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ACTION



JUSTICE
DEMOCRATS

AMERICANS SUPPORT SUSPENDING ALL RENT PAYMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ Voters strongly favor a program of suspending and forgiving rent, backing it by a margin of 22 percentage points.
- ▶ Voters under the age of forty-five are especially enthusiastic about suspending and forgiving rent, supporting it by a margin of 50 points.
- ▶ By a 14-point margin, voters who self-identified as Republicans favor a more moderate proposal of suspending, but not forgiving, rent during the coronavirus crisis.

BACKGROUND

This January—weeks before the coronavirus pandemic spread across the globe—a [Harvard University report](#) found that nearly half of renters in the United States are “cost-burdened,” meaning they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. The report found that a quarter of renters—eleven million people—are “severely cost-burdened,” meaning they spend more than half of their income to make rent.

The recent coronavirus outbreak has only exacerbated this situation for renters, forcing many of them to choose between housing and other essential expenses, like food and healthcare. [According to the New York Times](#), as many as 40 percent of New York City tenants may have skipped their April payments.

So, would Americans support suspending monthly rental payments? Our research finds that they

would. Overall, we found majority support for policies to “cancel and forgive” rent payments, and suspend mortgage payments. A slightly different proposition—to merely “suspend” rent for the duration of the crisis—was even supported by most Republicans.

These findings suggest growing support in the American electorate for bold housing justice campaigns that are organizing around the economic disaster of the coronavirus pandemic. Those campaigns are mobilizing around the slogans #RentZero and #CancelRent—in short, demands for the suspension of all monthly housing payments, including utility payments. (The latter is not covered in this poll.)

With millions of renters in a desperate situation, bold legislation to relieve renters is imperative. Eviction moratoriums—which postpone rent payments, but don’t cancel them—are only a first step, but they are not enough. Under these moratoriums, even if a tenant is able to defer rent payments to a later date, they would eventually have to pay for both their current rent and the rent of past months. Tenant rights groups, like those involved in the campaign for a national Homes Guarantee, and politicians like Representative Ilhan Omar and Senator Bernie Sanders [are calling](#) for the cancelation of rent as part of the next federal stimulus package. Legislation has already been drafted to suspend all rent and mortgage payments.

This poll also suggests majority support for the core planks of legislation that Rep. Ilhan Omar introduced on Friday, April 17. The legislation will, first, suspend rents and mortgages; second, provide relief to property owners, conditioned on tenant protection; and, third, create a fund to prevent 2008-style speculation and begin the transition towards social housing.

