AMERICA in ONE ROOM

Dallas, Texas | *September 19-22, 2019*

HELENA

Stanford | Center for Deliberative Democracy

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By the People

AMERICA in ONE ROOM

We will bring America together in one room — not the whole country, of course, but a statistical microcosm of America, selected via random sampling. This representative sample of the American public will meet for a weekend, to discuss in depth the issues and the candidates in the 2020 campaign. Instead of being one voice among millions, each of the randomly selected voters will know that his or her voice will matter in a sample of several hundred and in small group discussions of a dozen or so. They will feel the responsibility to take the issues and the viewpoints of others seriously.

Stanford University
Center for Deliberative Democracy

Dear Participants:

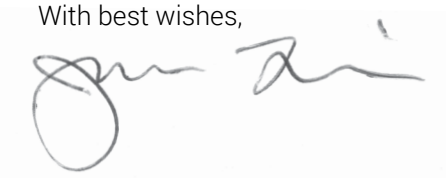
It is our pleasure to welcome you to this remarkable experiment in American democracy, America in One Room. You have the privilege of being one of roughly 500 Americans scientifically selected to represent the entire country in Dallas, Texas, from September 19 to 22. During these few days, you will join your fellow Americans in discussing the issues confronting the US in the 2020 presidential campaign, and in hearing presidential candidates and representatives of both parties discuss those issues in response to your questions and concerns.

We call this type of gathering a "Deliberative Poll." You have already answered survey questions about the issues and the candidates in the 2020 campaign. In Dallas, you will discuss your views with other Americans who also have been randomly selected to represent the whole country. To help prepare you to discuss the issues, we have produced this briefing book. It contains background analysis and competing arguments for and against different policy proposals on five issues: the economy, health care, the environment, immigration, and foreign policy. Each issue briefing brings together different points of view. Each has benefited from the input of diverse experts, some conservative, some liberal, some Republicans, some Democrats, and some independents.

We recognize this is a long document, but we have tried to make it as useful as possible. First, we present short summaries on each of the five issues. We recommend that you read these summaries first, before you arrive in Dallas. We hope all of you will read the entire document, but we realize people's time will vary. Please do not worry if you do not get the chance to read the document before arrival. The longer issue briefings are organized so that the background analysis of each issue comes first, followed by a set of boxes that list each issue proposal and the arguments for and against. These are the issues that you were surveyed on recently and will be again at the end of the event. We hope you will read the competing arguments in the boxes before your group deliberations on the issues, but you can also make reference to them during the group discussions. You will receive a hard copy of this document when you arrive.

We realize that you are giving up a long weekend to participate in this unique dialogue. We thank you deeply for your time and for the commitment you are expressing to our democracy. We look forward to meeting you.

With best wishes,



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THE ECONOMY AND TAXES

The Issue

While the US economy continues to grow in its longest period of expansion ever, many Americans feel economically insecure. Growth is not as high as in prior decades, the US government is saddled with more debt than ever, and the rebound after the 2008 financial downturn still left many people out in the cold. Wealth and income inequality, especially for the less educated and underprivileged, is increasing. Some say that the government should be more active in the economy to close the inequality gap by funding key educational and social programs. Others say that lower taxes, free markets and individual achievement — not more government regulation — are the primary factors that drive prosperity. Below are examples of policy proposals from the full-length document on this issue:

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Should the US impose a wealth tax on the richest taxpayers, requiring them to pay a small portion of their wealth each year in taxes?	This tax would affect a limited number of people, those with millions of dollars in wealth, and would help fund social services and reduce the national deficit.	The top 1% already pays 37% of all federal income taxes. Several European governments gave up on a wealth tax because measuring wealth is complex and costly.
Would it be best to increase the federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour to $15 per hour?	Raising the minimum wage to $15 per hour would increase the wages for millions of under-privileged people and help lift them out of poverty.	This policy could hurt those very workers it intends to help, as businesses may respond by laying off some of these workers or by investing in technology to replace them.
Should the government fund a bond for each child born until the child turns 18 so they can use these funds for higher education or other essentials to start life?	Baby bonds would give all young adults, regardless of race, religion, or other characteristics, a fair start in their adult life by helping them pay for higher education etc.	The payments to children would have to be paid for, likely with higher income taxes, and there's no way to ensure people spend it wisely.
Would a Universal Basic Income program, offering adults older than 18 cash grants of about $1,000 per month, for example, be best for America?	Universal cash grants would help reduce poverty efficiently by giving people support for basic expenses and letting them decide how the money would best be spent.	Cash grants would need to be funded somehow, likely with new taxes, and this could reduce the incentive to work, people may not use the money wisely.
Should the US government lower the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15%?	Reducing the corporate tax rate further would make the US an even more attractive place to do business, possibly boosting employment, jobs and the economy.	The 2017 rate cut from 35% to 21% was already drastic and did not help workers, only corporations. Another cut would hike the national debt, already at a record high.

HEALTH CARE

The Issue

Most Americans receive their health care through employer-sponsored health insurance plans, while retirees are eligible for government-sponsored Medicare and lower-income people have access to Medicaid. When the Affordable Care Act (ACA, or "Obamacare") was passed in 2010, nearly 47 million Americans were without health insurance. That number declined to around 27 million by the end of 2017. Today, the debate revolves around accessibility, choice and affordability of health care. Some believe that federal government should take a leading role in promoting coverage for as many people as possible, while others say that individual choice in the health marketplace and more private-sector insurance options would be a better approach. Below are examples of policy proposals from the full-length document on this issue:

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Should the Affordable Care Act (ACA, or "Obamacare") be repealed and/or replaced?	People have the right to buy their preferred insurance, they shouldn't be forced to subsidize others, and the role of the federal government in health care should be limited.	Thanks to the ACA, more than 20 million additional Americans have health insurance today, and coverage is now ensured for Americans with preexisting health conditions.
Should all Americans automatically be enrolled in "Medicare for All," which is a "single-payer" government health insurance system?	One health care plan for all Americans would ensure everyone has access to quality coverage, and it would reduce health costs by letting the federal government set prices.	Medicare for All would be financed by large new taxes on everyone, not just on the wealthy, and it would deprive people of the right to choose their own private plans.
Should people aged 55-64 also have the option of purchasing Medicare, known as "Medicare at 55?"	Americans aged 55-64 are likely healthier and less expensive to add to Medicare compared to those 65-plus, so this could drive down Medicare costs overall.	This policy would be a way for the government to eventually put everyone on Medicare, and such an expansion may water-down services for current recipients.
Would it be better if Medicare could negotiate pharmaceutical prices?	Lower drug prices would produce savings for both consumers and the government, but under current federal law, Medicare is not allowed to negotiate drug prices.	The US government might not negotiate better drug prices than private payers, and if prices are set too low, it may reduce market innovations for new drugs.
Should the federal government change the patent system so generic drugs can more quickly be brought to the marketplace and available to consumers?	Promoting more competition in pharmaceutics could result in lower prices, and the production of generic drugs should be encouraged to the fullest extent.	Such a policy may reduce the incentive to develop new drugs. When generics compete with brand name drugs, firms that own the brand drug make a smaller profit.

ENVIRONMENT

The Issue

In prior decades, environmental policy debates in America focused on how to achieve clean water, clean air, and better protections for national parks and wildlife. In recent years, however, climate change has become a central issue. In 2016, the US government signed the Paris Agreement, a framework for tackling climate change agreed to by nearly all of the world's nations. In 2017, the US government announced it would withdraw from the treaty. Most scientists say the increase of "greenhouse gases," produced from burning fossil fuels like oil and gas, is warming our climate and posing dangers to humankind and ecosystems. Critics say over-reacting to global warming would prove ineffective and result in higher taxes, reduced consumer choices, and an economic slowdown. Below are examples of policy proposals from the full-length document on this issue:

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Should the US re-commit to the 2014 Paris Agreement to confront climate change on a global basis?	Climate change is a crisis that demands international cooperation for humanity's future, and the US is a leading contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions.	The Paris Agreement is harmful to American energy competitiveness, and it would prove costly for the US economy and ineffective in curbing greenhouse gases.
Should the US adopt a Green New Deal for major investments in mass rapid transit, energy-efficient buildings, and renewable energy?	A bold, visionary initiative is needed to transform America into an economy based on renewable energy. This would also create more jobs for working people.	The Green New Deal represents a massive increase in government taxes and spending that will reduce individual freedom and distort the energy marketplace.
Would it be best if the US mandated zero or low-carbon emission for cars, trucks, and buses?	This is a concrete step to reduce carbon emissions, and it would help the country move toward the type of energy transformation needed to avoid climate catastrophe.	Such a dramatic change over a short timeline is unrealistic and represents an unnecessary government intrusion into the economy.
Should the US expand domestic oil and gas production?	Continued expansion can ensure an abundant supply of energy, enhance U.S. energy security, increase prosperity and jobs, and lower energy prices for consumers.	Whether in the US or abroad, the continued expansion of oil and gas production increases carbon emissions, which is causing global climate change.
Should the federal government encourage hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking?"	An innovation like fracking creates new jobs, boosts US energy independence, and lessens the reliance on dirtier forms of energy like coal-burning power plants.	Fracking increases greenhouse gas emissions and also leads to the contamination of drinking water and other serious risks to community health.

IMMIGRATION

The Issue

Immigration has been a touchstone of American political debate for decades, as policymakers have weighed economic, security, and humanitarian concerns. The Trump Administration believes too much immigration is dangerous and costly, and has undertaken actions to curb it, including building a border wall with Mexico, deporting undocumented immigrants, and banning visas for people from some predominantly Muslim countries. Others say that America began as a nation of immigrants, that immigration brings in workers for all types of jobs, and Congress could fix the issue through comprehensive reforms. Below are examples of policy proposals from the full-length document on this issue:

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Should Congress increase spending for US immigration personnel in order to process immigration claims faster?	The US needs more immigration judges and officers, as the system is overwhelmed by the record number of Central American asylum seekers at the southern border.	These funds could be better spent on Americans or assisting Central American countries whose desperate economies are causing mass migrations to the US.
Would it be best if the US reduced the number of refugees allowed to resettle in this country?	The US government has a special responsibility for the welfare of Americans, and it should not spend resources on foreigners when many Americans remain in need.	Other countries proportionally resettle many more refugees than the US, and we should not fail our moral responsibility to help those in danger.
Should the federal government increase the number of visas for highly skilled workers?	Attracting more highly skilled immigrants to work in the United States would help to boost innovation and productivity in the US economy.	The US government should pursue policies to increase the home-grown pool of skilled workers instead of relying on migrant labor.
Should the US government expel first-time violators of immigration laws and subject them to criminal punishment?	A policy of criminally punishing all violators of immigration laws will deter illegal immigration, and foreigners can avoid this by complying with immigration laws.	This policy would separate families, harming the children of undocumented immigrants, who would be left in the care of strangers while their parents are in prison.
Should the US continue the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program ("DACA") for people brought to America as children when their parents entered illegally?	These were children not responsible for their parents' actions. Applicants can't have a military record and must meet educational standards or do military service.	Congress never approved the original DACA program, and it encourages parents in foreign countries to enter the US illegally with their children.

FOREIGN POLICY

The Issue

Over the past decade, differences over American foreign policy have sharpened. Some argue that active international engagement, through military alliances, trade, aid, diplomacy, and even occasional humanitarian interventions, makes America stronger and better able to prevent or manage dangerous situations. Some favor a global leadership role for the US economically and diplomatically, but not militarily. Other critics argue that global trade and development aid to the poorest countries do not sufficiently serve American interests. At issue also is whether America should mainly work with allies and international organizations to promote its interests, or use its power alone, however it sees fits, to protect narrower national interests. Below are examples of policy proposals from the full-length document on this issue:

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Should the US increase tariffs on imported Chinese goods?	Higher tariffs will protect US manufacturing jobs, serve to halt the Chinese theft of US intellectual property, and open up Chinese markets for US companies.	American companies and consumers, not China, actually pay for tariffs, and China can simply retaliate and hurt US businesses, farmers and workers with their own tariffs.
Should the US reaffirm its commitment to defend any NATO ally attacked by a hostile force?	America's continued defense of its NATO allies deters Russian aggression, and our fellow NATO members honored our call for war against Afghanistan after 9/11.	The NATO allies do not meet their defense spending goals, while the US shoulders the burden for an alliance that may actually increase the chance of war with Russia.
Should the US boost its military presence in the Asia Pacific region?	Containment policies worked against the former Soviet Union during the Cold War and will prove effective against China, which seeks to control the South China Sea.	China is not an aggressor like the former Soviet Union, and if it wants to control the South China Sea or be the dominant power in Asia, it's not our business.
Should the US use diplomacy and funding to promote democracy and human rights throughout the world?	Promoting democracy and human rights abroad will produce more democracies, new allies, and fewer threats, which ultimately serves America's national interests.	The US should not interfere in the domestic politics of other nations, just as they should not intervene in American politics, even if that means being allies with dictatorships.
Should the US increase its defense spending by 5 percent per year to meet rising global challenges and ensure military readiness as a superpower?	The US cannot militarily withdraw from the world, otherwise rivals like China and Russia will exploit our weaknesses. A strong military prevents war and contains threats.	The US outpaces all other nations in military spending, and more spending would increase the deficit and make countries dependent on the American security umbrella.

