

# AMERICANS' PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW CONGRESS IN 2019

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**POLITICO**



**HARVARD**  
**T.H. CHAN**  
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## SUMMARY

Approaching the start of the upcoming term of the 2019 Congress, a new poll by POLITICO and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health shows the public's top priorities for the next Congress. They are: taking action to lower prescription drug prices, taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit, increasing spending on the nation's infrastructure, increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender, taking more action to address the opioid epidemic, and increasing federal spending on K-12 public education.

Despite recent national and international scientific reports of the increasingly serious threat of climate change, the issue does not rank among the public's top six priorities for congressional action.

In addition, the poll finds little support for Congress prioritizing the impeachment of President Trump in the next session. But the poll does find majority support for Congress investigating possible wrongdoing in regard to the President's personal investments and taxes. A majority also favors the continuation of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into possible illegal Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

## PART I: PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW CONGRESS

In January 2019 the new Congress will convene following the November 2018 election, which saw the Democrats gain a majority of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time since Republicans gained control in 2010, while the Republicans maintained control of the U.S. Senate.

A new poll by POLITICO and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health asked Americans about their priorities for the new Congress in 2019. Respondents were given a list of 21 domestic policy areas identified in the media and in the recent congressional campaigns as potential priority action items for the new Congress. Because Congress can only take action on a few of them at a time, people were asked whether or not each of the areas should be an "extremely important" priority.

The top six extremely important priorities for the public as a whole, as shown in Table 1, are: taking action to lower prescription drug prices, taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit, increasing spending on the nation's infrastructure, increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender, taking more action to address the opioid epidemic, and increasing federal spending on K-12 public education.

**Table 1. Americans’ Top Priorities for the New Congress, by Party Identification**

Rank	Total		Democrats		Republicans	
	Priority	% saying “extremely important”	Priority	% saying “extremely important”	Priority	% saying “extremely important”
1	Taking action to lower prescription drug prices	80	Taking action to lower prescription drug prices	90	Taking action to lower prescription drug prices	82
2	Taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit	80	Increasing spending and regulation to improve the environment and reduce climate change	89	Restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S.	82
3	Increasing spending on the nation’s infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and airports	79	Renewing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, or DACA, which grants temporary legal status to people brought to the US illegally as children	88	Taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit	81
4	Increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender	75	Changing the newly enacted tax law so it does more for middle income individuals and less for upper-income individuals and businesses	88	Increasing spending on the nation’s infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and airports	81
5	Taking more national action to address the opioid epidemic	74	Increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender	85	Enacting President Trump’s new trade agreement with Canada and Mexico	77
6	Increasing federal spending on K-12 public education	73	Increasing federal spending on K-12 public education	84	Taking more national action to address the opioid epidemic	71

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans’ Priorities for the New Congress in 2019, December 4 – 9, 2018. Base: U.S. adults.

Taking action to lower prescription drug prices is at the top of the priority list for both Democrats and Republicans. However, the list of top priorities differs considerably between adherents of the two parties, reflecting the continuing partisan divisions in the country.

For Democrats, the other top priorities, aside from prescription drug prices, are increasing spending and regulation to improve the environment and reduce climate change, renewing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, changing the newly enacted tax law so it does more for middle class individuals and less for upper-income individuals and businesses, increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes, and increasing federal spending on K-12 education spending.

For Republicans, the other top priorities, aside from prescription drug prices, are restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S., taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit, increasing spending on the nation's infrastructure, enacting President Trump's new trade agreement with Canada and Mexico, and taking more national action to address the opioid epidemic.

These differences are likely to be reflected in actions taken by the new Democratic House leadership and the returning Senate Republican leadership.

“It is important to recognize that Americans have shifted their priorities since the election,” said Robert J. Blendon, co-director of the survey and the Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “Addressing high drug prices and reducing the federal deficit were not the top voting issues. But they are now top public priorities for action by the new Congress.”

