

 DATA FOR **PROGRESS** SOCIAL  
SECURITY  
**WORKS.**

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Sean McElwee, co-founder of Data for Progress; Monika Nayak, analyst at YouGov Blue; John Ray, senior analyst at YouGov Blue.

DATE: September 2019

RE:

VOTERS  
OVERWHELMINGLY  
SUPPORT A RANGE  
OF ACTIONS TO  
**REDUCE THE COST  
OF PRESCRIPTION  
DRUGS**

The pharmaceutical industry [consistently ranks](#) as one of the most unpopular industries in the country. Legislators are proposing a range of policies that would reduce the cost of pharmaceuticals. Here, we test a range of policies and find that all have broad public support. In addition, even when voters are presented partisan framing and arguments against the policies, they remain supportive.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- ▶ Among registered voters, each of the pharmaceutical industry reforms we posed polled at least at majority support. Each policy polled net positive support.
- ▶ Support for these policies included net positive support among Republican voters on each of the policies we polled.
- ▶ Each of these findings are resilient to explicit partisan framing, which for Democratic policies typically reduces net support for any policy considerably. In an experiment, we randomly assigned voters to see whether “Democrats” supported one position on medical reform while “Republicans” opposed the position, or to see that “Supporters” held one position and “Opponents” held the other. Though the partisan framing had large effects, respondents overall continued to strongly favor pharmaceutical industry reforms.

## PHARMACEUTICAL ITEMS RESULTS

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In our survey, we included a module describing a variety of pharmaceutical reforms. For each of those reforms, respondents could report whether they strongly supported, somewhat supported, somewhat opposed, strongly opposed that reform, or if they were unsure. The survey posed each policy independently, and in a randomized order, with the question asking support level for each reform. Those reforms are included below:

*Next, you will read about some policies being considered by some in Congress. For each of the policies below, please tell us whether you would [support or oppose] the policy.*

- ▶ *A policy allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices directly with pharmaceutical companies*
- ▶ *A policy allowing importation of FDA-approved drugs from other countries to meet consumer demand*
- ▶ *A policy requiring full public disclosure of all pharmaceutical research and development costs*
- ▶ *A policy prohibiting direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs*
- ▶ *A policy prohibiting direct-to-provider advertising of prescription drugs*
- ▶ *A policy allowing other companies to produce generic versions of prescription drugs if the government determines prices are beyond patients’ ability to pay*
- ▶ *A policy allowing the government to manufacture generic versions of prescription drugs if the government determines prices are beyond patients’ ability to pay*
- ▶ *A policy increasing government funding of research by \$40 billion to develop drugs that are immediately available at an affordable price upon approval*
- ▶ *A policy in which the government offers prizes to researchers for drug innovations and requiring patents for those drugs to be in the public domain*

Respondents viewed each of the policies in a randomized order. Two separate items addressed limitations on prescription drug advertisements, one on the prohibition of advertisements to consumers and a second on the prohibition of advertisements to health care providers. Two other policy items propose legislation allowing either additional private companies to manufacture generic versions of prescription drugs or allowing the government to manufacture generics. Later in the survey, we posed a message test to examine the resiliency of the generics manufacturing item to explicit partisan framing.

Additionally, we rotated the response options so half of respondents were randomly assigned to see the response options listed as “Strongly support,” “Somewhat support,” “Somewhat oppose,” “Strongly oppose,” and “Not sure.” The other half of randomly assigned respondents viewed the first