Issue Briefing

THE ECONOMY AND TAXES

The US economy is in its longest period of expansion ever,[1] and recent growth has been higher than most expected just a couple of years ago.[2] After a long period of stagnation, wages have begun to show modest growth as well, and the unemployment rate is the lowest in half a century.[3]

But the economy is much different in 2019 than in the past. Growth is not as high as in prior decades, and the recent economic success after the Great Recession of 2007-09 has still left many people out in the cold. A high school diploma used to be the ticket to a comfortable middle-class lifestyle — more than 70% of middle-class jobs required only a high school diploma as late as the 1970s, but now less than 40% of jobs are for those without college degrees.[4]

In addition, the racial wealth gap looms large. The median white household has $146,984 in wealth; the median black household, $7,323 — about twenty times less.[5] Median black household wealth actually fell sharply between 1983 and 2016.[6]

Educational differences and the effects of past and continuing discrimination play roles in this racial wealth gap. It is, however, only one of many forms of inequality in wealth and income in America. Many Americans, including those in the white working class, feel economically insecure because they have not experienced economic gains over the past few decades. Only 40 percent feel even somewhat financially secure; only a quarter feel confident in their financial ability to "afford retirement"; [7] and only three in ten Americans are truly "financially healthy" according to the Financial Health Network, a non-profit financial consultancy firm specializing in financial health of less wealthy consumers.[8]

Another problem is that in order to achieve sustained economic growth, the US government has taken on enormous additional debt, and it continues to grow. As a proportion of the total economy, the federal government's level of debt now exceeds any level in the post-World War II period—and it's approaching the debt peak of World War II.[9]

This year, it's estimated the US government will spend $900 billion more than it expects to receive, an average of nearly $3,000 of additional indebtedness for every person in the US.[10] Eventually, future generations will need to repay this money.

This document considers two sets of issues: whether and how taxes on the rich and corporations should be changed, and whether and how more aid should be provided to the middle class, the working class, and the poor.

Economic growth and the national debt loom large in all these policy choices. Which proposals would help the economy grow most efficiently? Which would help Americans the most today without increasing the debt too much? If taxes on the rich should be raised, should the additional funds go to paying down the debt or helping the less fortunate? Which policies may be effective at lowering or limiting the national debt—or should reducing the debt not be a major priority? Should the first priority be economic growth? Or reducing inequality? Is it possible to achieve these goals simultaneously?

Taxes on the Wealthy

PERSPECTIVES ON ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

Income inequality has grown in the last decades. Some reports indicate that the top 1% of earners received 21% of all U.S. income in 2017, up from 10% in 1980.[11] At the same time, however, the top 1% paid 37% of all income taxes in the U.S. in 2017 — a larger share than the bottom 90 percent.[12] More than half the wage increases since the Great Recession also went to people with higher incomes.[13] Those with lower incomes have only recently begun to see modest increases in their paychecks,[14] ten years after the Great Recession.[15] This is in marked contrast to the period before 1980, when the bottom half of income earners gained significantly.

Some say that today's Americans are better off than nearly everyone who has ever lived. More than three-quarters of Americans now own smartphones, including 94% of those between the ages of 18 and 29,[16] meaning that they carry in their pockets access to information that the world's wealthiest people could not have dreamed of just two generations ago. Moreover, they say, economic inequality is a fact of life and not so bad if people work hard, make good choices, and move up the economic ladder.

Others stress that many ordinary Americans are struggling financially through no fault of their own. Paying for necessities such as health care bankrupts hundreds of thousands of Americans every year. Nearly 40% of Americans reported at least one financial difficulty in 2017, such as being evicted, missing a bill, or skimping on medical care because of the cost.[17] Even though there are ways to climb the ladder, it seems those opportunities have decreased compared to when our parents and grandparents entered the workforce.

The percent of children who can expect to earn more than their parents did has decreased by half since 1945.[18] The causes include the rising cost of higher education, stagnating middle-class wages, young people's declining interest in the military, a decrease in two-parent households, and accelerating health care costs. For example, prior generations often considered joining the military and later going to college on the GI bill as a way to move up economically.

Another issue is that the size of the federal government workforce has declined over the last decade, and is now nearly 15% lower it was around 2010.[10] Government jobs have historically provided relatively stable middle-class lifestyles.

THE ESTATE TAX

Some favor raising the federal estate tax, which is collected when a person with substantial wealth passes away. Currently, only individuals worth at least $11.4 million and married couples worth at least $22.8 million pay this tax — less than 0.1% of the population.[20] The tax is typically about 40% of all wealth above the threshold amount, which results in an overall average rate of 16.5% on estates that are taxed.[21]

Others say that people should be able to leave their own wealth tax-free to their children. After all, people can spend money on anything they want — including gambling and expensive vacations — without incurring "wealth" taxes. So, why shouldn't they be able to leave it to their children?

Also, they note, some people may own one very large asset, but otherwise do not have much wealth — such as farmers who own their farm. So, taxing this asset could require their heirs to sell the land just to pay the tax. On the other hand, in 2017, when the estate tax was higher than it is today, some reports indicated that only about 80 small businesses and farms paid any estate tax that year, so perhaps this happens less often than assumed.[22]

Others say that, while leaving a small amount of money to one's children makes sense, transferring large amounts of wealth from generation to generation creates greater inequality. This money could do more good for society if the government redistributed it into the hands of the poor and middle class, they say.

THE WEALTH TAX

Another proposal is to impose a wealth tax on those with substantial wealth. Using $100 million as an example, the tax might take 1% of someone's wealth over $100 million each year. Supporters of this proposal argue it only affects the very wealthy, so they could easily afford it. Also, people argue that today's wealthy have benefited from public services such as schooling, transportation, or health care. So, it is only fair that they invest in the next generation's ability to do the same.

Opponents of a wealth tax say that this money does more good for society in the hands of investors than with the government. Investors will use it to create jobs and boost the economy. Moreover, the wealthy are taxed enough, especially since they already paid income taxes when they earned the money, so a wealth tax would be a second tax.

Finally, wealth can be difficult to measure. It is easy to determine the net worth of an individual who has $50 million in a bank account and no other assets, but few very wealthy people live this way. They might own assets such as airplanes, art collections, or real estate that are difficult to value on a yearly basis, so their wealth would have to be recalculated each year. Wealth can also be easy to hide from the government in foreign accounts, which makes this tax difficult to enforce. Several European countries have repealed wealth taxes because they were too difficult to enforce.[23]

CAPITAL GAINS TAX

Another proposal is to tax dividends and capital gains as ordinary wage income. Capital gains are profits that come from investments, such as stocks. Right now, those profits are taxed at a much lower rate than wage income that employees earn from their jobs. The highest federal tax rate for wage and ordinary interest income is currently at 37%,[24] while highest tax rate for dividends and capital gains is 23.4%.[25]

Supporters of this proposal argue that the majority of investments are owned by the richest 10% of Americans,[26] and as a result, the current tax rate for capital gains is a giveaway to the rich. They argue that capital gains income should be taxed at the same as wage income.

Others counter that corporate profits are first taxed at around 26% (21% federal tax and often 5% state tax) before they are distributed to investors as dividends, so the combination of corporate and capital gains taxes yields a much higher rate (over 40%). From this perspective, raising taxes on investments will make investing less attractive and harm an economy that depends on investments. If business investment dries up, so do workers' paychecks and jobs.

Moreover, they say that those who invest their money accept the risk of losing it, so they deserve the benefit of reduced tax rates when investments turn out well. And although most investors are quite wealthy, many middle-class families invest their retirement savings in the stock market, so a tax increase would hit the middle class as well.

CORPORATE TAXES

The 2017 tax cuts reduced the tax on corporate profits from 35% to 21%.[27] Supporters of a higher corporate tax rate say that some corporations make billions of dollars in profits each year, so they can afford this. Raising corporate taxes, they say, brings in badly needed revenue to the federal government. Also, corporations benefit from a number of legal protections in the US, so a higher level of taxation is a fair trade-off. These supporters add that even if the US raises the corporate tax rate, it will continue to attract investment because the US is a wealthy country that has a large number of consumers and a strong legal system.

Advocates of further lowering the corporate tax rate — for example, from 21 to 15% — say that not all businesses are wealthy and can easily pay this tax. In other words, higher corporate taxes may harm small business investments. Higher corporate tax rates make investing in high-tax countries less attractive compared to countries with lower taxes. Thus, they argue, raising the corporate rate will send investors looking for other countries, which would reduce employment in the US.

In support of lower corporate taxes in the US, others point to the strong economic growth that followed the 2017 corporate tax cuts. Under higher taxes and to generate the same profits for investors, companies might have to cut wages and jobs in order to generate the same profits for investors. Employees would end up bearing the burdens of higher corporate tax rates, they add.

Moreover, setting the corporate tax rate at 21% does not mean that every business pays 21% of its profits in taxes. Companies can use so-called loopholes to reduce the taxes, and some firms and industries — especially technology — are better positioned to take advantage of them than others. In other words, wealthier and well-advised companies in certain industries may pay little in taxes, no matter what the tax rate is. Raising taxes will therefore disproportionately hurt smaller businesses.

INCOME TAXES ON THE HIGHEST EARNERS

Some propose raising the top federal tax rate on high earners of wage income from the current level of 37%. For example, annual income over $2 million would be taxed at a new rate of 50% or above. People who make less than $2 million would be taxed at the lower rates.

Supporters of raising taxes on high earners stress that this will only affect those who can most afford to pay, and that the increased revenue can be used to fund programs to help the poor and middle class, thus reducing inequality. Opponents argue that this money contributes to economic growth and prosperity more when it is in the hands of wealthy investors than when it goes to the government, and that high earners already pay their share of taxes. Furthermore, say these opponents, high tax rates reduce the incentive to work hard to make more money, and therefore raising taxes on high earners slows economic growth.

Each side points to statistics to justify its moral and pragmatic arguments. The opponents of higher taxes point to the disproportionate share of the tax burden that is borne by the top 1% of earners. As noted above, they recently paid 37% of all federal income taxes, while the bottom 90% of earners only accounted for 30% of all federal income tax payments.[28]

Supporters of higher taxes point to the sharp increase in income inequality in recent decades, with the top 1% of income earners more than doubling their share of national income, from 10 to 21%.[29] They also point out that the top tax rate reached 50% as recently as 1986, under President Reagan.[30] But others counter by saying that more deductions and loopholes existed back then, so few people truly paid 50% of their income.[31]

Stimulus and Assistance to the Poor and Middle Class

For decades, as worker productivity rose, wages typically increased along with it. But starting around 1970, even as workers continued to grow more productive, their wages became stuck in the same place. Some people point out that total compensation packages, including health insurance, pension contributions, and similar benefits, have kept closer pace with productivity.[32] Still, the middle class has stagnated economically.

What policies might fix this problem?

THE FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

One proposal is to raise the federal minimum wage. The current federal minimum wage is $7.25/hour,[33] but some support raising it to $15/hour. Such an increase, they argue, will substantially raise the take-home pay of nearly 40 million workers[34] who need it most, many of whom are living in poverty.[35]

Raising the minimum wage could also help close the gender pay gap, which finds women will making only 79 cents for every dollar men make.[36] Because women make up a majority of minimum-wage earners,[37] raising the minimum wage should boost women's earnings. Supporters also point out that in real value (after inflation) the current minimum wage is actually lower than in prior decades,[38] and they say that putting more money in the hands of low-income consumers would spur the economy.

Opponents counter that while the policy may be well-meaning, making employees more expensive for companies to hire will backfire — companies will hire fewer of them, leaving many workers out of the labor force. The higher cost of human labor will also lead companies to invest in technology to replace workers' jobs. Finally, some argue that $15/hour is so high that people will not be hired for entry-level jobs, especially in states with lower wage rates. This cuts off the crucial bottom rung of the economic ladder for the lowest income earners, including many immigrants and workers of color. Supporters of a higher minimum wage, however, point to studies showing that such increases have only very small effects on the unemployment level.[39]

Others disagree, pointing to recent study by the Congressional Budget Office estimating that while the $15/hour minimum wage would lift 1.3 million people out of poverty and raise the wages of 17 million workers, it would cost between one and three million jobs.[40]

EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)

Another proposal is to increase the generosity of the Earned Income Tax Credit, which benefits low-income workers, especially those with children. For those with no children, the maximum income a person can earn and still be eligible is $15,270. This eligibility level rises to $40,320 for people with one child and to $49,194 for people with three or more children. Those with no children can receive up to $519 under the EITC; those with three or more can receive up to $6,431.[41]

Some think that the EITC should be made more generous, either by permitting those who make more money to be eligible for the subsidies or by allocating more money to those who already qualify (or both). Supporters argue that the EITC is one of the most effective anti-poverty programs because it encourages work. The credit grows as work and wages increase, encouraging people to work more. It also injects much-needed resources into low-income families, who may help the economy by spending that money.

Critics say that there are more effective ways to grow the economy, such as by encouraging investment in new businesses and ideas. They believe that the tax system already treats the poor generously enough — nearly half of Americans pay no federal income taxes, in most cases because they don't earn enough money,[42] and there are a large number of programs and grants to assist the poor. These Americans

still pay state taxes, property taxes, sales and other taxes. Some add that the government should not subsidize people for having children and that the EITC does this by giving greater benefits to those with more children.

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME (UBI)

Another proposal is to provide a Universal Basic Income that would give all working-age adults a cash grant, perhaps $1,000 monthly, whether they work or not, and no matter how much money they make.

Supporters argue that it provides an important safety net against poverty, and, more importantly, allows people to make long-term investments in themselves. The certainty of receiving the UBI would allow people to invest in their education, develop their own business ideas, build wealth for retirement, or just keep out of debt from medical bills and other expenses. Not only would a UBI help people stay out of poverty, but it could grow the economy.

Opponents complain that it would be quite expensive, though perhaps it could replace other welfare programs. Some of the debate about UBI centers on whether it would be a supplement to current welfare programs or a replacement. Critics of current programs argue it is more efficient to just give people cash to spend as they need it, rather than allocate some government welfare dollars to food, others to health care, some to education, etc. If the UBI does replace existing welfare programs, it could result in reducing federal assistance to the very neediest, who may currently receive more than $1,000 per month in government support through various programs.

Opponents also argue that a UBI provides an incentive not to work because people will be paid whether they work or not, which will mean that many able-bodied adults might simply choose not to work or to work much less. The proposal taxes those who work in order to give money to everyone. Also, say critics, some people might not spend the money wisely: instead of investing in education, they might engage in recreational activities or buy illicit drugs.