RESULTS

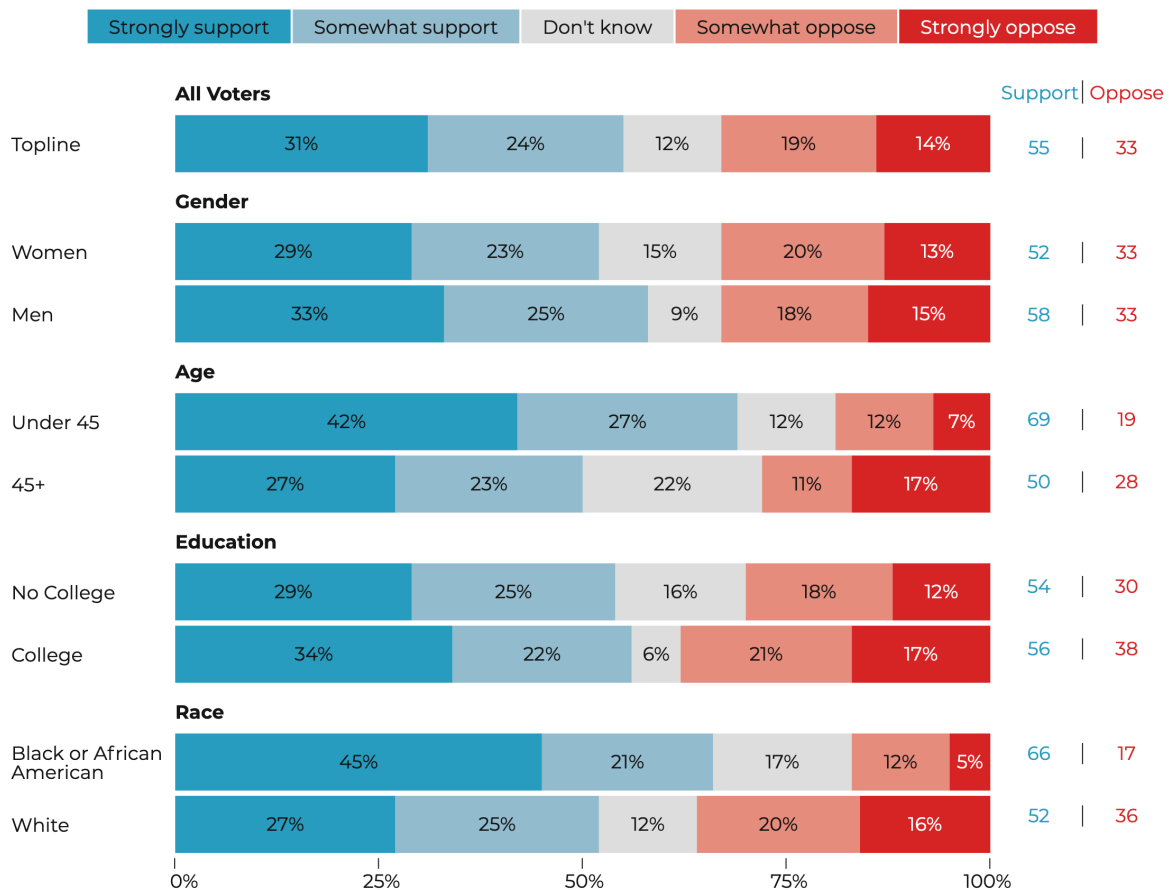
We asked a national sample of 1,086 likely voters if they would support a federal policy to suspend rent payments and mortgage payments during the pandemic. Suspending rent would effectively cancel and forgive all rent payments, meaning no payments and no debts. After hearing arguments from both political parties, 55 percent of likely voters supported the proposal, while 33 percent opposed it.

The proposal received majority support from every demographic group we tested: women, men, voters under the age of forty-five, voters over forty-five, non-college-educated voters, college-educated voters, black voters, and white voters.

Perhaps most importantly, we found that legislation to suspend rent and mortgage payments is popular across partisan lines. A clear majority of Democrats support the proposal (67

Voters Favor Suspending And Forgiving Rent

Some Democrats in Congress are proposing a policy that would cancel rent payments and suspend mortgage payments during the pandemic. Renters would not be required to pay rent that accumulated over this period. Democrats say that with millions of people unemployed or losing their income, Americans need this relief in order to avoid homelessness and destitution. Republicans say that this would amount to theft from landlords and that we should target relief programs specifically to those that have been hit by the pandemic. Do you support or oppose this policy?



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percent support, 25 percent oppose), and it has crossover appeal with independents, who favor it by a 34-percentage-point margin.

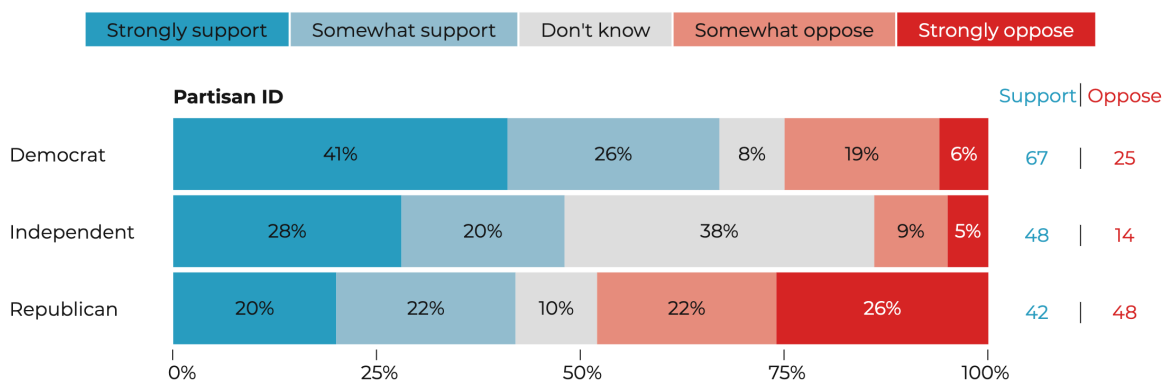
Furthermore, despite the proposal's ambitiousness and our inclusion in the survey question of a Republican counterargument that canceling rent "would amount to theft from landlords," more than two in five Republican voters were on board with the policy (42 percent support, 48 percent oppose).