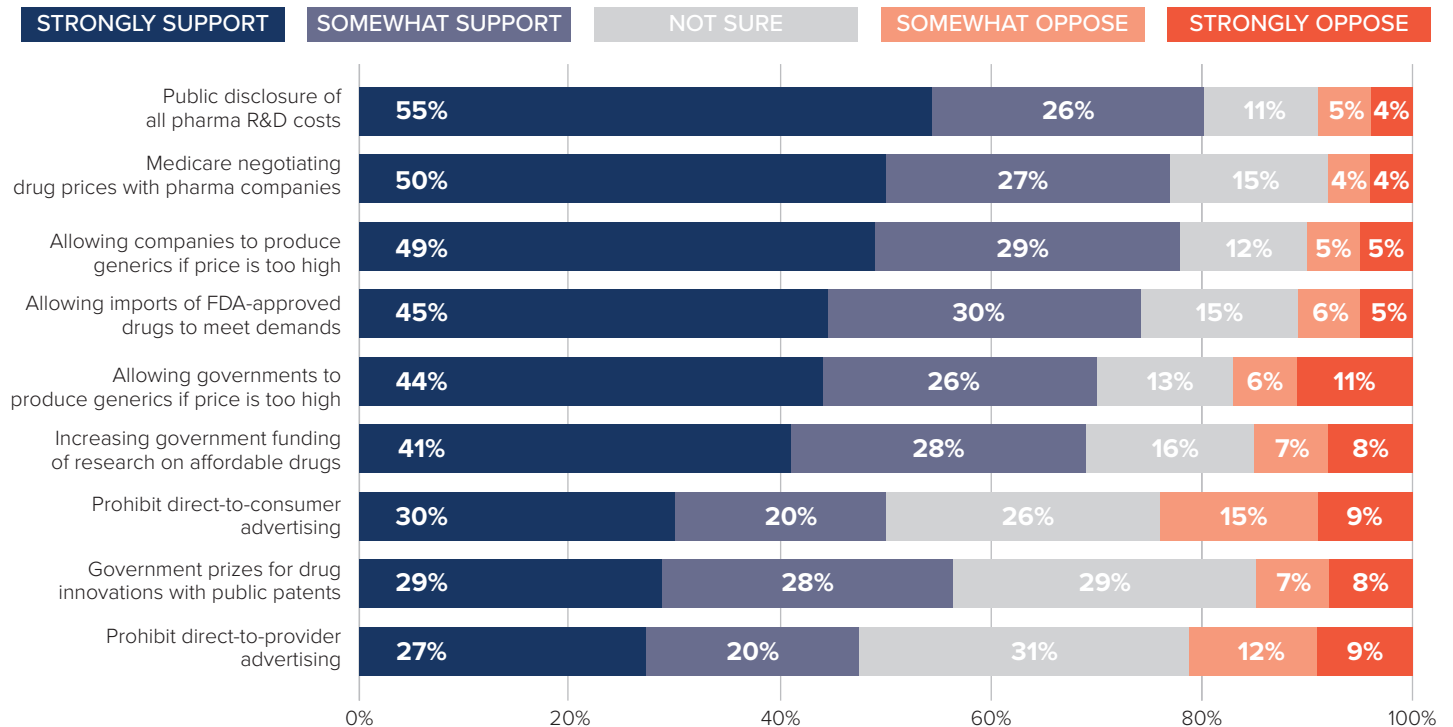
four options in reverse order with “Not sure” still last. The following chart summarizes the results for the full sample.

Each policy item saw high support levels. Survey takers responded best to “A policy requiring full public disclosure of all pharmaceutical research and development costs,” “A policy allowing other companies to produce generic versions of prescription drugs if the government determines prices are beyond patients’ ability to pay,” and “A policy allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices directly with pharmaceutical companies” with 81, 78, and 77 percent, respectively, saying they “strongly support” or “somewhat support” the items. The items resulting in the most opposition were “A policy prohibiting direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs” and “A policy prohibiting

direct-to-provider advertising of prescription drugs,” each with 24 percent and 21 percent, respectively, saying they “strongly oppose” or “somewhat oppose” the items. But, those two items were still met with 50 percent and 47 percent, respectively, supportive responses.

Generally, survey takers responded to government intervention in pharmaceutical pricing and company regulations. In grouping supportive responses of “Strongly support” and “Somewhat support” together, the support levels ranged from 47 percent to 81 percent. In the pair up of items stating “A policy allowing other companies to produce generic versions of prescription drugs if the government determines prices are beyond patients’ ability to pay” and “A policy allowing the government to manufacture generic