BABY BONDS

The “baby bonds” proposal would provide each child born in America with a US treasury bond. The government would make further yearly contributions to this fund for lower-income Americans, so it would grow into a substantial sum of money — nearly $50,000, according to politicians who support the proposal[43] — by the time the bonds mature and the children reach adulthood. This proposal is based on the idea that the most prosperous members of the older generation have a responsibility to give younger Americans a fair start in the free market.

Baby bonds would ensure that every child, no matter his or her race, region, or family income, would enter adulthood with some wealth already built up. In addition to narrowing the wealth gap between classes and races, baby bonds could be used to fund education or to prevent people from going into debt to cover essential costs such as medical bills or child care. Easing the burden of paying for these services could boost female workforce participation and the security and wealth of many single-parent families. Those who use bonds to fund further education can delay their entry into the workforce until they are more skilled and more mature, potentially leading to better job prospects and higher lifelong earnings.

Opponents of this proposal argue that it would be costly and require a funding source, such as higher income taxes. Also, people may not spend the wealth in productive ways. Some supporters favor restricting how people spend these bonds. For example, the proposal in the U.S. Senate limits uses of the fund to purposes such as education, home ownership, and retirement.[44] Others would give a financial incentive to convert baby bonds into an individual retirement account (IRA).

GOVERNMENT-FUNDED COLLEGE

Another proposal would have the government subsidize or entirely pay the cost of education at a public college for any U.S. citizen. A college degree is increasingly a necessity today. While American higher education is world-renowned, it is also among the most expensive,[45] and the cost of college — even at public universities — has doubled in the last thirty years.[46]

Supporters of this proposal argue that it will help combat America's underperformance in education (compared to other developed countries). Not only is a more educated society good in itself, they argue, but it will also lead to a stronger economy. Moreover, public funding of K through 12 education has long been a core feature of American society. So, if a college degree has become as essential as a high school degree, why should it not be publicly funded as well?

Critics see this as another massive government spending program that the country cannot afford, and for a benefit that should be an individual's responsibility to fund. They say that student loans are affordable for most people, and plenty of adequate jobs exist for those without a college education — even some jobs where employers subsidize the cost of college courses.[47] Not everyone, the critics say, needs to go to college. Moreover, they add, a blanket subsidy for education at public colleges could waste money in supporting children of well-off families, who make up the majority of current college attendees and whose families can afford the full cost.[48]

Finally, if the government is paying tuition costs, won't schools simply increase tuition, knowing that the government will pay it and they will make more money? And any effort by the government to prevent this, the critics say, would just impose more burdensome regulation.

Many conflicting values and visions exist in these discussions. Some believe that higher taxes on the very rich will make for a more equal distribution of income and arguably a more just society. Higher taxes, they add, will also generate more revenue to pay for government services and benefits, and may help pay down the federal budget deficit.

Others maintain that raising taxes on corporations and the very rich will discourage investment in the US and drive companies and jobs abroad, taking money out of the American economy that could otherwise help people climb the economic ladder.

If we tax inheritances at a high rate, we will bring in more revenue, but are we not limiting the freedom of people to benefit their children? On the other hand, ideas of equality are central to American democracy. Should this be defined as equality of opportunity, meaning that everyone has the same chance to succeed? Or should it mean equality of condition, at least in assuring that everyone has basic necessities?

Do we value creating more equal opportunity for the next generation — giving young people a better start in life? Are the proposals below worth the large costs — particularly given the steadily rising federal debt, which will also be paid by the next generation? Will greater benefits to the very poor serve social justice? Will they also help the economy? Or is there a danger that the new taxes and regulations that come along with new government programs for the poor will undermine the ability of entrepreneurs to create new businesses and jobs? And what will be the impact on the federal deficit if we pay for these new programs by borrowing the money rather than raising taxes?

The table below discusses some proposals and presents some arguments for and against the proposals. These are only some of the many arguments for and against the proposals; they are meant to help start your deliberations.

Taxing the Wealthy and Corporations

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Capital gains — income earned when an investment that has increased in value is sold — should be taxed the same as ordinary wage income.	Lower tax rates on investments benefits mostly wealthy people because they hold most investments. Raising capital gains taxes would prevent wealthy people who make millions from stock from paying lower tax rates as a percent of income than middle- and upper-middle-class wage earners.	Raising taxes on investments makes investing and starting a business less attractive, possibly drying up sources of income for businesses that would otherwise create jobs. This could hurt more people (workers) than just those who directly own investments.
The US should impose a wealth tax on the richest taxpayers, requiring them to pay a small portion of their wealth on an annual basis.	This tax would directly affect only persons with millions of dollars in wealth, so it would impose no hardship on them while providing a source of revenue to the government for enhancing social services or reducing the national deficit.	Measuring how much wealth someone owns can be complex and would be costly for the government to do. Several European countries abandoned wealth taxes after finding them too difficult and expensive to enforce. The tax would also face legal challenges, and the top 1% already pays 37% of all federal income taxes.
The US should repeal the estate tax, which currently taxes the fortunes of deceased individuals worth at least $11 million and deceased married couples worth at least $22 million.	If people can spend their money without taxation on activities such as gambling or luxuries, they should also be permitted to leave it for their children without taxation. Moreover, they were already taxed when they earned the money, so an estate tax would amount to "double taxation."	Many racial and socioeconomic groups have not seen any increase in their wealth following the Great Recession. Median American wealth overall is no higher than it was in the 1980s. Increasing the estate tax would provide more revenue to the government and potentially reduce inequality.
When taxpayers earn more than $2 million per year, they should pay a higher tax rate on additional income.	The tax — going back to the levels that obtained under President Ronald Reagan — would affect only those in the top 0.1% of income earners, who made over 10% of total American income in 2017 and can most afford additional taxes. It could support government programs in health insurance, education funding, or various welfare programs.	This could hike total taxation rates for the top earners to 65% or more in high-tax states, lower the incentive to work, and likely generate less revenue than expected. The top 1% already pays 37% of individual income taxes. Also, private investment of this money would do more to generate economic growth and opportunity than having the government spend it.
The US should lower the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15%.	While the US corporate tax rate is now in line with the rate of other leading economies, reducing the rate further would make America an even more attractive place to do business, spurring employment and economic growth.	The 2017 corporate rate cut from 35% to 21% was already drastic, and it's uncertain whether it benefited workers. Cutting the rate again would further increase the national debt, already at a record high, and, like the 2017 cut, would fail to benefit workers.

Stimulus and Assistance for the Poor and Middle-Class

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which provides a benefit to low-income workers, to more middle-class workers.	The EITC is among the nation's most effective anti-poverty programs. It also increases female work participation, and it has bipartisan support. But it phases out at low levels of income, especially for those without children. Expanding it would provide these benefits to more taxpayers.	Federal revenue is not unlimited. Expanding the EITC to middle-class workers would require either trimming benefits from the working poor or raising taxes to finance the new benefits. Thus, keeping the EITC's focus on the working poor makes better sense.
Increase the federal minimum wage from $7.25/hour to $15/hour.	Raising the minimum wage to $15/hour would increase the wages of tens of millions of the nation's most vulnerable workers, particularly those who lack college degrees. It would lift over one million workers out of poverty.	This increase would make workers more expensive to hire. Businesses would respond by laying off workers and investing in technology to replace workers, costing over one million jobs, by one estimate. These effects would be especially serious in states where a large share of workers earn far below $15 per hour.
The government should cover the cost of college tuition at public universities for all students who could not otherwise afford it.	Ninety percent of new jobs go to those with college degrees. But as the cost of college has grown rapidly, it has become unattainable for the families that education is supposed to help the most — those looking to break into the middle class. Moreover, the US continues to lag behind other developed countries in educational levels. We need a more highly educated society to compete in the 21st century.	We already have a huge federal debt, and this will either increase it or require new taxes. Moreover, not everyone needs to go to college. Many workers can serve society well without it. Money will be wasted subsidizing well-off families who can pay the tuition costs. And colleges may raise tuition costs knowing the government will pay.
The government should fund a bond for each child born that will accumulate in value until the child turns 18. At that time, they could use it higher education or something else to help start up their lives.	Inequality has accelerated in the last generation, and many young people lack funds to pay for education, find the right job, start a family, or begin saving for retirement. Only the top 10% of young people can rely on adequate family support. Baby bonds would dramatically lessen the racial wealth gap and other inequalities by ensuring all Americans a fair start in adult life.	The payments to children would have to be paid for, likely with higher income taxes. The government would have to ensure that children do not simply "take the money and run," rather than investing it in a societal good like education. The proposal may also discourage parents from paying for their children's needs, as the government will do so.
The government should give cash grants of $1,000/month to all adults at least 18-years-old.	This program might be more effective than other anti-poverty initiatives because it lets people decide how their money is best spent. It may also reduce the government's administrative costs because it would not need to determine and keep track of who is eligible. And it could permit people to make longer-term investments, such as in their education, because they are less desperate to take low-paying jobs to make ends meet.	Such cash grants would need to be funded somehow, either by the federal government raising taxes or borrowing more money. Cash grants also may reduce people's incentive to work because they will receive the money whether they work or not. And, there is a risk that people will not spend the money to make long-term investments in themselves, but on frivolous or impulsive things.

GLOSSARY

INCOME VS. WEALTH: Income refers to the amount of money that a person has made in a year, whereas wealth refers to that person's net worth, their assets minus their debt. For instance, a person can make $100,000 of income in year one, but if they consume it all that same year on items such as food, rent, health insurance, and vacation, then they have no wealth at the beginning of year two.

GREAT RECESSION: The Great Recession refers to the 2007-09 financial crises, which was marked by high unemployment, home foreclosures, bank failures, and a slow return to normal conditions in the years thereafter.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY: The ease with which someone can change their economic circumstances, say, by working hard to move up from poverty to the middle class. The more economic mobility a society has, the less damaging the effect of being born into a poor or otherwise unlucky family.

ESTATE TAX: A tax levied at death upon the deceased's wealth. Though different policy proposals would treat this tax threshold differently, the American estate tax affects only quite wealthy individuals and families.

WEALTH TAX: A tax that takes a portion of the wealth of the richest Americans on an annual basis.

CAPITAL GAINS: Generally-speaking, income derived from stocks and other investments.

ORDINARY INCOME: Generally-speaking, wage income earned as an employee.

CORPORATE TAX RATE: The rate of taxation on many companies' profits. The 2017 tax cuts reduced this rate from 35% to 21%.

MINIMUM WAGE: The minimum wage is an act of the government that sets the minimum hourly wage that a company must pay its workers—with few exceptions, no company can pay a worker less. The national minimum wage set by Congress is $7.25/hour. Several states and cities have set higher minimum wages that apply only within those states' and cities' borders.

TAX EVASION: Tax evasion refers to an individual or corporation paying less in taxes than legally owed. Though tax evasion is illegal, it can be very difficult to detect, whether it takes place on a small or large scale. A teenager can easily conceal small payments for mowing lawns and not pay taxes on them; large multinational corporations can take advantage of complex contracts that are hundreds or thousands of pages long whose provisions make it difficult to determine how much money the company actually made. The IRS's enforcement workforce and overall budget have also fallen in recent years, making detection of wrongdoing even more difficult.

TAX AVOIDANCE: Tax avoidance refers to the process of legally reducing one's taxes owed by, for example, taking advantage of so-called "loopholes." Though (mostly) legal, tax avoidance still angers many Americans because it can have results such as profitable multinational corporations paying little or nothing in taxes. Unlike tax evasion, tax avoidance can be common or even widespread knowledge. Still, combating tax avoidance is difficult because closing the "loopholes" to raise taxes on the low-paying corporations causes complications, such as having to raise taxes on others as well, tweak other provisions of the tax code that had been working well, or (in the case of taxing profits earned or held overseas) obtain agreement from other countries.

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Issue Briefing

HEALTH CARE

The United States has a distinctive health care system compared to other advanced industrial democracies. Most Americans not of retirement age receive their care through employer-sponsored health insurance plans, while retired people are eligible for government-sponsored Medicare and many lower-income Americans have access to Medicaid. When the Affordable Care Act (ACA, or "Obamacare") was passed in 2010, nearly 47 million Americans were without health insurance. That number declined to about 27 million by the end of 2017.[1]

The debate over US health care revolves around three main issues. First, should the ACA be repealed and replaced? Second, should it be replaced with a "single-payer" government health insurance system, "Medicare for all," or a more market-based approach that expands private-sector health insurance options? And third, should the federal government ensure cheaper prescription medications and wider access to them? We consider each of these issues below:

MEDICARE AND MEDICAID

Nearly 20 percent of Americans receive insurance through Medicare, the federally-run government health insurance program for senior citizens – people become eligible when they turn 65. Medicare also covers people with qualifying disabilities.[2] Another 23 percent of Americans receive insurance through Medicaid, a government insurance program jointly run by the federal government and the states, which provides insurance for low-income Americans (individual eligibility varies by state.)[3] Medicaid typically covers low-income pregnant women, children, seniors and people with disabilities — the program has expanded in recent decades in some states to incorporate a wider range of low-income people. Many people needing long-term care, for disabilities or nursing home care, for example, use Medicaid for coverage.

THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Key ACA issues include the scope of coverage (including through Medicaid expansion), the establishment of exchanges, premium subsidies, preexisting conditions, and the individual mandate.

ACCESS TO COVERAGE

Following the ACA's passage in 2010, the number of uninsured – people not covered through employer-based health insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid – declined by 20 million.[4] Some say the goal should be to continue to build on the existing system, which is based largely on private insurance, and then fill in the remaining gaps in order to achieve universal coverage. Others say that the ACA is too expensive for this country and gives the federal government too much authority. They prefer that additional private-sector options be offered to bring down the cost of health care and expand access to coverage.

Still others believe the ACA did not go far enough to expand coverage and should be replaced with a single-payer, government-run health care system. The ACA was also intended to require Medicaid expansion to all individuals with incomes under 138 percent of the federal poverty line (about $16,000 per year for an individual and $34,000 per year for a family of four.) The Supreme Court decided to expand Medicaid as a state option,[5] and 36 states have decided to do so.[6]

The ACA created health insurance exchanges or marketplaces (such as healthcare.gov) so people without access to employer-sponsored insurance could purchase private insurance. This insurance had to meet several qualifications, including a requirement to cover essential health benefits such as prescription drugs, maternity care, and treatment for mental health and substance use disorders – the latter is important now because of the opioid epidemic).