We also tested public support for a separate, less comprehensive proposal, which called for suspending rent and mortgage payments but requiring renters to eventually pay back the rent that they've accumulated. After hearing Democratic and Republican arguments, 63 percent of voters supported the proposal, while 25 percent opposed it.

Voters supported this proposal by a 38-point margin, compared with a 22-point margin of support for the more comprehensive proposal.

Democrats Strongly Support Suspending And Forgiving Rent

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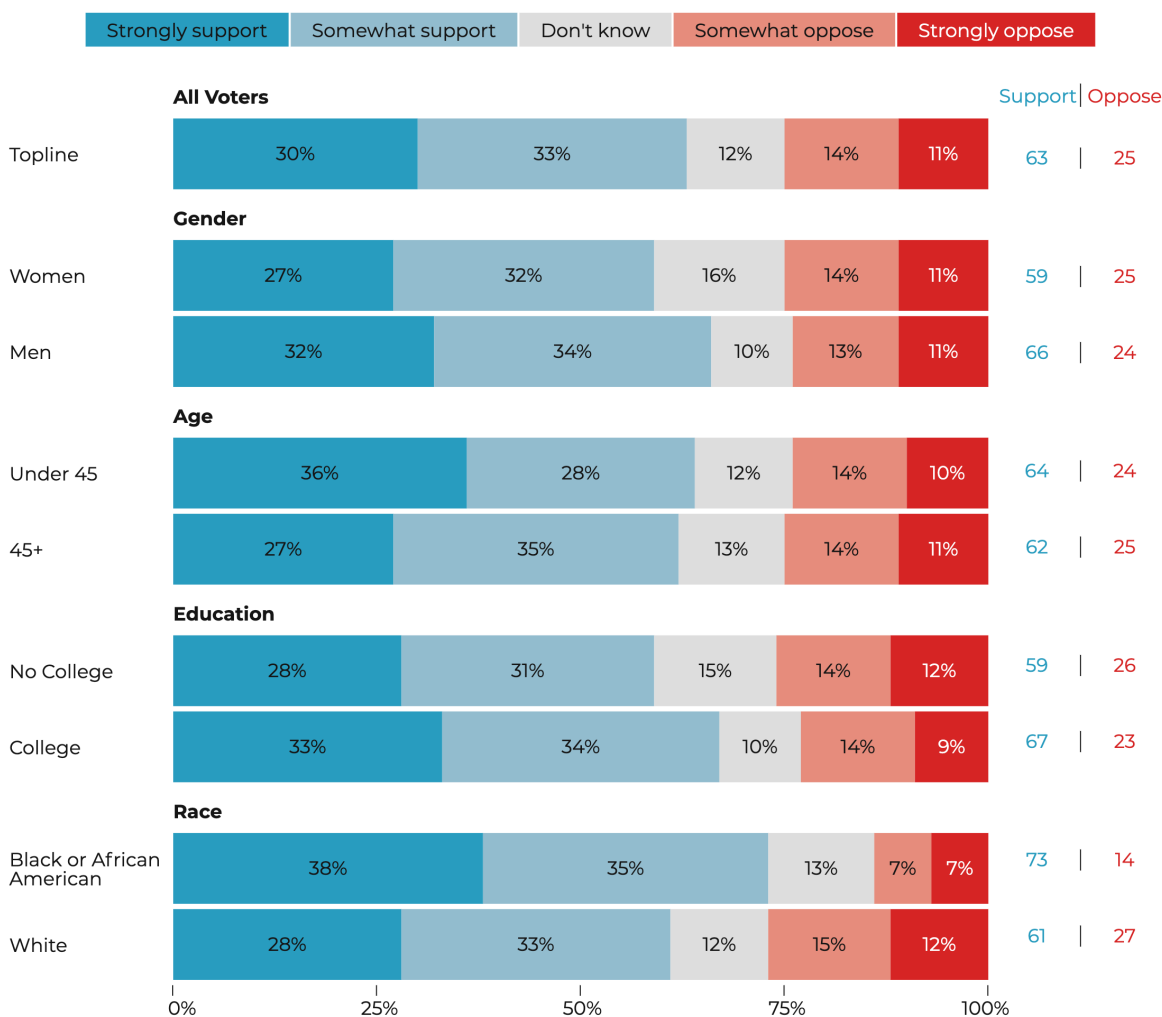
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Interestingly, while this proposal performed better with most demographic groups, voters under the age of forty-five preferred the proposal to cancel and forgive rent (69 percent support, 19 percent oppose) to the proposal to merely suspend rent payments (64 percent support, 25 percent oppose).