## PHARMACEUTICAL REFORM ITEMS SUPPORT ALL VOTERS



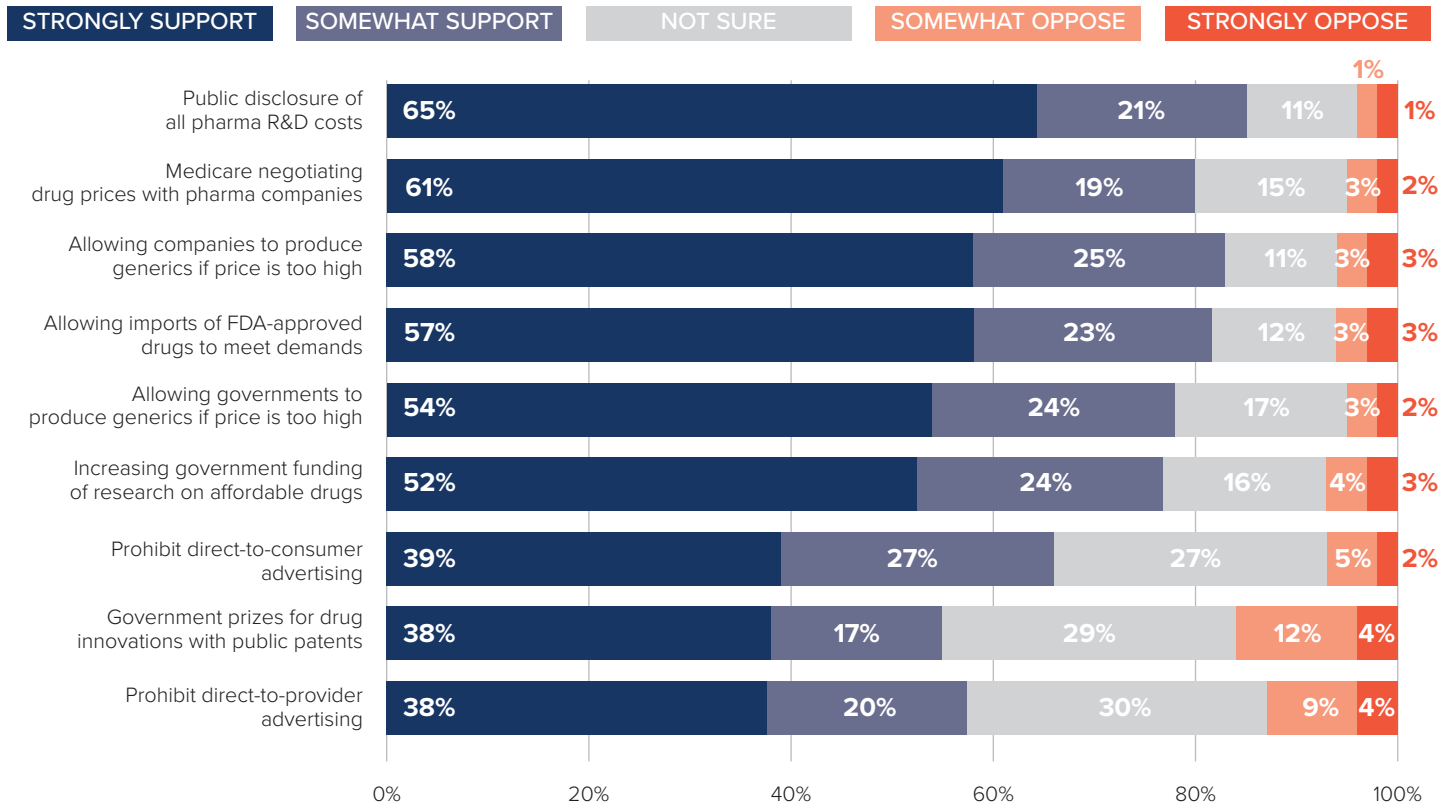
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versions of prescription drugs if the government determines prices are beyond patients' ability to pay," the former items received greater support. The item offering other companies as generics manufacturers saw 78 percent support with only 10 percent of respondents saying they strongly or somewhat opposed the measure. Meanwhile, the item allowing a government owned drug company to manufacture generics saw 70 percent in respondent support and 17 percent in respondent opposition. While both items were generally well received overall, it is interesting to see greater support for a third party company. This discrepancy could be indicative of public aversion to allowing the federal government to intervene in a traditionally corporate space. Further message testing could examine whether or not the public

truly responds more favorably toward private-owned options sparked by government legislation. General stigma against generics and government intervention could confound conclusions here, but weighing private options versus public options might be important as proposals pushing government-owned products and companies come forward.

The following graphs show the same nine policy items broken down by party identification. Across all three party identification subsets -- Democrats, Independents, and Republicans -- public disclosure of pharmaceutical research and development costs polled the strongest, with 86 percent of Democrats, 80 percent of Independents, and 75 percent of Republicans supporting the measure. The following plot shows policy support among Democratic respondents.