People with incomes between 138 and 400 percent of the federal poverty line receive government subsidies to help them buy these private plans. The ACA also allowed young adults to remain on their parents' health care plan until age 26, made prescription drug coverage for seniors on Medicare more generous, eliminated annual and lifetime limits on insurance coverage, told insurers they could no longer charge women higher rates than men, and prohibited insurance companies from discriminating against people with preexisting conditions.

Protection against discrimination for preexisting conditions means that insurance companies cannot deny these people coverage and that they are also prohibited from charging them more for an insurance plan.

An additional ACA protection for those with preexisting conditions is the Essential Health Benefits requirement. Because the ACA requires all insurance plans to offer comprehensive coverage, a plan cannot try to exclude people with certain conditions. For example, a plan cannot steer people with a history of cancer away from enrolling by excluding chemotherapy coverage.[7]

On the other hand, some critics say that the Essential Health Benefits Requirement forces people to buy coverage they don't need. As a result, it raises insurance costs for younger and healthier individuals in order to better subsidize the coverage for older and sicker individuals (although the ACA does allow prices to vary by age). The ACA also increases coverage for preventive care — it requires all insurance plans to fully cover a yearly check-up and provide full contraception coverage.

The current administration has introduced number of regulations to steer the ACA in a more private-sector, market-oriented direction. These include expanding access to association health plans and short-term health plans, which allow small businesses to team up together to offer cheaper insurance, and limited-duration health plans, which offer basic coverage at lower monthly premiums.[8] The ACA also included an individual mandate that required all individuals (aside from those who qualified for hardship exemptions) to have health insurance — but the penalty for not complying was repealed as part of the 2017 tax bill.[9] The ACA led to the percentage of uninsured people dropping from 17 percent in 2010 to 10 percent in 2016,[10] but in the past couple years the number of uninsured has increased.[11]

Today, about 30 million Americans — who are disproportionately from communities of color – do not have health insurance. (The uninsured rate for Hispanics is 19 percent compared to 7 percent for whites).[12] Some say that the recent increase in the uninsured rate is due to the current administration's actions to roll back the ACA following Congress's failure to repeal the law. Others maintain that without the individual mandate — which the Administration opposes — many people are choosing not to buy health insurance if they don't want or need it.

HEALTH CARE COSTS

Health care spending makes up nearly one fifth of our nation's economy. The US has far higher health care spending rates per capita than other developed countries, and most studies point to higher prices for health care services, hospital stays, physician salaries and prescription drugs as the principal causes.[13] Despite this higher spending, some say that we don't get better results.[14] We have a higher uninsured population and worse public health outcomes than other industrialized democracies. And in the past few years, the US has experienced a decline in life expectancy.[15] The total costs for a family of four

insured by an employer's health care plan averages more than $28,000 per year. This estimate includes the costs paid by the employers and the employees. And the share of those costs paid by people themselves has gone up as more and more Americans have plans that require them to assume a high share of the costs of their medical care.[16] Others say that the current high prices generate drug and device innovation and better treatment for acute conditions, and that our bad public health outcomes come in part from our greater poverty, gun fatalities, and automobile deaths, which are outside the health care system.

Medicare for All?

Some policy experts think that the US government is too involved in health care and we would be better off with a truly free market system by eliminating most government regulations. Others think the government should subsidize health care only for those who truly cannot afford it on their own. Support is also growing in the US for the opposite position: a single-payer health care system that would directly cover health care costs for all Americans, as is common in many European democracies. "Medicare for All" has become a common refrain on the campaign trail, but what does it actually mean?

Some "Medicare for All" proposals call for the elimination of all private insurance. Under this type of plan[17], everyone would be enrolled in a single, federal government-run plan. Proponents say that by lowering administrative costs and allowing the government to control prices, a single-payer plan could reduce health care costs. This plan would be a more generous version of Medicare.

Some proposals, such Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' proposal, would offer comprehensive coverage, including long-term care, and eliminate premiums, deductibles, and co-pays. All health care payments would be made through the tax system.

Critics say that "Medicare for All" would require the largest tax increase in the history of the United States[18], or else would cause very large federal deficit increases. They are concerned that such proposals will lead to the rationing of care, while diminishing innovation and harming the quality of health care in America. They say that Medicare is far cheaper in part by depending on the private system for fraud detection and billing estimates.

Other plans, such as "Medicare buy-in" and other public-option proposals, would move major portions of the population into a similar government plan, but they would allow people satisfied with their employer-based plans to keep them. A public option would allow anyone who wanted to purchase a government plan, usually Medicare, to do so. This public plan would compete with private health insurance plans, and the competition would lead insurance companies to lower their prices in an effort to keep their patients.[19] Critics say this could diminish access to care for beneficiaries already on Medicare, because a large number of new enrollees would be competing for the same number of doctors.

Prescription Drugs

The US spends more on prescription drugs than any other country — about $1,443 per person on prescription drugs, compared to an average of $749 in other high-income nations with similar rates of prescription drug use.[20] From 2007 to 2017, prescription drug spending increased by more than 40 percent.[21] But this cost means that the US is also the world's leading innovator when it comes to new cures and technologies — and these innovations are often available first and most readily here, as opposed to elsewhere around the world.

Unlike many other countries, the US government does not directly regulate prices. (Medicare is one of the biggest payers for prescription drugs, but under federal law, it is not allowed to negotiate prices.) Pharmaceutical companies set their own prices when they develop a new drug and are granted a patent. The patent gives the innovator the sole ability to sell and manufacture the drug in the US for the duration of the patent (typically 20 years), meaning that there is limited price competition, though there may be other possible treatments that are chemically distinct.

Once the patent expires, other manufacturers can produce the drug, what is commonly referred to at that point as a "generic," which greatly reduces the price of the drug. Because the patent gives them the ability to charge high prices, some drug companies attempt to extend their patents for as long as possible. When drug prices are too high, some patients cannot access the medicine.[22]

But high prices for new drugs don't tell the whole story. Prices for drugs that have been on the market for many years like insulin, which type I diabetics depend on to live, have seen large price increases in recent years with drug companies making huge profits.[23] Where there is competition between different drug manufacturers — even for cures and medicines on patent — prices have dropped.

Conflicting values exist in these choices. How should we weigh the freedom of some people to choose their own insurance level — or to go without any insurance if they feel they do not need it — versus the equality of having a system that tries to include everyone at levels that are affordable? Should the government protect everyone's right to buy affordable health insurance regardless of pre-existing medical conditions, even if that raises the costs of health care for everyone else? What about Americans' right to pursue life, liberty and happiness? Without health insurance, people's lives are at stake. On the other hand, achieving good health for as many people as possible will cost money, and the US medical care costs are already much higher than in the rest of the world.

Should people have the freedom of choice for their health plans? For example, should they be able to keep their current plans, if they like them? Or if we could create a more just and inclusive system, lowering the costs for everyone, by placing all Americans on the same plan, should Medicare for All replace the current system of private insurance? Who should make these choices that bear so heavily on the health and life expectancy of Americans? Should the whole society decide for everyone, or should people make their own personal and family choices? Note that with some proposals of Medicare for all, people can still choose their doctors. In fact, if more people are covered, then more people will be able to exercise this liberty.

The tables below discuss some proposals and presents some arguments for and against the proposals. These are only some of the many arguments for and against the proposals — they are meant to help start your deliberations.

Affordable Care Act

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
The Affordable Care Act should be repealed.	The ACA penalizes young, healthy people who would be better off buying cheaper plans that offer fewer benefits. People have the right to buy the insurance that fits their needs. They shouldn't be required to subsidize the health care costs of sicker or older Americans. The ACA has increased the role of the federal government in our health care system, added costly regulations, and increased health care spending, and failed to reduce the overall cost of health care. Given the large expansion of Medicaid under ACA, state budgets will be at risk if the federal government lowers its share of spending for the program.	The ACA ensures equal coverage for Americans with preexisting conditions. Young people benefit from the ACA by being able to stay on their parents' health plan until they turn 26. As a result of the ACA, more than 20 million additional Americans have health insurance today. Curtailing the ACA's expanded Medicaid funding would put coverage gains in jeopardy, harm state budgets and could force hospitals, especially in rural areas, to close. Health care spending as a share of GDP has grown much more slowly since the ACA was passed in 2010 than in the preceding years.
Repeal the Affordable Care Act and give state governments funds to create their own systems.	Under this proposal, individual states could pursue policies, tailored to the needs of their residents, to expand coverage or lower costs. State leaders, who are closer to the citizenry, can do a far better job than policy-makers in Washington. State governments also would have stronger financial incentives to ensure that care is efficiently delivered to their residents.	This proposal could enable state governments to authorize insurers to discriminate against Americans with preexisting conditions. It could also permit the sale of leaner insurance plans that could offer lower prices, but at the cost of depriving buyers of comprehensive coverage and other consumer protections. Lean plans could also undermine insurance markets by attracting only very healthy people, leaving the sicker on the less lean plans.
The federal subsidies in the Affordable Care Act that help the poor should be increased.	People with incomes 200 percent of the federal poverty line, about $24,000 per year, still have to put more than 6 percent of their income toward insurance premiums, which amounts to more than $1,500 per year. This doesn't even cover all health care expenses, and yet they still need to pay for food, shelter, and other necessities. Low-income people, because they have so much less disposable income to put toward insurance, are more likely to be uninsured.	The ACA already helps low-income Americans the most and already limits the amount these individuals have to spend on health insurance. Increasing the subsidies would require the federal government to spend even more money. People also have the option to choose less expensive plans that would lower their out-of-pocket costs. Reforms should focus on reducing the costs of plans, not subsidizing more coverage.

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Affordable Care Act / *Continued*

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
The federal subsidies in the ACA that help the middle class should be expanded to include more people.	Americans who purchase individual health coverage and who have incomes above 400 percent of the federal poverty line (about $50,000 per year for an individual and $85,000 for a family of three), receive no subsidies to help cover health insurance costs. Some of these individuals are spending 15 or even 20 percent of their income on premiums. These middle-class families have to pay the full cost of premiums and suffer the most when premiums increase.	The ACA already costs the federal government too much money. Increasing the scope of subsidies will result in vastly increased federal spending. It will also allow insurance companies to impose price increases that are borne disproportionately by the government rather than consumers. Expanding subsidies could result in some losing job-based coverage, as employers curtail coverage in anticipation of employees buying their own subsidized coverage.
People should have reasonable access to health insurance without discrimination against pre-existing conditions.	All people should have equal access to health care regardless of their medical histories. About half of non-elderly Americans have a pre-existing condition. Prior to the ACA, people with pre-existing medical conditions could be denied health insurance or charged higher prices for individual market coverage. None of us knows when we or a family member will have an accident or be diagnosed with an illness that would fall under the pre-existing condition category.	The consumer protections for people with pre-existing conditions make health insurance more expensive for younger and healthier people. People should be able to buy health insurance commensurate with their own risk profile.

Increasing Access to Public Insurance/Medicare for More

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Everybody should be able to buy a public plan like Medicare, the current plan for seniors over 65.	Medicare's history shows that the government experiences much lower administrative costs than private insurance companies. This proposal would also allow new participants to obtain the high-quality care now available to Medicare beneficiaries. Allowing people of any age to buy in to Medicare would ensure that all Americans always have access to quality, affordable coverage regardless of employment status or the decisions of private insurance companies. This "Medicare buy-in" or "public option" would force insurance companies to compete with the government plan on price, potentially reducing costs across the board.	With more enrollees and the same number of, or ever fewer, providers, medical care could be delayed or more difficult to access. Because Medicare pays lower rates to clinics, hospitals and doctors, this approach could compromise access to care. This could lead health care providers to demand higher payments from patients who retain private insurance, resulting in them paying significantly higher premiums for the same medical services.

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Increasing Access to Public Insurance/Medicare for More / *Continued*

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Americans aged fifty-five and older should have the option of purchasing Medicare, instead of a private insurance plan.	Americans closer to retirement age typically have higher health care costs than younger individuals. This makes them more expensive to insure, resulting in higher premiums. Because these older adults have greater health care needs, they are more likely to enroll in health insurance than younger individuals. When older individuals make up a large share of the population enrolled in a plan, premiums increase for everyone. By allowing this group to buy into Medicare, the price of private plans could go down, because the remaining population enrolled in private insurance plans would be younger and healthier. Allowing individuals aged 55 and older to enroll in Medicare ensures they will always have access to quality, affordable health coverage. Americans 55-65 are likely healthier and less expensive for healthcare compared to those 65+. Allowing them to buy into Medicare will likely lead to a decrease in the average per capita healthcare spending in the patient pool, potentially lowering prices for patients in Medicare as well.	By giving many people who are likely to be high consumers of health care — those 55 and older — access to Medicare, coverage and services to current recipients might be at risk. Just like a more general public option, a Medicare buy-in for people aged 55 and older is simply a way for the government to eventually put everyone into Medicare. And if the goal is to expand access to coverage, everyone regardless of age should be able to buy Medicare as an alternative to a private plan.
All Americans should be automatically enrolled in a more generous version of Medicare.	Having one health care plan for all Americans, administered by the government, would ensure that everyone always has access to quality health coverage with little to no premiums or cost-sharing by the patients themselves. This more generous version of Medicare would include expanded benefits like long-term care, vision, and dental. People wouldn't have to worry about switching plans when they change employers or experience a shift in income. Instead, everyone would have the same plan throughout their lifetime. Medicare for All can reduce health care costs by giving the federal government the power to set prices. Providers would not have to navigate among and bill numerous different insurers. With few administrative costs and no need to make a profit, Medicare for All can provide quality care to more people at lower costs.	Significant new taxes on many Americans, not just the wealthy, would be required to finance such a plan. The annual combined spending on health care in the US from public and private sources is now well over $3.5 trillion per year, with $1.4 trillion coming from Medicare and Medicaid. Even if "Medicare for All" yielded significant savings in total expenditures, it would need at least an additional $1.5 trillion in federal funding annually.[24] Without higher payment rates from private insurers, providers, including hospitals, would lose revenue. This could result in cuts to services, hospital closures and job losses. Single-payer, government-run solutions like "Medicare for All" could result in the elimination of private health insurance plans that hundreds of millions of Americans count on. People would lose the freedom to choose between different plans with different costs.

