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VOTERS SUPPORT MORE GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES

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Over the last few years, the growing role that social media companies play in American life has become increasingly clear. Our polling shows that voters broadly enjoy using social media, and that this is true across partisan identification. Voters also support a new tax on social media companies and a requirement that social media companies make their algorithms public. Voters strongly oppose a private, digital currency.

Executive Summary

- ▶ A majority of voters enjoy using social media sites like Facebook, with very slight differences based on respondent's self-reported party ID.
- ▶ Most voters (53 percent) would prefer to use a digital currency devised by a public source like the government, with only 5 percent indicating they would prefer to use a digital currency from a private source. Notably, 41 percent of voters report being unsure about which of the two options they would prefer. This result holds across the partisan divide.
- ▶ Six out of ten voters support a policy requiring large social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to make public the algorithms that they use to serve ads in their platforms. A majority of Democrats (64 percent), independents (53 percent), and Republicans (58 percent) each support such a policy.

- ▶ Fifty-seven percent of voters support a new tax based on the size of social media companies. The policy has net support across all three groups: 54 percentage points among Democrats, 23 points among independents, and 12 points among Republicans.

Topline: Enjoyment of using social media sites like Facebook

We asked the following question to gauge voters' overall views on using social media sites like Facebook:

In general, would you say you [like or dislike] using social media sites like Facebook?

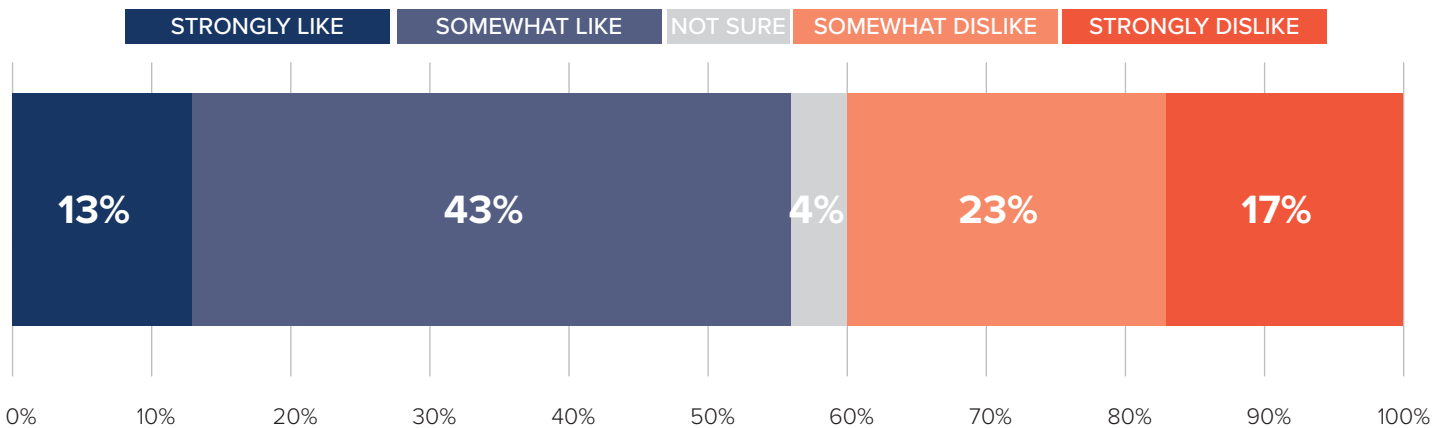
The response options for this question were a traditional five-point scale ranging from strongly like to strongly dislike.

A majority of respondents (56 percent) report that they either strongly or somewhat like using social media sites like Facebook, and 40 percent report disliking them—a net difference of 16 points. Only 4 percent of respondents reported being unsure about whether they like using social media sites.