## PHARMACEUTICAL REFORM ITEMS SUPPORT DEMOCRAT

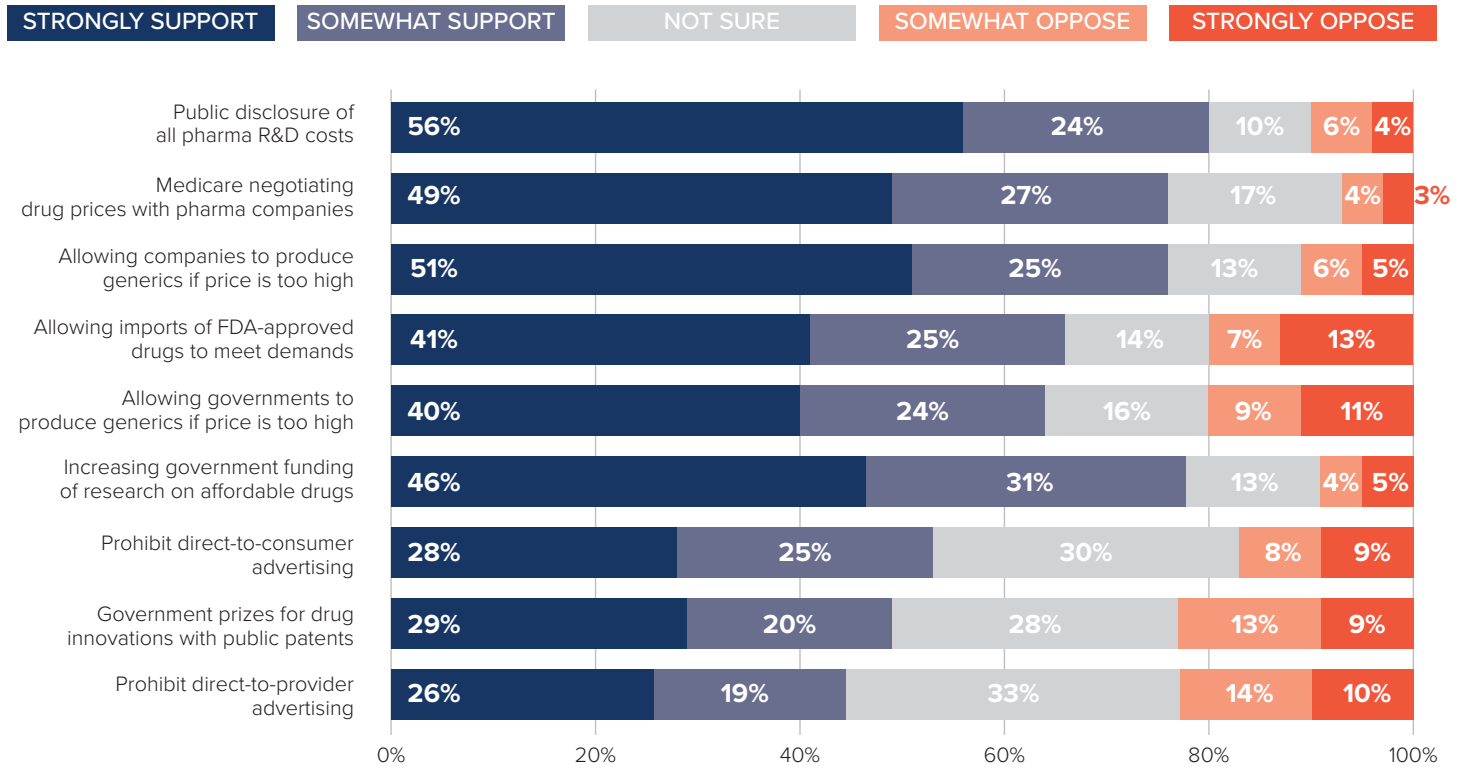


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Perhaps surprisingly, Independents and Republicans clearly favored each of the policies we polled on pharmaceutical reform. While opposition to each reform was clearly highest among Republicans, net support for each policy was positive

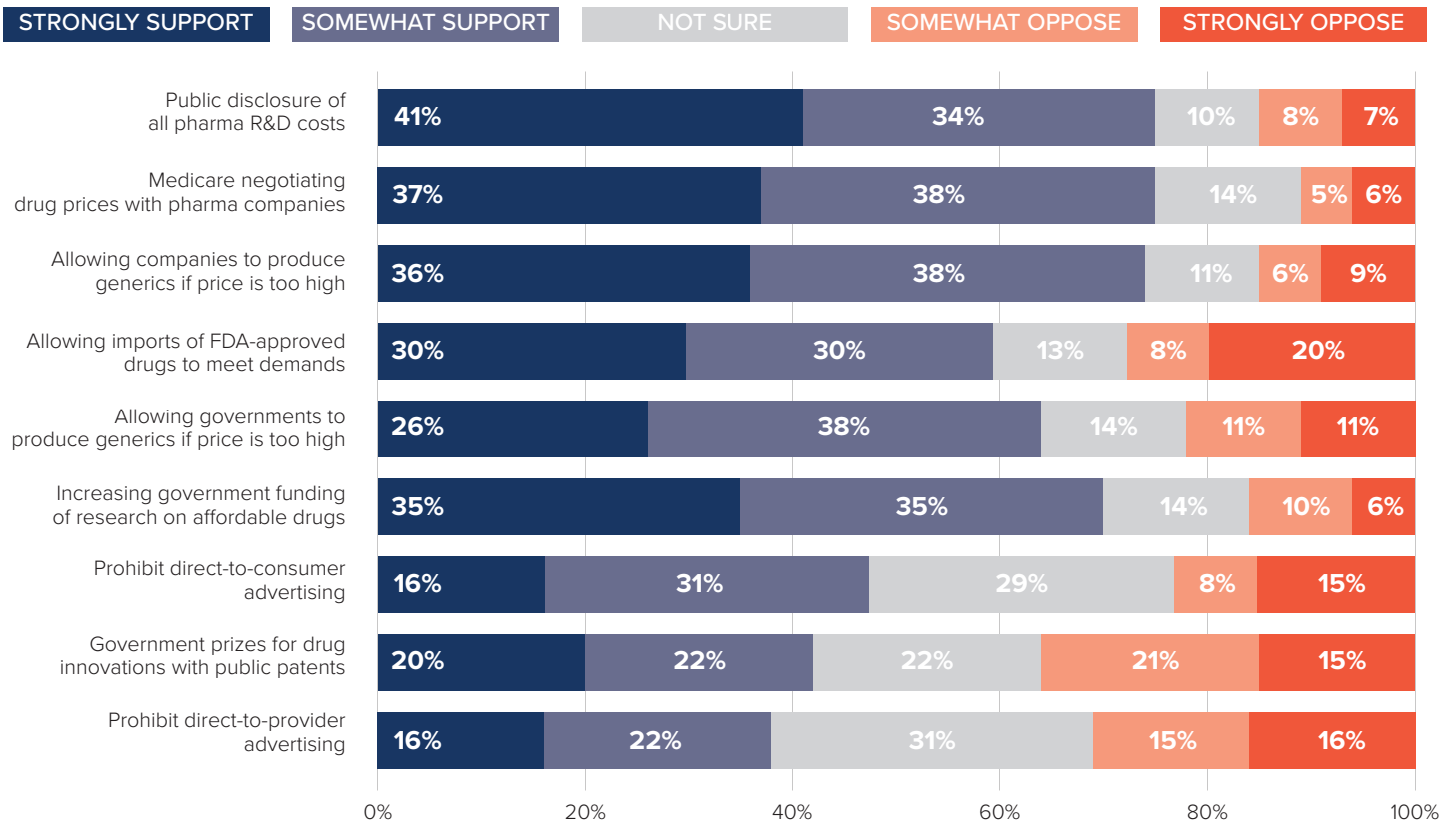
for each policy, for each partisanship group. The following plots show the same support/opposition breakdowns for Independent and Republican voters.