In two areas related to health and health care – trying to lower prescription drug prices and taking more national action to address the opioid epidemic – there appears to be an opportunity for bipartisan action. These areas are seen as extremely important priorities for congressional action by more than seven in ten Democrats and Republicans. In addition, more than eight in ten adherents of both parties see increased infrastructure spending as extremely important. While both Democrats and Republicans place a high priority on reducing the federal budget deficit, the poll results suggest there is unlikely to be agreement on how that goal would be achieved.

The results also show that Democrats and Republicans have wide differences in their priorities for dealing with the immigration issue. The gap is also wide when it comes to increasing spending and regulation to improve the environment and reduce climate change.

## PART II: INVESTIGATIONS OF ISSUES RELATING TO PRESIDENT TRUMP

The poll finds that the public places a low priority on congressional efforts to impeach President Trump at this time (tied for last among 21 issues, with 38% saying it should be an extremely important priority).

In addition, the poll asked Americans their views about future investigations, by the new Congress and by the special counsel, of issues relating to President Trump.

As shown in Table 2, about six in ten (62%) believe that the special counsel investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election and possible links to the Trump campaign should continue, while 37% think it should end.

**Table 2. Americans' Views About Investigations of Issues Relating to President Trump, by Party Identification**

	Total	Democrats	Republicans
Special counsel investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election and possible links to the Trump campaign...			
Should continue	62	88	35
Should end	37	12	64
Congress more fully investigating...			
President Trump's investments and taxes			
Favor	58	82	29
Oppose	39	16	69
Allegations about newly appointed Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh			
Favor	47	73	25
Oppose	48	20	71

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans' Priorities for the New Congress in 2019, December 4 – 9, 2018. Base: U.S. adults.

Some members of Congress have suggested the need to have Congress more fully investigate a number of issues relating to President Trump. About six in ten Americans (58%) favor the Congress more fully investigating President Trump's investments and taxes, while 39% are opposed. Less than half (47%) of the public favors more fully investigating allegations about newly appointed Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, while 48% are opposed.

There is a wide partisan divide in attitudes about all three of these current and potential investigations. More than seven in ten Democrats favor each of these investigations, while two-thirds or more Republicans are opposed.

## METHODOLOGY

The results are based on polling conducted by *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Representatives of the two organizations worked closely to develop the survey questionnaires and analyze the results of the polls. *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health paid for the surveys and related expenses.

The project team was led by Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Joanne Kenen, Executive Editor, Health Care at *Politico/Politico Pro*. Harvard research team also included John M. Benson and Justin M. Sayde.

Interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,014 randomly selected adults, ages 18 and older, via telephone (including cell phones and landlines) by SSRS of Glen Mills, Pennsylvania. The interviewing period was December 4 – 9, 2018. The data were weighted to reflect the demographics of the national adult population as described by the U.S. Census.

When interpreting these findings, one should recognize that all surveys are subject to sampling error. Results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole U.S. adult population had been interviewed. The margin of error for the full sample is  $\pm 3.6$  percentage points. For questions asked of half-samples, the margin of error is  $\pm 5.1$  percentage points.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases and for variations in probability of selection within and across households, sample data are weighted by household size, cell phone/landline use and demographics (sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, and region) to reflect the true population. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.



**Politico/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Poll**

**AMERICANS’ PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW CONGRESS IN 2019**

This survey was conducted for *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health via telephone by SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone (cell phone and landline) **December 4 – 9, 2018**, among a nationally representative sample of **1,014 U.S. adults**. The margin of error for total respondents is  $\pm 3.6$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For questions asked of half-samples, the margin of error is  $\pm 5.1$  percentage points. More information about SSRS can be obtained by visiting [www.ssrs.com](http://www.ssrs.com).

**PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW CONGRESS**

POLQ1. The new Congress faces a number of choices as it sets priorities. Here is a list of some things the new Congress could act on. Because they can only take action on a few of them at a time, we are only asking whether or not you think each of the following should be an EXTREMELY IMPORTANT priority. How about... (INSERT ITEM)? Should that be an EXTREMELY IMPORTANT priority or not?

