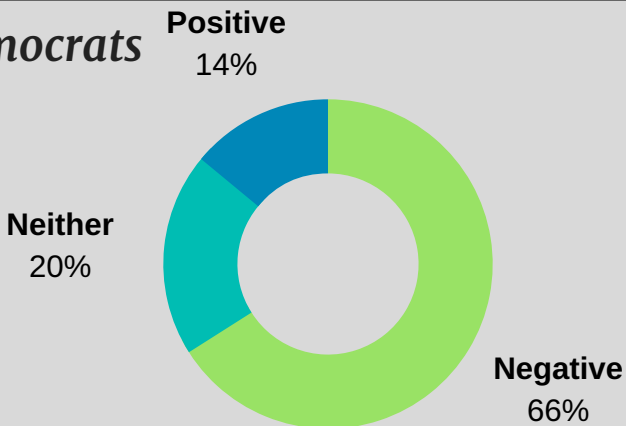
Independents



Independents



Democrats



Democrats