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Increasing Access to Public Insurance/Medicare for More / *Continued*

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
All Americans should be automatically enrolled in a more generous version of Medicare. *(continued)*	Automatically enrolling all Americans and making payments via taxes ensures that even those who are young and healthy pay into a national health care system, thus subsidizing care for those who are sicker/older. Although this is a redistribution of resources, it operates under the assumption that those young and healthy people will one day be old and sick, and they too will benefit from this redistribution.	Medicare for All could also stifle medical innovation because the government would be the only buyer of drugs, devices, and other technology. Without market competition, drug companies would have no incentive to do research and develop better and/or less expensive drugs and technology. Governments have a difficult time "getting prices right." If everyone is insured in a single government program, the government may over- or under-pay for certain treatments with no private market to serve as a check on government price setting.

Prescription Drug Prices

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices.	Medicare is one of the biggest payers for prescription drugs, but under federal law, it is not allowed to negotiate prices. That means that pharmaceutical companies are able to set the price and force the federal government — and ultimately the taxpayer – to pay it. Lower drug prices would save money for both consumers and the government.	The federal government might not be able to negotiate a better price for drugs than private payers do. If prices were set too low, it might reduce the incentive for pharmaceutical companies to invest in research and development, which could limit innovation and the invention of new drugs. Also, for the government to save a lot of money by negotiating prices, it would have to be willing to limit access to certain drugs that pharmaceutical companies demand too high of a price. This would reduce or eliminate the ability to access these drugs.
The US government should change the patent system so generic drugs are more quickly introduced into the marketplace.	Promoting more competition in the pharmaceutical industry could result in lower prices. Current patent protection goes too far in allowing pharmaceutical companies to extend the life of their patents and prevent competitors from entering the market. The federal government should incentivize the production of generic drugs to the fullest extent.	The current level of patent protections is necessary to incentivize the research and development of new drugs. Drug development is a risky business with many failures, and pharmaceutical companies rely on patent protections in order to recoup their investment. When generics compete with brand name drugs, the company that owns that drug makes a much smaller profit. Shortening the life of patents could reduce investment in research to develop new drugs.

GLOSSARY

MEDICARE: The federally-run government health insurance program for senior citizens (people become eligible when they turn 65). Medicare also covers some people with disabilities.

MEDICAID: A government health insurance program jointly run by the federal government and the states, which provides insurance for low-income Americans. Eligibility varies by state.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT (ACA, OR "OBAMACARE"): Passed in 2010, ACA created health insurance exchanges or marketplaces (such as healthcare.gov) so people who did not have access to employer-sponsored insurance could purchase private insurance. Those plans had to meet several conditions and cover essential health benefits, including prescription drugs, maternity care, and treatment for mental health and substance use disorders (a benefit of increasing relevance in light of the opioid epidemic). People with incomes between 138 and 400 percent of the federal poverty line receive government subsidies to help them afford to purchase these private plans. The ACA also allowed young adults to remain on their parents' health care plan until age 26, made prescription drug coverage for seniors on Medicare more generous, eliminated annual and lifetime limits on insurance coverage, told insurers they could no longer charge women higher rates than men, and prohibited insurance companies from discriminating against people with preexisting conditions.

"MEDICARE FOR ALL": Policy proposals that call for the elimination of all private insurance. Under this type of plan, all individuals would be enrolled in a single plan run by the federal government.

"MEDICARE BUY-IN": A policy proposal that would move major portions of the population onto Medicare, but they would allow people satisfied with their employer-based plans to keep them.

GENERIC: Once the patent expires, other manufacturers can produce the drug, what is commonly referred to at that point as a "generic," which greatly reduces the price of the drug.

PATENT: Gives an innovator the sole ability to sell and manufacture the drug it created in the US for the duration of the patent, typically 20 years.

ENDNOTES

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Issue Briefing

ENVIRONMENT

In prior decades, environmental policy debates in the US focused on whether and how to achieve cleaner water and air, and increased protections for national parks, open spaces, wildlife, and endangered species. In recent years, climate change has become central to the American political conversation. Nearly all scientists have come to the conclusion that the increasing accumulation of "greenhouse gases," produced from burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas, are warming our climate and making it more severe, thus increasing the intensity of hurricanes and other storms, producing more extreme heat waves, causing sea levels to rise, and threatening the extinction of species.

Some current policies seek to regulate "greenhouse gas" emissions that create a so-called "greenhouse effect," in which certain gases trap heat in the earth's atmosphere.[1] Other "green" energy policies aim to encourage using renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power, for example, through government subsidies. An alternative policy approach puts the priority on expanding US production of oil and gas. One way to do so is to permit companies to pursue new oil and gas exploration, in part through hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking." This involves injecting pressurized fluid into rock formations to cause cracking in the rocks, thereby allowing fossil fuels to flow from places they otherwise would not.

In 2016, the US government signed the Paris Agreement, a framework for tackling climate change across the globe that was signed by nearly all of the world's nations (but not Russia, Turkey, or Iran).[2] In 2017, the US government announced it would withdraw from the treaty.[3]

Some Americans believe the US should re-commit to the Paris Agreement to combat climate change, which they say is a rapidly escalating global threat requiring urgent global action.[4] After all, greenhouse gases emitted anywhere affect the people everywhere.[5] From this perspective, climate change is one of the most serious long-term threats to the health and wellbeing of Americans, and even American military readiness is being affected.[6] Additionally, some advocates believe the US needs to participate in the Paris Agreement in order not to give up its claim of global leadership on climate change to China and other nations.[7]

Opponents of the Paris Agreement believe the US government was right to withdraw because it included only voluntary commitments and imposed no consequences on countries that failed to follow through. Critics also object that the American commitment was much larger than those of other countries, and that it would prove costly to US households and harmful to American competitiveness in the energy market. As a result, spending US taxpayer dollars on this problem would benefit other countries more than the US.[8] Advocates respond that US leadership is critical to mobilizing global action, and that some other nations have actually made commitments far more serious than ours.

Some believe the US should go beyond the Paris Agreement to more ambitiously reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They say that the Paris Agreement only seeks to hold the rise in average world temperatures to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, and that it does not go far enough.[9] Many scientists predict more severe droughts, wildfires, flooding, food shortages and refugee flows unless we can keep global temperatures from rising beyond an additional 2.7 degrees.[10]

Advocates for strong action argue we have been warned by scientists about the dangers of global warming for over three decades — and have done relatively little as a nation. Because adverse climate changes are so profound and so difficult to reverse, but take place so slowly over time, it is important

to take action as soon as possible—both to minimize the damage as much as possible, and to minimize the costs of preventive action, which will rise dramatically with time. For the sake of the next generation we need to start acting now.

Critics believe that moving beyond the current Paris Agreement goal is unrealistic. Industrialized countries and other big polluters like China and India would be unlikely to agree to the immediate and costly actions that a larger goal would require. Greater real-world progress will come, they suggest, by aiming for a more attainable objective.[11]

COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE

What can be done? One approach is to encourage reduced emissions through taxes or other market incentives. Among the leading proposals here are: 1) a "carbon tax," a tax on the carbon content of fossil fuels; 2) a "cap and trade" proposal that establishes a market for companies to buy and sell allowances that let them emit only a certain amount, as supply and demand set the price. Trading gives companies a strong incentive to save money by cutting emissions in the most cost-effective ways; and 3) a "fee and dividend," similar to a carbon tax, but the money collected by the fee is redistributed to citizens.[12]

The case for enacting an overall tax on carbon emissions is that it generates incentives for entrepreneurs to design the most cost-effective measures available for limiting emissions. Supporters of these programs see them as more efficient than "command and control" regulation, which mandates what people and companies can and cannot do as a matter of law.

But all three of the above options would make fossil fuels such as gasoline and home heating oil more expensive. Critics object in general to raising energy prices, and worry that these would especially hurt working and low-income Americans, unless they were offset by other policies (like tax cuts) designed to compensate them for rising energy costs.[13]

In the last year, the Green New Deal has emerged as a policy idea. This refers to the ambitious scope of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal to respond to the Great Depression, but it would target climate change specifically.

Those in favor argue the US should adopt a Green New Deal to construct mass rapid transit, modernize electricity grids, make buildings more energy efficient, and develop new sources of renewable energy.[14]

Though not many details have been released to date, a Green New Deal is envisioned as a major initiative or set of initiatives through which the US could transform itself over the next ten years into an economy based on renewable resources, while also creating jobs for working people, and making the economy fairer and more just. The Green New Deal focuses on environmental justice (the idea that environmental issues unfairly impact low-income communities and communities of color) as well as integrating environmental policy with other progressive social policies such as expanded health care and a federal job guarantee.[15]

Those opposed to the idea of a Green New Deal argue it would represent a massive increase in government intervention and spending that would not only be unaffordable but would inhibit entrepreneurship and economic growth.[16] But supporters insist the Green New Deal is an investment in the economy of the future, and so would create new jobs and make the US more competitive.

For transportation, some argue the US should reduce greenhouse emissions by mandating that all new cars and trucks be zero or low-emission vehicles (like electric vehicles) or by reaching agreements to this end with automakers directly.[17] However, only one percent of cars currently meet this standard, and they are expensive. Critics say that it will be impossible to meet this goal for some time to come.

EXPANDING FOSSIL FUELS FOR ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

Instead of focusing on climate change, some Americans believe the US should expand oil and gas production. This focus, they maintain, can ensure an abundant, secure supply of energy for the US, increase prosperity and jobs, and lower energy prices for consumers. Even though the US is the world's largest oil producer,[18] it still imports more oil and gas than it exports, and, they say, energy independence is important for our national security. Additionally, many believe that government regulation should not constrain private sector innovation.

In contrast, advocates for a rapid switch to renewable energy sources stress that human reliance on fossil fuels is driving a disastrous acceleration of climate change; that renewable energy is the ultimate form of energy security, and that the private sector can be incentivized to speed up innovation for renewable energy.

Some advocate expanded oil and gas production on federal lands now dedicated to wildlife preservation. They believe we can design less restrictive regulations, while still maintaining our national commitment to protecting endangered species and ecosystems.[19]

But critics of this approach assert that the Department of Interior's current efforts to protect federal lands are already too weak, and that we need stronger restrictions in light of the growing threat of extinction faced by many species and natural environments.[20]

Another issue in environmental and energy policy today concerns the pros and cons of fracking. Advocates want to allow fracking in oil and gas fields throughout the United States in order to increase oil and gas production. Fracking, they argue, will create many new jobs and bring forth new sources of oil and gas and will enable us to speed up the closing of much dirtier coal-burning power plants.[21]

But critics believe fracking only deepens our dependence on fossil fuels, increasing greenhouse gas emissions, while also contaminating drinking water and posing other risks to health for workers and people in nearby communities.

These issues pose a number of value trade-offs.

If climate change is a global problem, then how much should Americans, especially middle- and lower-income Americans, bear the burden of solving it? People could face higher energy prices if they are not otherwise compensated.

On the other hand, if climate change produces more frequent weather disasters such as extreme heat, floods, hurricanes, and wildfires, then all Americans will suffer from these developments, especially the poor. In this view, the burdens of not combating climate change fall disproportionately on the poor and the working class. Because the effects of climate change are expected to become much worse over time, a question of fairness to the very young and future generations arises. They have no voice in today's policymaking, and they would have to bear higher taxes or energy prices to undertake a Green New Deal.

The table below discusses some proposals and presents some arguments for and against the proposals. These are only some of the many arguments for and against the proposals; they are meant to help start your deliberations.

Emissions Reductions

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
The US should commit to the 2014 Paris Agreement to combat climate change.	Climate change is an urgent global threat requiring global solutions. It demands international cooperation, since greenhouse gases emitted anywhere affect people everywhere. The US should not cede its claim of global leadership in this arena to China and others.	The Paris Agreement is harmful to American energy competitiveness and is expensive and ineffective. Overall, the agreement requires a vast expenditure of taxpayer dollars in ways that benefit other countries more than the US.
The US should go beyond the Paris Agreement and aim for even greater reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.	The Paris Agreement tries to assure that global temperatures do not rise more than 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit. But many scientists predict grave consequences of extreme weather and flooding if temperatures rise beyond 2.7 degrees. The agreement must be revised.	Moving beyond the Paris goal is unrealistic. Countries responsible for the bulk of greenhouse emissions would not consent to the immediate and costly actions that would be required of their citizens. It is better to aim for a more attainable objective.
The US should use taxes or other market incentives to achieve emissions reductions.	Taxes on greenhouse gas emissions and similar programs will create incentives for entrepreneurs to design the most cost-effective measures to rapidly reduce emissions. The "fee and dividend" approach would return the taxes to the citizens.	These policies would make energy more expensive and create distortions and inefficiency in the market. Unless they are offset by policies to cushion their impact, greenhouse gas taxes may generate a backlash from average Americans facing rising energy prices.
The US should adopt a Green New Deal for major investments in mass rapid transit, energy-efficient buildings, and renewable energy.	A bold, visionary initiative is needed to transform the US into an economy based on renewable energy over the next ten years. Building the new infrastructure for energy efficiency will also create many jobs for working people.	The Green New Deal represents a massive increase in government spending and intervention that will distort the free market and energy entrepreneurship, which have served as engines of American prosperity over the decades.
The US should mandate zero or low-carbon emission for cars, trucks, and buses.	This tangible step can help the country move toward the type of massive energy transformation needed to avoid climate catastrophe.	This dramatic change over a short timeline is unrealistic and represents an unnecessary government intrusion into the economy.