The patterns are similar when looking at the results broken out by voters' self-reported party ID. Overall, voters from all three groups report liking social media

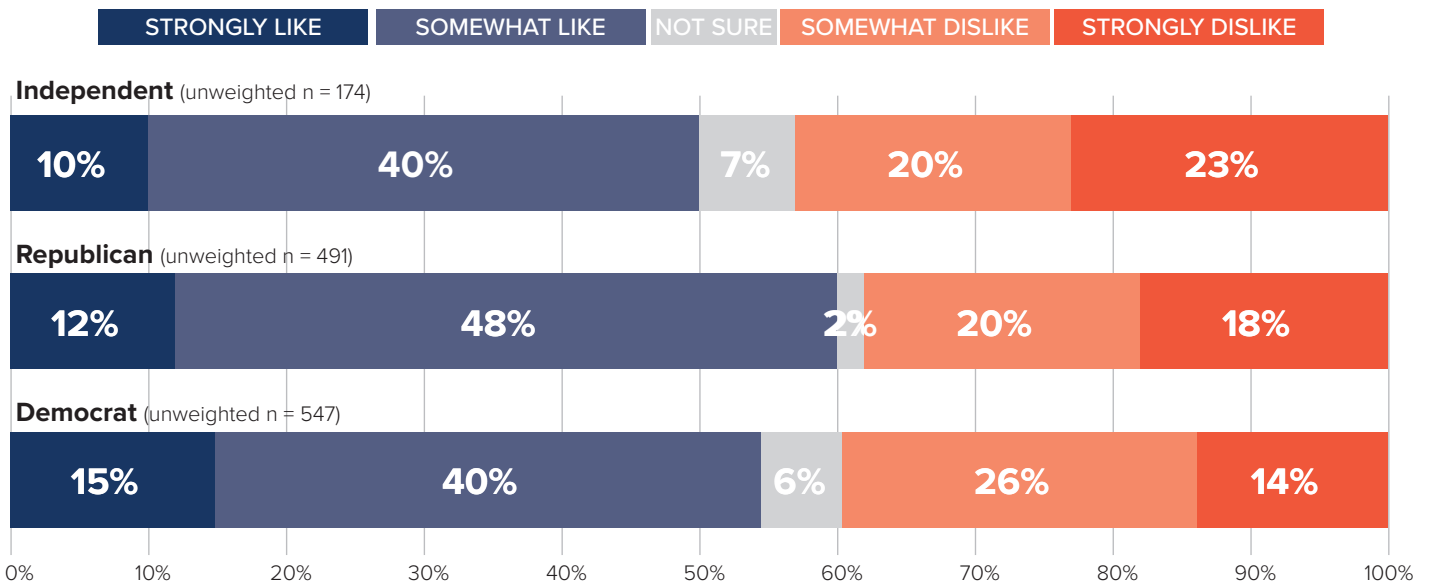
sites much more than they report disliking them (a net difference of 16 points among Democrats, 7 points among independents, and 22 points among Republicans). Note, however, that the percentage of voters who are unsure is larger among Democrats and Independents (6 percent and 7 percent, respectively) is larger than it is in the overall topline, with only about 2 percent of Republicans reporting that they are unsure in this item.

VIEWS ON USING SOCIAL MEDIA SITES LIKE FACEBOOK



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VIEWS ON USING SOCIAL MEDIA SITES LIKE FACEBOOK BY PARTY ID



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Topline: Views on adopting digital currencies

Voters were also asked a question about their views on whether they would adopt a digital currency. A digital currency differs from a traditional currency in that it exists only in electronic form, and in many cases, it is stored similarly to other digital assets, but its use is recorded in a decentralized ledger known as a “blockchain.” The question read as follows:

Lately, many people have been talking about the adoption of a purely digital currency, such as Bitcoin, which would be used to buy and sell goods like any currency but would only exist in digital form. If you were to start adopting new digital

currency instead of traditional currency like dollars, would you prefer to use currency devised by a private company like Facebook or a currency devised by a public source like the federal government?