## PHARMACEUTICAL REFORM ITEMS SUPPORT INDEPENDENT/OTHER



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## PHARMACEUTICAL REFORM ITEMS SUPPORT REPUBLICAN



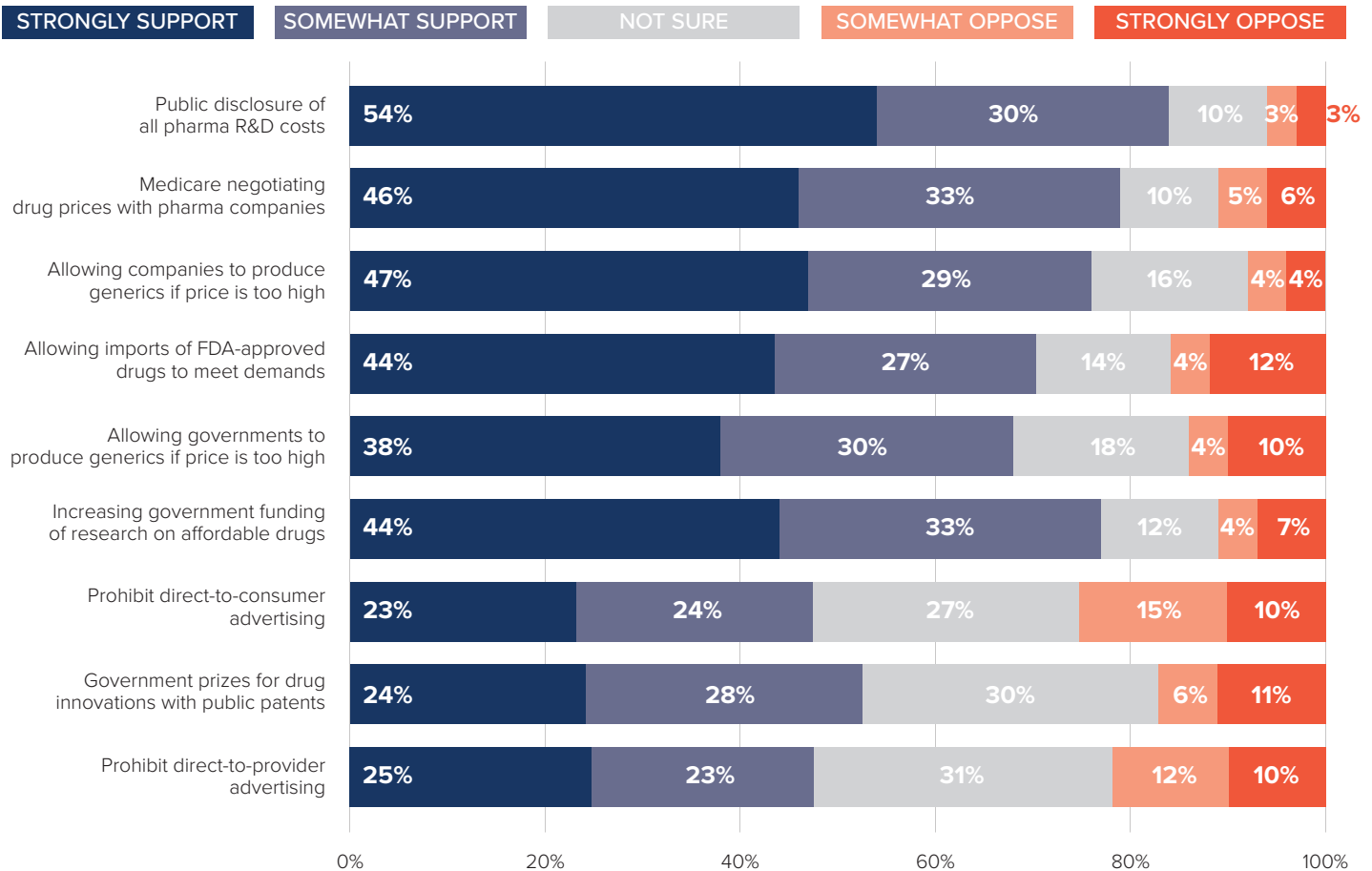
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We also note that uncertainty among respondents was relatively high, which is not surprising for a set of policies that have only recently come to the fore of public debate. Among registered voters and each subgroup, respondents reported being most unsure overall about the ideas of new government prizes for research and development, and prohibiting pharmaceutical advertising either to the public or to providers. Voters of every party identification bucket shared the same two most opposed policy items: “A policy prohibiting direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs” and “A policy prohibiting direct-to-provider advertising of prescription drugs.”