Economic Development and Energy Production

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
The US should expand oil and gas production.	Continued expansion can ensure an abundant supply of energy, enhance US energy security, increase prosperity and jobs, and lower energy prices for consumers. The government should not regulate in a way that constrains private sector innovation.	The scientific consensus finds that human reliance on fossil fuels is driving global climate change at an accelerating and potentially disastrous pace. The continued expansion of oil and gas production further entrenches this reliance and will make the problem worse.
The US should expand oil and gas production on federal lands previously dedicated to wildlife preservation.	We need more domestic oil and gas production for our prosperity and security, and it is possible to design less restrictive regulations in a fashion that continues to protect endangered species and ecosystems.	The Department of Interior's current efforts to protect the environmental integrity of federal lands are too weak, not too strong. They need strengthened in light of the growing threat of extinction faced by many species and possible other harm to natural environments.
The US government should facilitate hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") throughout the country.	Fracking is not only a big job creator but a low-cost way of enhancing oil and gas production, which will speed up the closing of much dirtier coal-burning power plants.	Fracking increases greenhouse gas emissions. It also readily leads to the contamination of drinking water and other risks to health suffered by workers and people of nearby communities.

GLOSSARY

FOSSIL FUELS: hydrocarbons (principally fuel oil, natural gas, and coal) formed in the Earth from the remains of dead plants and animals, and which release carbon dioxide when burned.

GREENHOUSE GASES: gases that trap heat in the earth's atmosphere, including carbon dioxide (which is produced by burning fossil fuels like oil and gas), methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases.

FRACKING: a process that injects pressurized fluid into rock formations to cause cracking in the rocks to allow fossil fuels to flow out more easily than they otherwise would have.

PARIS AGREEMENT: a deal reached in late 2015 by nearly all of the world's nations outlining a framework for tackling climate change across the globe.

ZERO OR LOW-EMISSION VEHICLES: vehicles with no or little exhaust gas emissions (often electric vehicles).

COMMAND AND CONTROL: policies that rely on direct regulation rather than incentives (needing permission to take certain actions, banning other actions entirely, etc.).

CARBON TAX: a tax on the carbon content of fossil fuels.

CAP AND TRADE: a policy setting a limit on greenhouse gas emissions and creating a market for trading emissions allowances up to that cap.

FEE AND DIVIDEND: a policy similar to a carbon tax, but where the money collected by the fee is redistributed to citizens.

GREEN NEW DEAL: a major initiative or set of initiatives which proposes to transform the US economy over the next decade to one based on renewable energy resources and more efficient energy use, while also making the economy fairer and creating more jobs for working people.

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Issue Briefing

IMMIGRATION

The United States began as a nation of immigrants.[1] Today, America welcomes more legal immigrants than any other country — 1.1 million per year — and roughly one in seven American residents was born in a foreign country.[2] While a sizable percentage, this is significantly smaller than Canada and Australia, yet similar to other advanced industrial democracies such as Germany and Britain.[3]

The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1965 is the basic framework governing legal immigration to the US. Before the INA, US immigration policy favored immigration from Northern and Western European countries, while dramatically limiting admission from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Southern and Eastern Europe.[4] The 1965 law replaced these national quotas with rules that treat applicants without regard to race or ethnicity, while prioritizing family connections to existing US residents.[5] At the same time, the law established for the first time an annual cap on the number of immigrants admitted from Latin America.[6] The 1990 Immigration Act increased annual visas by 40% and emphasized employment-based admissions.

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Three main categories of immigrants are legally eligible to enter America permanently — family members, refugees, and workers. The first category consists of close family members of US citizens and legal permanent residents. Within this category, there is no cap on the number of visas for immediate family members of US citizens, but there are wait times placed on each applicant based on their country of origin. Some scholars have indicated that wait times could be up to 20 years before an application is approved. Family-based immigration is the most common form of legal immigration. Some reports indicate that about 70% of immigrants who receive permanent residence — a "green card" – came to the US on a family-based visa.[8]

The second category consists of refugees — people who are oppressed in their home country and apply for legal visas ("refugees") or journey to the US border and then apply for asylum status.[9] Once granted legal status as a refugee by US officials, individuals cannot be deported, even if they initially arrived unlawfully.[10] Five to ten percent of legal immigrants in recent years were refugees, and their numbers are legally capped by the White House (up to 110,000 per year during the Obama administration, curtailed repeatedly during the Trump administration to 30,000 per year as of 2019[11]). Some reports show that the US currently resettles fewer refugees in proportion to its population than most other developed countries such as Canada and Australia.[12]

Reasons for the refugee asylum crisis include gang violence and corruption in their native countries. However, data shows that average incomes have grown robustly in all countries for the past decade, and homicides have been on the decline in Honduras and elsewhere since 2012.[13] One theory is that foreign aid from the US to Central American countries may help reduce poverty and violence.[14] Another factor perhaps causing the asylum crisis is the incentive posed by US policy that mandates granting of provisional residence to any asylum applicant who is traveling with children until a hearing to determine their status, which can take years.[15]

The third category is for immigrants admitted for employment purposes.[16] This includes both high-skilled and low-skilled workers. For high-skilled labor, the most common types of merit-, investment-, or skill-based immigration involve L-1, H-1B, O, and EB-5 visas. L-1 and H-1B visas fall into the nonimmigrant

visa category, which means that workers use these who may only plan to live in this country during the course of a single multi-year job. Technically, these types of visas are not for immigrants but for temporary workers, sometimes referred to as "guest workers."

For example, the H-1B visa is initially a 3-year visa, renewable for a second 3-year term, for total of 6 years and it may be extended in 1-year intervals if the employer sponsors a green card application for the worker. For low skilled labor, EB3 visas are one option. EB3 visas apply to jobs that require less than two years of training or experience. A temporary visa called H2A is also available for agricultural workers. These visas are generally for seasonal workers.

EFFECTS OF IMMIGRATION POLICIES

Immigrants, US residents, and foreign residents are the three broad groups of people affected by US immigration policies. Immigration generally benefits most US citizens, as reuniting foreign relatives with family members in the US is the most direct benefit, and this emphasis on family ties (in contrast with policies of some other nations) helps to promote faster assimilation. Indirectly, migrants help grow many businesses by doing work that is in need of labor, and by boosting the economy's overall productivity.[17] At the same time, expanding legal immigration has been shown to harm a small cohort of low-skilled US citizens by increasing competition for jobs and social services.[18]

ENFORCEMENT POLICIES

The main mechanism of immigration law enforcement is deportation — all people who are in the US without a legal right to stay can be removed. The US government may choose whether or not to make removing certain categories of deportable immigrants a priority. In addition, individuals found in violation of US immigration laws may be criminally prosecuted.

Two government agencies are tasked with enforcing our immigration laws, one at the border and one focused on immigrants already living and working in the US. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) patrols US borders and ports of entry to deter and detect unauthorized entry. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is responsible for identifying and deporting undocumented immigrants already in the United States.[19]

The upsurge in asylum seekers arriving from Central America to the southern US border is a crisis that has generated a huge backlog in processing asylum claims.[20] Immigrants are eligible for asylum under law if they can show they have, in their home country, been a victim of or have a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular group.[21] A federal courts recently affirmed that, under these guidelines, immigrants can seek asylum in the US to escape situations involving domestic violence and gang violence.[22]

Opinions differ on whether the policy applies to victims of gang violence in Central America, and the Trump Administration is seeking to narrow the grounds for asylum. One solution to the surge of asylum claims might be to hire more immigration judges and other agency personnel. For example, the Trump Administration's 2019 budget proposal included a request for $71.1 million to support 600 new positions.[23] Also, in July 2019, the Senate passed a bill providing $45 million to hire 30 new immigration judge "teams."[24]

It's very difficult to effectively police all border crossings — the US has an almost 2,000-mile land border with Mexico,[25] and some of the most significant post-9/11 security threats have been detected on the US-Canadian border.[26] In 2013, the Senate passed a bill increasing border security through physical barriers and surveillance was passed with bipartisan support.[27] Moreover, border enforcement cannot stop immigrants from violating the terms of their visa, for example by overstaying, which is estimated to account for more than half of all undocumented immigrants.[28]

A major enforcement challenge is the sheer size of the undocumented population, estimated at roughly 11 million people.[29] As the undocumented population has become more embedded in the US economy and society, this challenge has grown. More than 60% of undocumented immigrants have lived here for ten or more years,[30] and about one-third have at least one child under 18 who is a US citizen.[31] About two-thirds of undocumented immigrants are employed.[32] A policy of mass deportation would disrupt many local families, communities, and businesses. At the same time, it is important that the government act to ensure compliance with US laws.

One potential strategy is to prioritize only certain categories of undocumented immigrants — such as those convicted of crimes — for deportation. This contrasts with the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which President Obama initiated without authorization from Congress. This program provides temporary protection from deportation for undocumented immigrants who arrived here before they were 16, have lived continuously in the US since 2007, have completed high school or served in the US military, and have no felony or serious misdemeanor convictions.[33]

Some say that extending the stay of DACA residents would be consistent with American values, as these child immigrants through no fault of their own were brought here by their parents. Critics say that this offers de facto amnesty for illegal immigration and will encourage future illegal immigration.

Many conflicting values exist in these policy decisions.

On the one hand, many policy experts and ordinary citizens are concerned about the rule of law and effective control of our borders. Millions of undocumented immigrants are here in violation of the law, and strict application of the law would require that they leave. From one perspective, justice or procedural fairness requires that they return to their home countries and, in effect, get to the back of the line. Ultimately, truly enforcing the security of our borders means deporting people who come into the country illegally.

On the other hand, undocumented immigrants may not be able to safely return to their countries of origin. For some, the US is the only home that they know. Do they then have the right to pursue the American dream of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" if they are law-abiding, productive and contribute to our society? Or should these rights apply only to citizens and legal residents? What about the DACA recipients who were brought here as children and know no other country? What rights do they have? Would the liberties we take for granted be sacrificed if large-scale police action were required to force millions to leave, or make them live under threat?

Many different perspectives are at stake in these policy questions. Now take a look at some more specific proposals and arguments for and against them. This information is meant to help you start your deliberations.

Refugees and Asylum Policy

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Increase personnel in order to process asylum seekers' claims faster.	The existing system is overwhelmed by the record number of Central American asylum seekers arriving at America's southern border. Given their enormous workloads, immigration officers and judges make lots of mistakes. They sometimes deport refugees who are in fact subject to persecution in their home countries. At other times, they give asylum to migrants who are not entitled to it. Processing times for asylum claims range from two to five years.[34] As they await a final decision, refugees remain in limbo, unable to build a stable life for themselves either in the US or their homeland.	To make an impact, the government will need to hire at least 600 more personnel at an estimated cost of $71.1 million. This money could be better spent deterring refugees who recognize that they don't have a credible asylum claim and are really coming to the United States to find jobs. US government funds should be used to assist Central American countries whose desperate economic conditions are causing mass migrations to the US in search of employment.
Provide aid to reduce poverty and violence in Central America.	Promoting economic growth, increasing job opportunities, and strengthening police and law enforcement in Central America will greatly reduce migration at the US-Mexican border, because many migrants are fleeing violence and lawlessness.[35] Targeted initiatives, supported by US funds, can help Central American governments reduce violence in their countries. For example, drug cartels have destroyed effective law enforcement in these countries.[36] The US can aid in the reconstruction of effective and honest police forces and judiciaries. The US can also fund an ambitious job training program to help young people and steer them away from drug gangs.	It isn't clear that US aid could actually reduce migration from Central America. It would be more effective to deter them from coming to the US by threatening them with long-term detention at the border while their asylum claims are processed. Why should we Central American governments with aid when they aren't doing their jobs to restrain immigration? The way to stop this illegal immigration is for the US to demand that Mexico stop refugees who have crossed from Central America into Mexican territory from moving northwards into US territory. Mexico should instead arrange for refugees to claim asylum in Mexico.
Reduce the number of refugees allowed to resettle in the United States.	The American government has a special responsibility for the welfare of Americans. It should not divert resources to assist foreigners when so many Americans remain in need. Allowing refugees from Syria and other countries in the Middle East to resettle in the US could heighten to risk of terrorists settling in America. Existing vetting procedures do not do enough to eliminate this risk	2.6 million refugees now live in camps around the world under very poor conditions.[37] In 2016, the United States resettled 85,000 refugees.[38] Countries like Australia and Canada typically admit a larger number, relative to their populations. For example, Canada — with a population ten times smaller than the USs — admitted 7,000 refugees in 2014. We should recognize our moral responsibility to these desperate people and do better. To qualify for resettlement in the US, refugees must undergo extensive vetting. Refugees applying for resettlement face far more rigorous vetting than other categories of foreigners seeking to enter the US, such as tourists and economic migrants.

The Labor Market and the Economy

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Increase the number of visas for skilled workers to move to the US.	Many US high-tech companies have a greater demand for skilled workers than the US citizen talent pool can fulfill.[39] Greater access to skilled immigrants will help such companies get the workers they need. Attracting more highly skilled immigrants to work in the United States would help to boost innovation and productivity in the economy.	The government should pursue policies to increase the home-grown pool of skilled workers, instead of relying on migrant labor. For example, the government might act to make American higher education more affordable and accessible. Poaching skilled professionals from developing countries causes those countries to suffer "brain drain." For example, recruiting more doctors from developing countries could undermine health care in those countries. The US has a responsibility not to worsen brain drain in developing countries.
Increase the number of visas for low-skilled workers so enough workers can be hired for American industries that need them, like agriculture and service.	US companies would be better able to respond flexibly to labor shortages in the low-skilled sector if they can more easily hire migrant workers. This also keeps prices low for food and other agricultural products. The pressure to work and migrate illegally will be reduced in proportion with the size and flexibility of temporary work visas. For many low-skilled workers from developing countries, the opportunity to work in the US represents their only realistic chance to escape severe poverty.	Increasing the pool of low-skilled workers may reduce wages and increase the risk of unemployment for those US citizens who compete for jobs in low-skilled sectors.[40] The US is not responsible for promoting the economic well-being of foreigners.