Voters were given the following three options to answer this question:

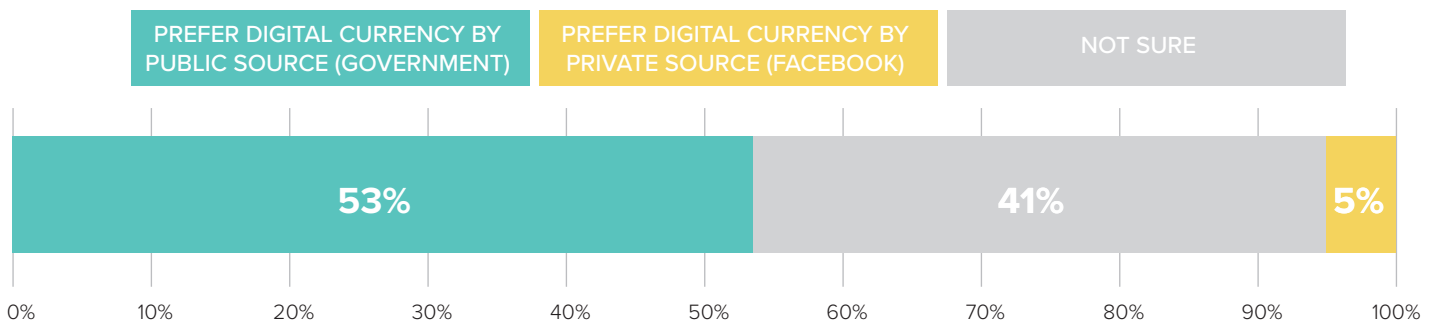
I would prefer to use a digital currency devised like a public source like the government

I would prefer to use a digital currency devised by a private source like Facebook

Not sure

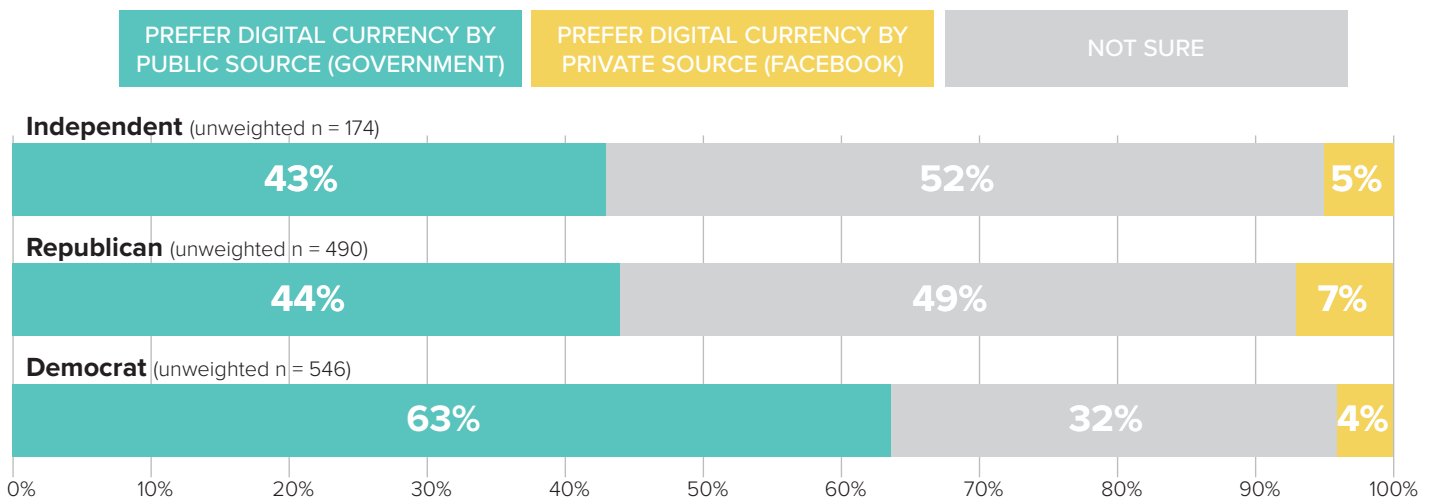
Overall, voters overwhelmingly prefer to use a government-devised digital currency over one created by a private source like Facebook. The majority of respondents

PRIVATE OR PUBLIC DIGITAL CURRENCIES?