Compared to the other party identification breakdowns, Republican voters were more likely to report that they “Somewhat supported” policies whereas Democrats were more likely to use the “Strongly support option” for most policy items. And as one would expect, Independents and others used the “Not sure” option for all items combined more frequently, but not enough to disturb the general trend for support for each policy.

Notably, the policies we polled are particularly popular among respondents who live in a rural area. Fully seven of the nine policies we polled here had outright majority support among rural voters. Rural-area respondents on net clearly approve of each of these policies as well.

## PHARMACEUTICAL REFORM ITEMS SUPPORT “RURAL AREA”-DWELLING RESIDENTS



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### PARTISAN MESSAGE TESTS

Later in the survey, we included a message test to ascertain the framing effects of partisanship on support for reform to pharmaceutical manufacturing in the United States. This experiment is important because past work suggests that on relatively complex policy issues, partisan framing will dictate support for the policy. In other words, Republicans may support Democratic policies until they learn Democrats support those policies, and vice versa. Partisan framing strongly influences policy support and so we used this

experiment to study the robustness of policy support to this effect. We find that support for generic pharmaceutical manufacturing is influenced by but clearly robust to this effect.

In this experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to see whether “Republicans” opposed a given medical policy and “Democrats” supported it, or to see whether “Supporters” were arguing for a policy and “Opponents” were arguing against it. The purpose of this experiment was to see the effects of knowing the party identification of the supporters or proponents of a given theoretical piece

of legislation. The control group viewed the words “Some,” “Supporters,” and “Opponents,” respectively, in each of the three questions. The treatment group read each of the three questions with the words “Democrats,” “Democrats,” and “Republicans”, respectively. The two questions are listed as follows with the options for the message test texts in bold:

Support level for allowing the federal government to end a patent on a drug they deem too costly (Generic Competition):

*[Some OR Democrats] in Congress have proposed allowing the production of generic versions of life-saving drugs if the government determines that a drug company has raised prices beyond patients’ ability to pay. This would end the company’s patent on the drug and allow other companies to manufacture generic versions of the drug.*

*[Supporters OR Democrats] say that the proposal will reduce the cost of prescription drugs, ensuring all Americans can afford medicine without going into debt. [Opponents OR Republicans] say this will reduce the incentives for companies to invest in new innovations, ultimately resulting in fewer life-saving drugs. Would you [support or oppose] this policy?*

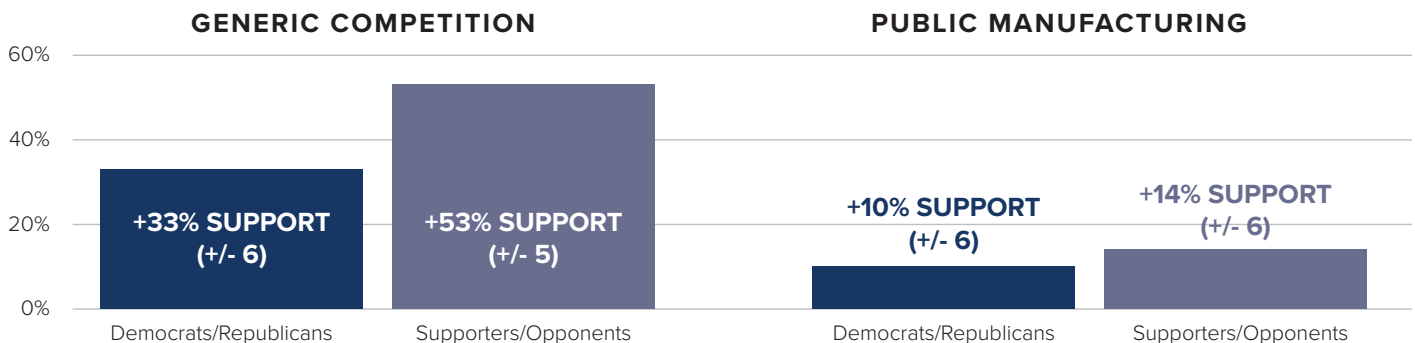
Support level for a publicly-owned drug company (Public Manufacturing):