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=508)**

- a. Enacting stricter gun laws

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
<b>Total</b>	55	42	3
<b>Dems</b>	80	15	5
<b>Reps</b>	35	65	*
<b>Inds</b>	49	49	2

**(Asked of half-sample A ; n=508)**

- b. Trying again to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
<b>Total</b>	50	47	3
<b>Dems</b>	44	55	1
<b>Reps</b>	57	41	2
<b>Inds</b>	51	46	3

**(Asked of half-sample A ; n=508)**

c. Taking more national action to address the opioid epidemic

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
<b>Total</b>	74	21	5
<b>Dems</b>	78	17	5
<b>Reps</b>	71	25	4
<b>Inds</b>	76	21	3

**(Asked of half-sample A ; n=508)**

d. Restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S.

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know
<b>Total</b>	56	41	3
<b>Dems</b>	34	58	8
<b>Reps</b>	82	18	*
<b>Inds</b>	58	41	1

**(Asked of half-sample A ; n=508)**

e. Taking steps to make sure abortion is legal in all or most cases

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
<b>Total</b>	47	50	3
<b>Dems</b>	63	34	3
<b>Reps</b>	28	71	1
<b>Inds</b>	48	49	3

**(Asked of half-sample A ; n=508)**

f. Increasing spending and regulation to improve the environment and reduce climate change

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
<b>Total</b>	69	29	3
<b>Dems</b>	89	8	3
<b>Reps</b>	37	62	1
<b>Inds</b>	74	25	1



**(Asked of half-sample A; n=508)**

g. Taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	80	18	2
<b>Dems</b>	76	22	2
<b>Reps</b>	81	18	1
<b>Inds</b>	84	15	1

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=508)**

h. Impeaching President Trump

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	38	57	5
<b>Dems</b>	64	32	4
<b>Reps</b>	14	83	3
<b>Inds</b>	34	62	4

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=508)**

i. Investigating President Trump's investments and taxes

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	53	45	2
<b>Dems</b>	80	17	3
<b>Reps</b>	23	74	3
<b>Inds</b>	50	48	2

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=508)**

j. Decreasing federal regulation of business

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	46	50	4
<b>Dems</b>	38	53	9
<b>Reps</b>	56	43	1
<b>Inds</b>	47	49	4

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

k. Taking action to lower prescription drug prices

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	80	20	*
<b>Dems</b>	90	10	-
<b>Reps</b>	82	17	1
<b>Inds</b>	75	25	*

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

l. Fixing problems in the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	71	23	6
<b>Dems</b>	82	13	5
<b>Reps</b>	62	35	3
<b>Inds</b>	72	22	6

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

m. Changing the newly enacted tax law so it does more for middle income individuals and less for upper-income individuals and businesses

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	72	24	4
<b>Dems</b>	88	11	1
<b>Reps</b>	59	39	2
<b>Inds</b>	72	25	3

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

n. Increasing spending on the nation's infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and airports

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	79	20	1
<b>Dems</b>	82	17	1
<b>Reps</b>	81	18	1
<b>Inds</b>	78	22	*

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

- o. Renewing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, or DACA, which grants temporary legal status to people brought to the US illegally as children

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	66	28	6
<b>Dems</b>	88	9	3
<b>Reps</b>	56	41	3
<b>Inds</b>	62	31	7

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

- p. Increasing national defense spending

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	53	44	3
<b>Dems</b>	46	53	1
<b>Reps</b>	68	30	2
<b>Inds</b>	49	46	5

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

- q. Enacting President Trump's new trade agreement with Canada and Mexico

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	58	32	10
<b>Dems</b>	47	47	6
<b>Reps</b>	77	18	5
<b>Inds</b>	57	29	14

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

- r. Taking steps to make sure abortion is illegal in all or most cases

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	38	60	2
<b>Dems</b>	33	65	2
<b>Reps</b>	44	53	3
<b>Inds</b>	38	61	1