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PRIVATE OR PUBLIC DIGITAL CURRENCIES BY PARTY ID



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(53 percent) would prefer to use a currency devised by a public source like the government, while only 5 percent of respondents would prefer to use a currency devised by a private company like Facebook. Notably, however, 41 percent of voters were unsure about which of these two options they would prefer. This high percentage of uncertain voters should give readers some caution in how strongly they should interpret the striking 48-point difference between the public and private options.

When breaking the responses out by voters' party ID, with partisan leaners assigned to the party that they lean toward, the results remain substantively the same. For example, 63 percent of Democratic voters would prefer the government-backed digital currency, while only 4 percent of them would prefer the private source, and 32 percent are unsure.

Independents and Republicans look statistically similar in this breakout; the amount of independent (43 percent) and Republican (44 percent) voters who are unsure is indistinguishable from one another. Similarly, both groups exhibit a significant gap of over 30 points between those who support using a public digital currency (43 percent of independents, 44 percent of Republicans) to those who would prefer using private one (5 percent of independents, 7 percent of Republicans).

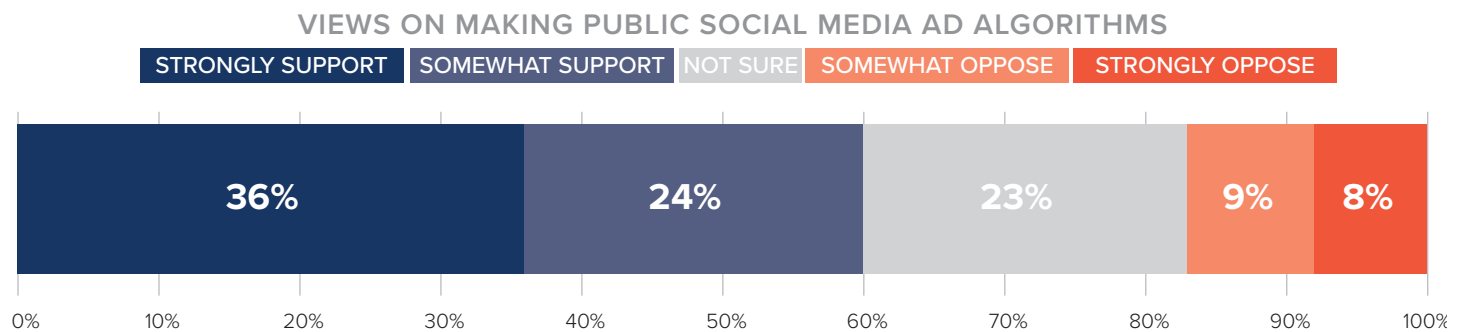
Topline: Views on a policy making social media companies' ad-serving algorithms public

In this survey, we also asked voters about their views on a hypothetical proposal to make social media ad-serving algorithms public. Using social media to target voters has been an important topic in American politics since the 2016 election. Understanding how people are chosen to receive a given advertisement is one potential means of addressing outside interference in American elections.

On our survey, the full question read as follows:

Would you [support or oppose] a policy requiring large social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to make public the algorithms they use to serve ads? This would reveal the strategies used to distribute advertisements on large social networks, which are private property.

The response options for this question were a traditional five-point scale ranging from strongly support to strongly oppose.



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Overall, voters support this proposal. Sixty percent either strongly or somewhat support making these algorithms public, with only 17 percent opposing this proposal—an overall net support of 43 points. However, nearly a quarter of respondents (23 percent) reported being unsure about whether they support or oppose making these algorithms public.