*[Some OR Democrats] in Congress have proposed setting up a publicly-owned, not-for-profit drug company that would research, test, and manufacture pharmaceutical drugs. [Supporters OR Democrats] say that the proposal will reduce the cost of prescription drugs, ensuring all Americans can afford medicine without going into debt. [Opponents OR Republicans] say that this is a waste of taxpayer money and that the government can’t run a Department of Motor Vehicles correctly, much less a drug manufacturer. Would you [support or oppose] this policy?*

The following figure indicates support levels for the Generic Competition and Public Manufacturing items. Each bar represents those respondents who indicated the percent of respondents who “Somewhat” or “Strongly” support the policy minus those who “Somewhat” or “Strongly” oppose the policy, broken out into the “Democrats/Republicans” treatment group and the “Supporters/Opponents” control group.

Across the sample, permitting competition from generic producers of pharmaceuticals out-pollered creating a public generics manufacturer, but both on net poll positively. This finding is resilient to either telling voters which side of the issue Democrats and Republicans support, and to simply telling them that the policy has supporters and opponents.

## POLICY SUPPORT BY MESSAGE TEST SPLIT





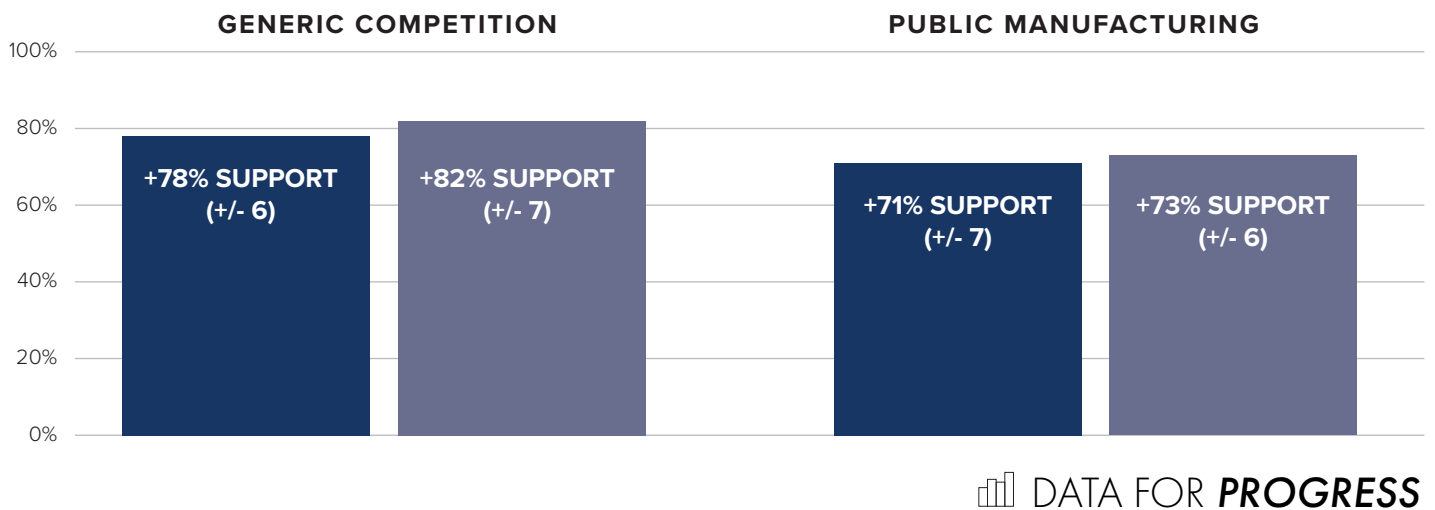
Among registered voters, the nonpartisan framing moved respondents in favor of both policies, though the difference in movement on the Public Manufacturing item is statistically marginal. As we present in the appendix, the topline result changes as one might expect by party identification: Democrats strongly favor both policies, Republicans strongly reject both policies, and Independents are split on both policies. Democrats moved marginally in favor of both policies when given the “supporters/opponents” framing,

and Republicans moved strongly in favor of both policies when given the “supporters/opponents” framing, compared to the partisan framing. Independents clearly favor the Generic Competition in both conditions, and are marginally against the Public Manufacturing item in both cases.