Also notably, the proposal to suspend rent and mortgage payments received support from a majority of Republicans (50 percent support, 37 percent oppose), even though we again presented respondents with the Republican counterargument that it “would amount to theft from landlords.”

Voters Support Suspending Rent Payments

Some Democrats in Congress are proposing a policy that would suspend rent payments and mortgages during the pandemic. Renters would be required to eventually pay back all rent which accumulated over the course of the pandemic. Democrats say that with millions of people unemployed or losing their income, Americans need this relief in order to avoid homelessness and destitution. Republicans say that this would amount to theft from landlords and that we should target relief programs specifically to those that have been hit economically by the pandemic. Do you support or oppose this policy?



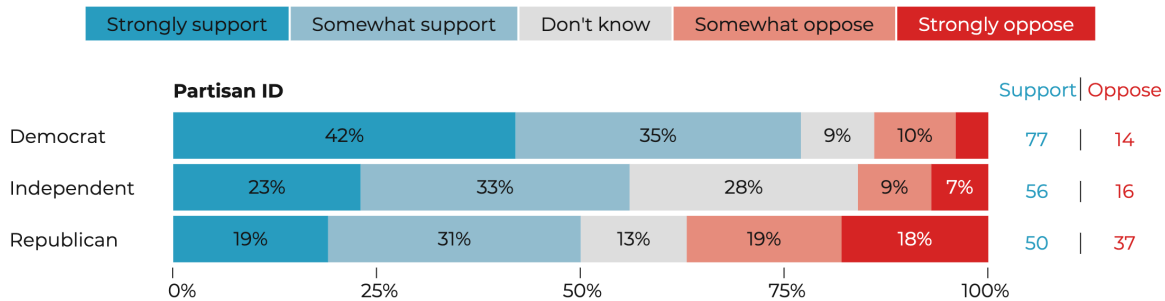
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There Is Bipartisan Support For Suspending Rent Payments

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Some in government are beginning to act. While New York has placed a ninety-day moratorium on evictions, including a ban on landlords' abilities to sue tenants and a suspension of pending eviction orders, not all states have enacted such measures. For instance, Ohio has not halted evictions, and local courts have the discretion to decide whether to temporarily postpone eviction hearings or allow them to proceed per usual. And in Maryland and New Jersey, properties owned by the family of Jared Kushner are continuing to file new eviction lawsuits, according to the Intercept.

A growing number of states and cities have placed a moratorium on evictions but this isn't enough. Rent hasn't been canceled—it's simply been postponed. This could burden many tenants with an insurmountable level of debt and with the possibility of being evicted once the eviction moratorium ends.

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to place millions of Americans in a difficult economic situation, lawmakers should pursue the cancelation and forgiveness of rent for all tenants in the US, knowing that a clear majority of Americans are on their side.

METHODOLOGY

On 3/31, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 2165 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, urbanicity, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 2.1 percent.

EDITED BY

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COVER PHOTO

Anthony Fomin/Unsplash