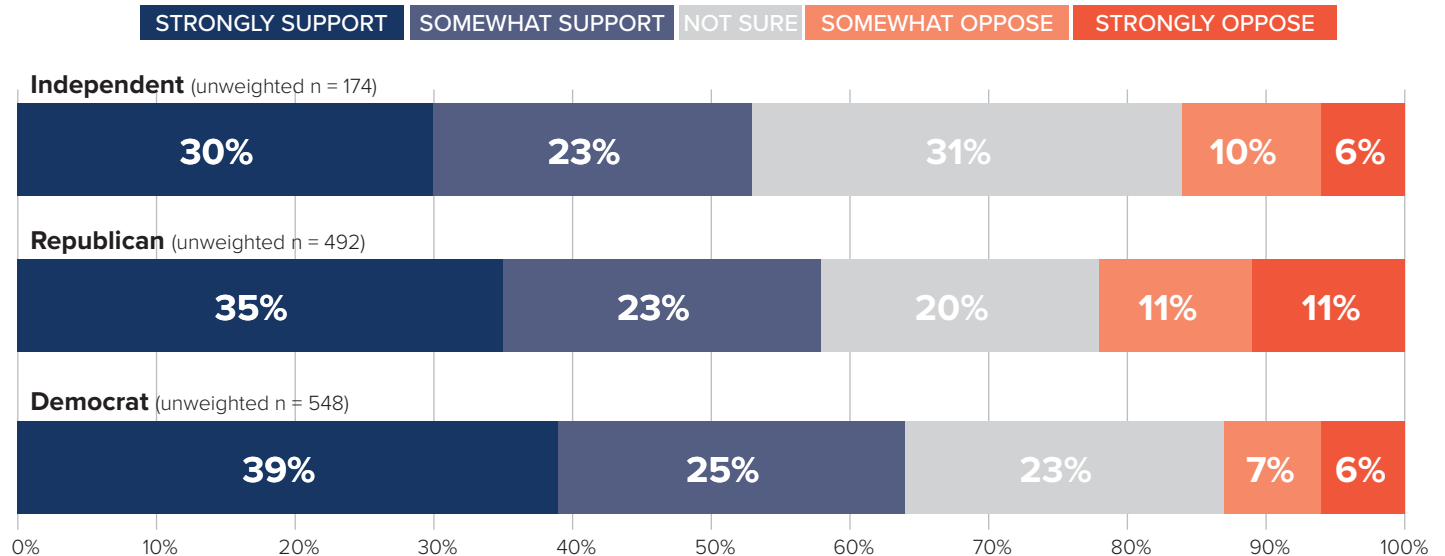
The party differences in this item are not very stark. A plurality of all parties—Democrats (64 percent), independents (53 percent), and Republicans (58 percent)—either somewhat or strongly support this policy.

Topline: Views on a policy imposing a new tax on size of social media sites

In this survey, we also asked voters about their views on a potential policy imposing a new tax based on the size of individual social media sites. The full question read as follows:

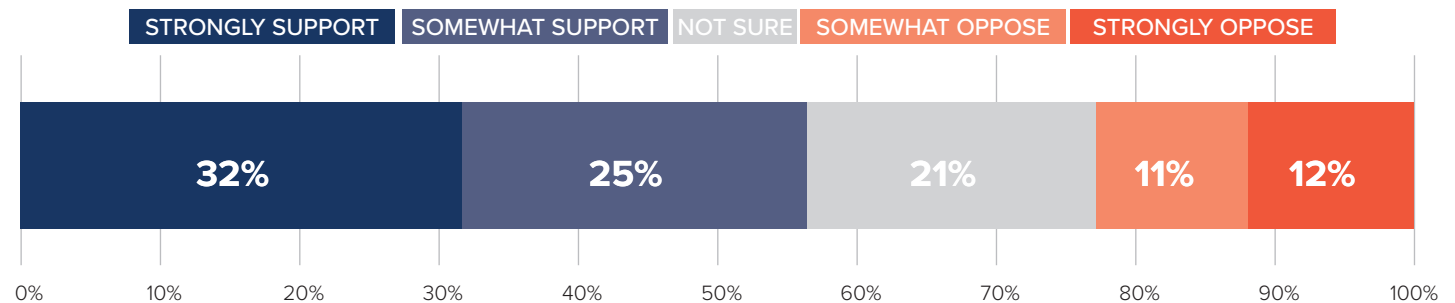
Would you [support or oppose] a policy imposing a new tax on the size of social media networks? This would require private businesses that run social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, to pay more in taxes as their number of users grow.