Enforcing Immigration Law

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Require employers to use the E-verify computer system to confirm workers' eligibility.	Widespread use of E-verify will deter illegal entry and prevent foreigners from overstaying their visas. Some employers hire undocumented workers to circumvent taxes and minimum wage laws, and the fines they risk paying are too small to deter this illegal hiring. E-verify is already required in twenty states,[41] so the legal and technical issues are largely resolved. The program should be expanded so that employers in all 50 states comply.	E-verify violates the privacy of US citizens and can create errors that bar people from working who are legally authorized. Employers will have to hire or train staff to monitor compliance with E-verify. This will burden small businesses who have few employees. It should be the responsibility of border agents and US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to enforce immigration law, not employers.
First-time violators of immigration laws should only be expelled, not subject to criminal punishment.	A policy of criminality that punishes all unauthorized entrants would deter refugees fleeing persecution from seeking asylum. A policy of criminal punishment would separate families, harming the vulnerable children of undocumented immigrants, who would be left in the care of strangers while their parents are in prison.	Asylum seekers can avoid prosecution and criminal punishment if they make their claims at official border crossings. A policy of criminally punishing all violators of immigration laws is an effective way to deter illegal immigration. Foreigners can avoid criminal punishment by complying with US immigration laws.
Continue DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which addresses people who were brought to the US as children when their parents entered the country illegally	Only those undocumented immigrants who were brought here as children or young teenagers, typically by their parents, are eligible for DACA. They are not morally responsible for their parents' violations of American immigration law. DACA beneficiaries generally have closer ties to this country than to their parents' homeland. If deported, they face the challenge of adapting to a strange land at a young age. Our government should not impose such a traumatic experience on innocent people. DACA recipients will be contributors to our social and economic life. To qualify, they must not have committed any felonies; must also have completed high school; or served in the military. Many DACA youth enter colleges and universities in the US, and they have every incentive to be productive Americans.	Providing any undocumented immigrant, no matter how they came to be in this country, with official protection from deportation fosters disrespect for America's immigration laws. Congress has never approved the DACA program.[42] Presidents acting on their own do not have the proper authority to implement this program. The DACA program may encourage parents in foreign countries to enter the US illegally with their children. And it may encourage foreign parents to hire smugglers to transport their children across the border to be raised by relatives or friends in the US.

Long-Term Residents and Permanent Legal Status

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
Undocumented immigrants should be forced to return to their home countries before applying to legally come to the US to live and work permanently.	It is wrong for foreigners to enter or stay in the US in violation of our immigration laws. Immigrants who have entered illegally or overstayed their visas should not be rewarded with permanent status. Providing pathways to permanent legal status for those undocumented immigrants already here is unfair to applicants who wait for years to be allowed to enter the US lawfully. Providing pathways to permanent legal status for those already here would incentivize others who came to the US illegally or who overstayed their visas to stay here as long as possible in order to be eligible to convert their illegal status to legal status.	Most undocumented immigrants have lived in the US for more than 10 years, and most have one or more immediate family members who are US citizens. Requiring them to leave the country will often mean either separating them from their spouses and children, or forcing them to uproot their children who are US citizens to take them to a country they have never known. Current US immigration laws make it very difficult for the majority of undocumented residents to come back with legal status. Some undocumented immigrants have served in the US military and fought for our country in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. They and other undocumented immigrants strongly identify as Americans. At a time of record low unemployment, it would be detrimental to the economy to remove so many workers, with no alternative ones to fill their positions.

GLOSSARY

ASYLUM SEEKER: When refugees flee their own country and arrive in another country, they are entitled by international law to apply for asylum – the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive the legal protections that come with that status. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that their fear of persecution in their home country is well founded. Once an asylum seeker has been recognized as a refugee, they may not be sent back to their home country. Under US law, a person who the US government has granted asylum may not be deported, even if they initially crossed the US border unlawfully.

DACA (DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS): The DACA program temporarily protects undocumented immigrants from deportation, who came to the US when they were children. They are given a renewable two-year period of protection from deportation, and a work permit. To receive DACA status, an undocumented immigrant must have first arrived in the US before age 16, have continually lived in the US since 2007, and have completed a high-school education or served in the military. In addition, to be eligible for DACA benefits, an applicant must be free of any felony or significant misdemeanor convictions and must not have been convicted of three or more misdemeanors of any kind.

E-VERIFY: E-verify is a website and computer system maintained by the US government to help businesses check the eligibility of their employees to work in the United States. E-Verify compares information submitted by an employee with data from US government records. If the information matches, E-verify certifies that employee as eligible to work in the United States. If there is a mismatch, E-Verify alerts the employer.

REFUGEE: Refugees are a special category of migrants who have been forced to flee their home countries because of war, violence, or government repression. A refugee is defined in US and international law as any person who has left their own country and cannot return there because they have a well-founded fear of being persecuted based on their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

RESETTLEMENT: Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from the country in which they originally sought asylum to another country that has agreed to admit them on a permanent basis. Refugees often apply to be resettled when the country in which they first seek asylum is unable or unwilling to allow them to participate in the regular economy and society of that country, housing them instead in refugee camps. Refugees applying to be resettled in the United States must go through extensive screening, first by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN's refugee agency, and then by the US government.

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Issue Briefing

FOREIGN POLICY

Over the past decade, differences over American foreign policy have sharpened. Some argue that active international engagement, through military alliances, trade, aid, diplomacy, and even occasional humanitarian interventions, makes America stronger and better able to prevent or manage dangerous situations. Some favor a global leadership role for the US economically and diplomatically, but not militarily. Other critics argue that global trade and development aid to the poorest countries do not sufficiently serve American interests. At issue also is whether America should mainly work with allies and international organizations to promote its interests, or use its power alone, however it sees fits, to protect narrower national interests. The candidate who wins the 2020 presidential election will have to navigate a challenging and changing landscape in foreign policy. The heart of the debate is what America's relationship with the rest of the world should be.

This briefing paper weighs these issues with a particular focus on alliances and trade, the global war on terror, and our country's relationships with China, Russia, and Iran.

Alliances and Trade

ALLIANCES

During and after the Cold War, the US led its partners through alliances and free trade agreements that focused on strategic areas of the globe. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an alliance of the US, Canada, and over twenty European countries, requires members to defend any member attacked by an outside power. Originally, it was part of the US strategy for protecting Western Europe from invasion by the Soviet Union.

After the Cold War, NATO expanded to several former Soviet satellites bordering Russia thus antagonizing that country. At the same time, many Western European members significantly reduced their defense spending. In 2014, NATO members all committed to spend 2% of their gross domestic product on defense by 2024, a goal first set in 2002. In Asia, American maintains defensive alliances with five nations and works closely with several other states. Throughout the world in more than 130 countries, hundreds of thousands of American troops are deployed.

In 2018, the US defense budget was $650 billion.[1] This is roughly 3.25% of our national economy, and represents 32% of global spending on defense. We spent roughly the same amount in current dollars at the end of the Cold War, before reducing defense budgets to around $450 billion in the 1990s. Amid the post 9/11-wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and counter-terrorism missions around the world, the defense budget rose dramatically to almost $800 billion in 2010. In 2011, a dispute in Congress between the two parties produced a series of automatic cuts of about $150 million from the annual defense budget (the "sequester").[2] America's substantial defense spending is reflected in how well it provides for its soldiers and invests in them as an effective and well-equipped fighting force.

TRADE

Between 1944 and 2016, the US was clearly committed to lowering tariffs ("taxes" on imports) and other barriers to international trade, such as subsidies for exports and quotas on imports. In theory, free trade should increase prosperity for all by lowering the cost of goods and services everywhere,

as countries specialize in producing particular goods and services. Most economists believe the US benefits from freer international trade. However, the gains from trade are not equally shared. Lowering trade barriers costs American jobs in some sectors (where other countries are more competitive than the US), while it creates jobs in other sectors where the US can export more competitively.

National governments negotiate trade deals, but companies and public interest groups can lobby for or against specific provisions.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is made up of most countries in the world, including the US. The countries in the WTO promise to lower tariffs for all WTO members in accordance with the organization's rules. Countries can only raise tariffs above WTO levels in response to "dumping," — when a country exports a good for a lower price than is charged in its own domestic market — or for national security concerns.

Countries targeted with tariffs can raise tariffs in retaliation while an international court judges the dispute. The WTO has not been able to agree on further tariff reductions in over a decade. China joined the WTO in 2001, which gave its companies better access to the US market. This was marketed as a win-win that would help provide cheaper goods for Americans and spark political reforms in China.

Countries also negotiate regional free trade agreements, which lower tariffs further, below WTO levels. The 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is the biggest such example of this, as it dramatically cut tariffs on trade between the US, Mexico, and Canada. This had the effect of encouraging companies to build supply chains to assemble manufactured goods across the three counties, especially in industries like auto manufacturing. In 2018, negotiators agreed to an updated deal, the United States-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) trade agreement, which would make producing cars in Mexico more expensive (although still cheaper than in the US) and improve access to Canada for American dairy products. Congress has to still ratify this draft agreement.

Under the Obama administration, the US negotiated two large trade agreements — the Trans-Pacific Partnership (with Canada, Mexico, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Australia, and others) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (with the European Union). These deals would have further reduced tariffs on trade and increased protections for workers, the environment, and US intellectual property abroad. However, President Trump withdrew from these agreements before Congress could ratify them, leaving both deals in limbo.

Critics of global free trade say American manufacturing jobs have been lost in these deals. Wages are lower in places like Mexico, China, India, and Vietnam, and these countries also have weaker labor and environmental standards than the US. American consumers gain, as they can purchase many foreign-made goods at much lower prices than they could if these goods were produced in the US. Some say, pointing to America's growing trade deficits, that NAFTA and trade with China has cost millions of jobs in the US.[3] However, others say that automation better explains America's steady or increasing manufacturing output despite fewer manufacturing jobs.[4] In other words, the US actually manufactures more now, but does so despite employing people.

SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

One key American foreign policy issue is whether the US should defend human rights and support democratic institutions and groups in other countries. "Realists" say that our foreign policy and military deployments should serve our national interests in making America more secure and prosperous. Therefore, we should ignore human rights abuses in authoritarian countries like Russia, China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and instead advance our economic welfare, control weapons proliferation, help allies like Israel, and find ways to work with other countries on issues such as terrorism.

On the other hand, "idealist" critics point out that America's greatest rivals are dictatorships; that no two democracies have ever gone to war with one another; and that the democracies of the world have been our most reliable allies and trading partners. In this view, America's national interests are best served through the peaceful spread and defense of democracy and its ideals and practices.

In fact, strong bipartisan support exists in Congress for peaceful assistance programs to help other countries develop democracy's core institutions. Currently the US spends about $2 billion per year on these efforts, which is less than one-tenth of one percent of the total federal budget. The current question is how much should the US emphasize democracy and human rights in its diplomacy — and should democracy be a prerequisite for US economic and military assistance to other countries, which now totals nearly $50 billion?

Realists counter that larger priorities exist when dealing with adversaries like China and Russia, and that criticizing partners for poor human rights records could make them less cooperative in the War on Terror or American efforts to counter Iran, Russia, or China.

Human rights advocates say that the US should use its voice in world affairs to defend the freedoms of speech, organization, religion other principles that have made America a great nation. Therefore, we should condemn violations of these rights even among friendly governments or powerful adversaries, and we should consider how well countries adhere to democracy and the rule of law when allocating foreign aid.

The Global War on Terror

In the wake of 9/11, the US and its allies have been waging a Global War on Terror involving extensive military operations in the Middle East and Africa. In late 2001, the US and its NATO allies invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban government to deny al Qaeda, the group behind the September 11th attacks, a safe haven to plan more attacks against the US. In 2003, the US invaded Iraq and overthrew its dictator, Saddam Hussein, in part to prevent him from developing weapons of mass destruction, which the Bush administration feared could be given to terrorists.

Under the Obama administration, the US along with its NATO allies intervened militarily in Libya in 2011, with the support of the UN Security Council, to prevent an imminent humanitarian catastrophe in the civil war. The military operations enabled the rebels to overthrow Muammar Qaddafi's government. In 2014, the Obama Administration also returned troops to Iraq and deployed some in Syria starting to fight the Islamic State. Finally, as terrorist groups have relocated or emerged in other areas of the Middle East and Africa, the US has deployed troops and drones to attack these groups in cooperation with local governments.

As of 2019, the US is, according to some accounts, conducting counter-terror operations — which include combat and drone/air strikes, supporting and training local forces, and bases — in over 75 countries.[5]

The Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations have justified these actions under the "Authorization for Use of Military Force" (AUMF), which Congress passed after 9/11 and which allows the president to use military force against any organization or country involved in 9/11. However, this interpretation has been seriously questioned because the AUMF is now being used to justify military operations against terrorist groups that did not exist in 2001.

Having won initially in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US sought to rebuild them as modern democracies by providing them with political, military, and economic assistance. However, in both countries, insurgencies soon emerged even after the US installed friendly governments there. Today, there are 14,000 American soldiers in Afghanistan and roughly 5,000 in Iraq. In each country they mostly train local forces rather than fight on the front lines.

Supporters say that these two interventions were necessary to ensure that these countries never again become threats to America. Some say that only the Afghanistan intervention was necessary. The total long-term cost of these interventions is estimated to be several trillion dollars, which includes military operations, the medical costs of caring for injured veterans, aid to Afghanistan and Iraq, and interest on the debt that paid for the wars. Roughly 14,000 US soldiers and contractors have been killed and an unknown number injured in the two conflicts. The conflicts have killed hundreds of thousands of local combatants and civilians and have generated millions of refugees.[6]

These interventions have resulted in much debate and analysis.

On one hand, terrorist groups have been unable to carry out another major attack like 9/11 on the US. However, drone strikes and military operations have not completely defeated these Islamist terrorist groups.