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

- s. Increasing federal spending on K-12 public education

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	73	24	3
<b>Dems</b>	84	14	2
<b>Reps</b>	65	33	2
<b>Inds</b>	75	24	1

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

- t. Blocking or limiting President Trump's future policy decisions, such as health care, immigration, and the environment and climate change

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	60	36	4
<b>Dems</b>	82	14	4
<b>Reps</b>	44	54	2
<b>Inds</b>	56	40	4

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=506)**

- u. Increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender

	<b>Yes, should be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>No, should NOT be an extremely important priority</b>	<b>Don't know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	75	23	2
<b>Dems</b>	85	14	1
<b>Reps</b>	64	35	1
<b>Inds</b>	75	23	2

**Summary (% saying each of the following should be an “extremely important” priority)**

<sup>a</sup> = asked of half-sample A, n=508; <sup>b</sup> = asked of half-sample B, n=506

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Taking action to lower prescription drug prices <sup>b</sup>	80	90	82	75
Taking steps to substantially reduce the federal budget deficit <sup>a</sup>	80	76	81	84
Increasing spending on the nation’s infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and airports <sup>b</sup>	79	82	81	78
Increasing efforts to reduce the number of hate crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, or gender <sup>b</sup>	75	85	64	75
Taking more national action to address the opioid epidemic <sup>a</sup>	74	78	71	76
Increasing federal spending on K-12 public education <sup>b</sup>	73	84	65	75
Changing the newly enacted tax law so it does more for middle income individuals and less for upper-income individuals and businesses <sup>b</sup>	72	88	59	72
Fixing problems in the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare <sup>b</sup>	71	82	62	72
Increasing spending and regulation to improve the environment and reduce climate change <sup>a</sup>	69	89	37	74
Renewing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, or DACA, which grants temporary legal status to people brought to the US illegally as children <sup>b</sup>	66	88	56	62
Blocking or limiting President Trump’s future policy decisions, such as health care, immigration, and the environment and climate change <sup>b</sup>	60	82	44	56
Enacting President Trump’s new trade agreement with Canada and Mexico <sup>b</sup>	58	47	77	57
Restricting unauthorized immigration into the U.S. <sup>a</sup>	56	34	82	58
Enacting stricter gun laws	55	80	35	49
Investigating President Trump’s investments and taxes <sup>a</sup>	53	80	23	50
Increasing national defense spending <sup>b</sup>	53	46	68	49
Trying again to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare <sup>a</sup>	50	44	57	51
Taking steps to make sure abortion is legal in all or most cases <sup>a</sup>	47	63	28	48
Decreasing federal regulation of business <sup>a</sup>	46	38	56	47
Impeaching President Trump <sup>a</sup>	38	64	14	34
Taking steps to make sure abortion is illegal in all or most cases <sup>b</sup>	38	33	44	38

**INVESTIGATIONS**

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=508)**

POLQ2. Some members of Congress have suggested the need to have Congress more fully investigate a number of issues relating to President Trump. Do you favor or oppose Congress more fully investigating each of the following? (INSERT ITEM)

- a. President Trump’s investments and taxes

	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>Don’t know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	58	39	3
<b>Dems</b>	82	16	2
<b>Reps</b>	29	69	2
<b>Inds</b>	58	41	1

- b. Allegations about newly appointed Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh

	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>Don’t know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	47	48	5
<b>Dems</b>	73	20	7
<b>Reps</b>	25	71	4
<b>Inds</b>	44	54	2

- c. Possible Russian involvement in the 2016 election

	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>Don’t know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	60	37	3
<b>Dems</b>	83	15	2
<b>Reps</b>	33	67	*
<b>Inds</b>	61	36	3

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=508)**

POLQ3. A special counsel is currently conducting an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election and possible links with the Trump campaign. Should the Russia investigation continue or should it end?

	<b>Investigation should continue</b>	<b>Investigation should end</b>	<b>Don’t know/ Refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	62	37	1
<b>Dems</b>	88	12	*
<b>Reps</b>	35	64	1
<b>Inds</b>	59	39	2