VIEWS ON MAKING PUBLIC SOCIAL MEDIA AD ALGORITHMS BY PARTY ID



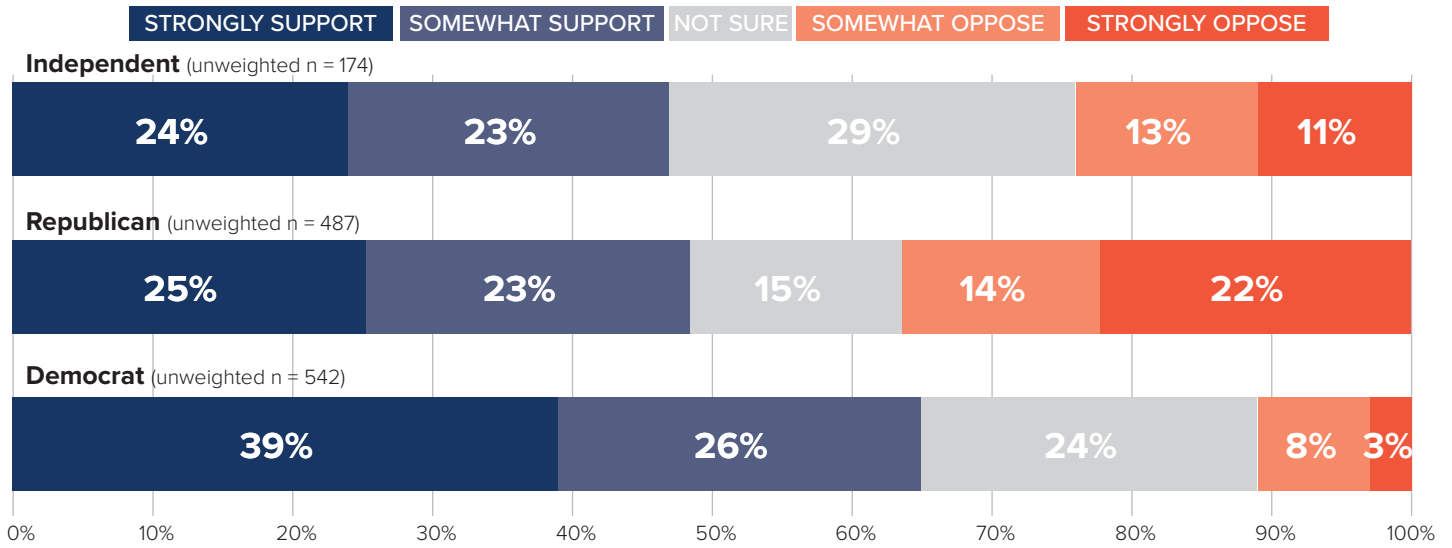
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VIEWS ON A POLICY IMPOSING A NEW TAX ON THE SIZE OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS



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VIEWES ON A POLICY IMPOSING A NEW TAX ON THE SIZE OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS BY PARTY ID



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A majority of respondents (57 percent) support this position, while 21 percent are unsure, and only 23 percent oppose it. This policy also enjoys net support across all three groups: 54 percentage points among Democrats, 23 percentage points among independents, and 12 points among Republicans.

Conclusion

Large social media companies, like Facebook, have come under increasing public scrutiny as their impact on American society becomes increasingly clear. We find that voters do not support Facebook’s proposed idea of a privately owned digital currency. We find support among voters for a tax on large social media companies, and a requirement that their algorithms be made public.

Methods

On behalf of Data for Progress, YouGov Blue fielded a national survey on YouGov’s online panel on a sample that included 1,216 US voters. The survey fielded from November 9 through November 11, 2019. The results were weighted to be representative of the population of US voters by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, US Census region, and 2016 presidential vote choice.

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