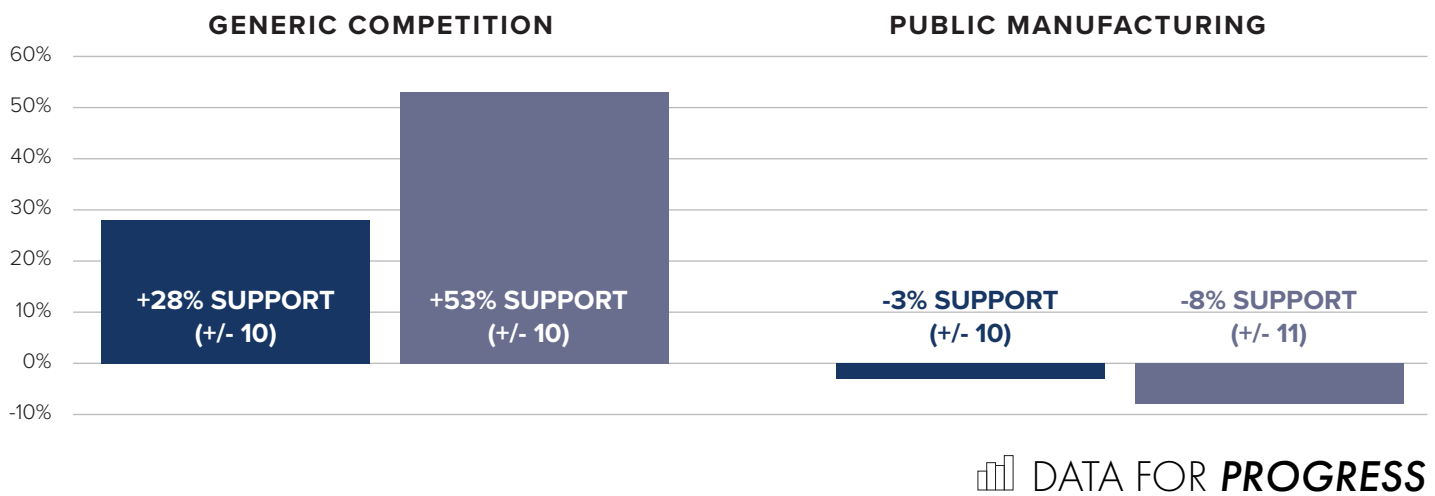
Policies that will reduce the cost of prescription drugs have strong support and even when these ideas face partisan opposition, they will remain broadly popular.

## APPENDIX: EXPERIMENT RESULTS BY PARTY IDENTIFICATION

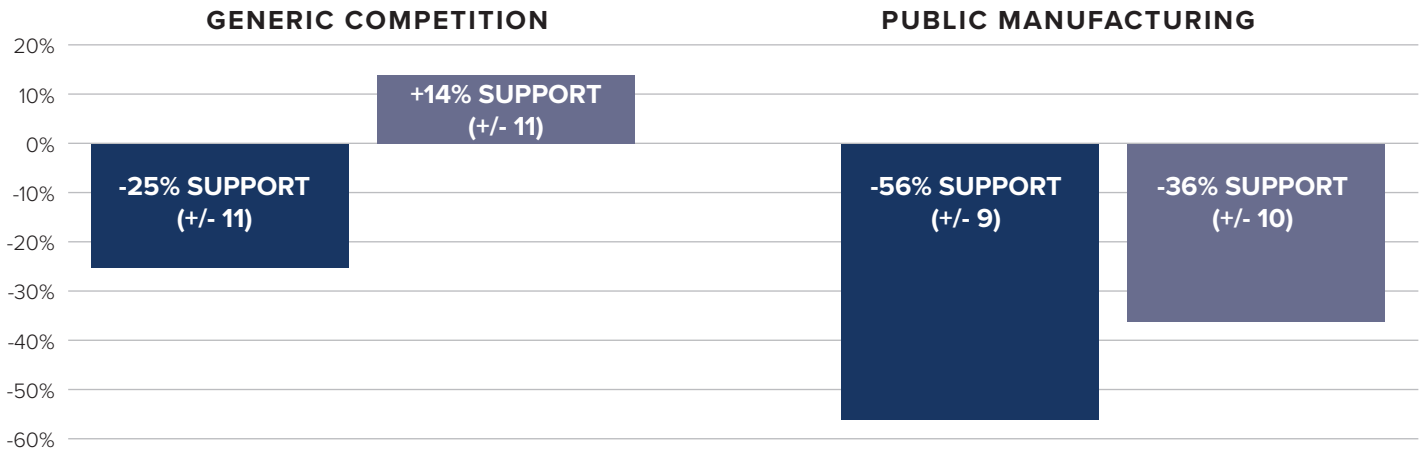
### POLICY SUPPORT BY MESSAGE TEST SPLIT (DEMOCRAT)



### POLICY SUPPORT BY MESSAGE TEST SPLIT (INDEPENDENT/OTHER)



## POLICY SUPPORT BY MESSAGE TEST SPLIT (REPUBLICAN)



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On behalf of Data for Progress, YouGov Blue fielded a survey on a sample of 1280 registered voters using YouGov's online panel. The survey fielded between September 11 and September 12, 2019, and was weighted to be representative of the national population of US voters by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, US census region, and 2016 Presidential vote choice. This survey included a module asking support levels for various pharmaceutical policy proposals. We also included two message testing experiments.