For example, while the Islamic State has lost all the territory it gained in 2014-5, it continues through cells and branches scattered around the world. These cells have carried out smaller attacks in the US and Europe, often through radicalized American and European citizens.

Compared to the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, Afghanistan's and Iraq's governments today are much more democratic. But they remain plagued by violence and corruption, with weak and ineffective leadership, and political freedom is still limited in those countries.

In contrast to Iraq and Afghanistan, the US did not attempt a "nation building" project in Libya after the 2011 fall of the Qaddafi government. For the past eight years, a civil war has engulfed that country. In each of these cases, terrorist and rebels have taken advantage of weak or failed governments to plan, train, and conquer land.

Great Power Conflict

CHINA

China's meteoric rise since 2000 has produced a historic shift in geopolitics, presenting the US with choices and challenges. To what extent does China's rise threaten US security interests? Should the US take measures to protect its economy from Chinese competition? Should we aid Asian allies increasingly pressured by China?

China was the world's richest country until the 1800s. European and Japanese imperialists then carved up China until after World War II, when the Chinese Communist Party came to power. In the 1980s, the Chinese Communists began developing a model of state-led capitalism. Today, China is the world's second largest economy with a growing middle class. However, that economic growth has not produced greater political freedom and openness. Today, the Communist Party remains in power and continues to deny basic freedoms, control the Internet, and suppress dissidents and ethnic minorities with ruthless efficiency.

China's entry into the WTO helped make it a global manufacturing hub, thanks to its large, low-wage work force. Recently, however, wages have risen, and China's workforce will soon begin shrinking as the population ages. China's economic rise contributed to but did not alone cause the decline in American manufacturing, which has been a longer phenomenon driven by technological innovation and the integration of more economies into the global trading system.

China's government and military, and its state-owned companies, have been accused of stealing the intellectual property of US firms, which allows them to use American inventions to undermine this country's economic competitiveness. Most of these technologies — such as robotics, drones, artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons, and gene editing — are "dual-use," meaning that they have both commercial and military applications.

As a result, China's thirty-year campaign of technology transfer poses a serious threat to American military superiority, as the Chinese government incorporates this into its ambitious military modernization and expansion programs. China is developing weapons to counter the US Navy, and is building artificial islands for military bases in disputed territory in the South China Sea — a crucial maritime zone through which one-third of all global shipping passes.[7]

As China's wealth and technological prowess grow, its government is making major investments in research and development in areas such as artificial intelligence. As a percentage of GDP, China's spending on research and development now vastly exceeds that of the US federal government.[8]

Members of Congress and foreign policy experts from both parties broadly agree on the need for more vigorous US policies to limit how China acquires high technology, shapes global public opinion, and exercises geopolitical power. Still, foreign policy experts differ on how exactly to respond.

Critics of the Trump Administration are concerned about a possible withdrawal of US international leadership since 2017. Such a power vacuum, they say, would likely be filled by China, which positions itself as the global leader of the 21st century. The Trump Administration and its supporters reply that Trump is the first American president to stand up to China with regard to unfair trade practices, including theft and coercive transfer of American high technology, as well as China's efforts to influence politics, media, and universities in the US and other countries.

Much as the US has used its central role in the global economy for political leverage, China uses investment and threats to pressure other governments. Moreover, China's rapid but slowing economic growth still gives it enormous resources to spend on international development projects, making it by some accounts the largest provider of foreign aid in the world, surpassing the US. China recently unveiled an ambitious global investment strategy called "One Belt One Road," which is aimed at cultivating the resources and infrastructure to support and promote its model of "authoritarian capitalism." This investment in countries in Asia, Africa and Europe may dwarf America's celebrated Marshall Plan of Post-WW II Europe.

RUSSIA

America's old rivalry with Russia has reemerged in the past decade. Between 1948 and 1989, the US and the Soviet Union competed globally in the Cold War. In 1991, the Soviet Union fell apart, and eventually the Russian Republic inherited most of its military and strategic assets, helping it to rise again as a great power.

However, in the first decade after the Soviet Union's collapse, Russia suffered economic turmoil and political weakness. During Bill Clinton's administration, the US supported the expansion of NATO to countries formerly part of the Soviet Union's orbit. Since Vladimir Putin came to power in 1999, he has stabilized Russia's economy, modernized its military, militarily intervened in neighboring countries, and sought to re-assert Russian power and influence in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the world.

Still, Russia remains far weaker than the former Soviet Union ever was. Russia's economy is the world's 11th largest, only about 8% the size of the US economy, and is dominated by oligarchs close to Putin.

In 2014, Russia began a war in neighboring Ukraine to destabilize that former Soviet Republic and keep it from joining the EU and NATO. Russian soldiers then invaded and seized Crimea, a strategic Ukrainian peninsula on the Black Sea that Russia annexed despite global condemnation. Russia continues to support Russian-speaking rebels in the civil war raging in eastern Ukraine. Russia also has sent troops to prop up Syria, its ally.

In recent years, Putin's government has tried to influence elections in the US and Europe, including the 2016 presidential election in the US and the referendum in the UK on leaving the EU. Russia has openly supported some European parties, hacked sensitive information from campaigns, and sponsored misinformation through news and social media.

The effects of this activity on election results are unclear. In response to Russian actions in Ukraine and against American elections, the US has placed sanctions on individuals and firms close to Putin. Russia has responded with sanctions against European trade. Finally, Russia also has as many nuclear weapons as the US, and agreements that helped limit the nuclear arms race are collapsing.

IRAN

Iran has long tried to develop nuclear weapons, which Israel and the US view this prospect as unacceptable and even have carried out covert actions against Iran's nuclear program and considered military strikes. In 2015, the US, the European Union, Russia, and China convinced a relatively moderate Iranian government to agree to the Iran nuclear agreement. The terms were designed to restrict Iran's nuclear research so that it would not be able to produce a nuclear weapon for at least ten years. In exchange, Iran would be able to trade with the rest of the world. The agreement did not aim to change the conservative, Islamic regime in Iran or to prevent Iran from supporting allied countries and groups in the Middle East.

President Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018, citing Iranian non-nuclear missile testing and military operations in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen. He reintroduced sanctions and cut Iran off from US markets and banks. In early 2019, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the international organization charged with monitoring Iran's compliance, certified that Iran was still complying with the nuclear part of the agreement. In May 2019, Iran's president announced that Iran would re-launch its nuclear program in response to America's withdrawal and sanctions.

These foreign policy issues derive in part from conflicting values.

Some Americans think the US should affirm human rights and democratic freedoms around the world, insisting that these are universal, not just American, values. For many, this includes not only a commitment to NATO allies, but also a willingness to act, sometimes militarily, in the interests of those who may be oppressed by autocratic regimes.

Others favor only more limited ways of spreading democratic values globally, such as using diplomacy to cooperate with other countries that share our beliefs and to help them develop democratic freedoms. However, critics think we need to focus more on our needs at home. For some, fighting for justice abroad when there is still injustice at home is wrong. Others reject the possibility of promoting democracy in countries and cultures vastly different than ours. Under this view, we cannot change the world, and, if we try to, we will simply put the lives of our soldiers and diplomats at risk.

International Trade

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
The US should rejoin the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trading arrangement between 12 countries, but not China.	The TPP will help encourage its members to look to the US, rather than China, for leadership on trade, worker protection, and environmental control. It will also make US goods more competitive, creating more jobs and lower prices for consumer goods.	The TPP does more to protect big business than workers or the environment. It will encourage companies to move manufacturing out of the US.
The US should increase tariffs on Chinese goods.	Higher tariffs will protect US manufacturing jobs. They can also serve as a bargaining chip in negotiations to halt Chinese theft of US intellectual property and provide fair access to the Chinese markets for American firms.	American consumers will have to pay more for the $500 billion in goods imported from China each year. China will respond to US tariffs with tariff hikes on US goods sent to China. US agriculture will also be hard hit, since it is heavily dependent on exporting products like soybeans and pork to China.

International Security and Foreign Policy

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
The US should tighten sanctions on Russia.	Tighter sanctions could deter Vladimir Putin from meddling in American and European democracy. They also punish Russia for its seizure of a part of Ukraine (Crimea) and its ongoing military efforts to undermine independent government in the Ukraine.	Tighter sanctions risk worsening relations between Russia and the US, which could increase the chances of military conflict between our two countries. Existing sanctions have not changed Russian behavior, and increasing their severity will hurt our European allies, who are more dependent on Russian trading relationships.
The US should reaffirm its commitment to defend any NATO ally attacked by a hostile force.	President Trump has repeatedly called this commitment in question, demoralizing our allies and increasing the chances of Russian military intervention. Our European allies have never in fact called upon the US to repel attacks. Only the US has used NATO this way, in response to 9/11. NATO members honored our call for war against Afghanistan.	The NATO commitment increases the chances of war with Russia. President Trump should require large increases in European defense spending before reaffirming our commitment.
The US should enhance its military presence in the Asia Pacific region to prevent aggression by China.	Containment policies worked against the Soviet Union and will work against Communist China. Military cooperation with countries like Japan and India, as well as Australia and New Zealand, is essential in resisting Chinese demands. If the US does not support freedom of navigation and the security of democracies in the Asia Pacific region, China could impose authoritarian control over the entire region, threatening our economic security as well as the future of freedom in the world.	In contrast to the Soviet Union, Communist China does not want to take over the world. Rather it seeks to be the dominant power in Asia. As a consequence, it does not pose a direct threat to the US, and American military alliances with other Asian nations will only increase the risk of US-China conflict. If China wants to control the South China Sea or be the dominant power in Asia, it's not our business.

Continued on next page

International Security and Foreign Policy / *Continued*

PROPOSALS	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
The US should re-commit to the Iran Nuclear Agreement.	The Iran agreement represents the best chance of preventing that country from developing a serious nuclear threat over the next five to ten years. There is no evidence that Iran has cheated on its commitments under the agreement to forego activities that could enable it to produce a nuclear bomb.	Iran is the principal threat to stability in the Middle East, and the deal will not prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons in the long run. The deal gives Iran economic resources and international credibility at a time when it is supporting terrorist groups and other allies who endanger both Israel and American troops in the Middle East.
Presidents should be required to obtain explicit congressional approval for sending US troops into combat situations.	The Constitution gives Congress, not the president, the power "to declare war." Our leaders should engage in a full public debate before making war in the name of the American People.	Military threats from terrorists and rogue states require rapid responses. Presidents need the authority and flexibility to strike quickly with armed forces. Congressional approval takes too long and puts American lives and security at risk.
The US should intervene abroad with its military when it is necessary to prevent genocide.	America has a moral obligation to prevent mass atrocities by authoritarian governments or extremist groups. History shows that it is necessary to act early and decisively, with force, to prevent genocide, and if the US does not lead, other democratic countries are unlikely to take action on their own.	The US should respect the sovereignty of other countries, even when their governments pursue policies that deeply offend us. There is a lot of evil in the world, and assuming an obligation to prevent genocide is a recipe for endless war. We can condemn mass violence, but it's not our job to save the world.
The US should use diplomacy and financial support to promote democracy and human rights throughout the world.	Democracies share values and interests with the US, and democracies do not fight one another. All of the countries threatening our security are non-democracies. Promoting democracy and human rights abroad will produce more democracies, new allies, and fewer threats. This will serve America's national interests.	The US should not interfere in the domestic politics of other countries, just as they should not intervene in American politics. This should be true even when foreign governments pursue policies that offend us. We should focus on building alliances with any country that can help advance US national interests, including dictatorships.
The US should increase defense spending by five percent per year to meet rising global challenges and ensure military readiness.	The military needs more funding in order to recover from the global war on terror and rebuild its ability to fight and defeat major countries investing in high-tech weaponry, like China and Russia. The US cannot afford to withdraw from the world. The last century showed that America's own security is tied to the world's security. The best way to prevent another world war is through strong military alliances that can win wars.	The US spends more on defense than the next 8 highest spenders combined, and does not need to spend more to maintain this dominance. Higher defense spending threatens national security by either increasing deficits or curtailing domestic spending. Other countries should be responsible for their own defense and should not be able to free-ride on alliances with the U.S.

GLOSSARY

NATO: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is an alliance of the US, Canada, and over twenty European countries that requires members to defend any member attacked by an outside power. Originally, it was part of the US strategy for protecting Western Europe from invasion by the Soviet Union. During the Clinton administration, NATO began expanding to include former Soviet states.

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NAFTA: The 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is an agreement that dramatically cut tariffs on trade between the US, Mexico, and Canada. This had the effect of encouraging companies to build supply chains to assemble manufactured goods across the three counties, especially in industries like auto manufacturing. In 2018, negotiators agreed to an updated deal, the United States-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) trade agreement, which would make producing cars in Mexico more expensive (although still cheaper than in the US) and improve access to Canada for American dairy products. Congress has yet to ratify this draft agreement.

"REALISTS": Those who believe that foreign policy and military deployments should serve our national interests in making America more secure and prosperous. Therefore, we should ignore human rights abuses in authoritarian countries like Russia, China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and instead advance our economic welfare, control weapons proliferation, help allies, and find ways to work with other countries on issues such as terrorism.

"IDEALISTS": Those who believe foreign policy should promote the peaceful spread and defense of democracy and its ideals and practices abroad, including by addressing human rights abuses in authoritarian countries.

AUTHORIZATION FOR THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE (AUMF): The "Authorization for Use of Military Force" is a bill that Congress passed after 9/11 and which allows the president to use military force against any organization or country involved in 9/11. It has been used by various presidents to justify military operations abroad, including in Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2011 and, as of 2019, 75 other countries. However, this interpretation has been questioned because the AUMF is now being used to justify military operations against terrorist groups that did not exist in 2001.

TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP (TPP): A trade agreement (with Canada, Mexico, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Australia and others) that was negotiated under the Obama administration. The TPP would have reduced tariffs on trade and increased protections for workers the environment, and US intellectual property abroad. President Trump withdrew from this agreement before Congress could ratify it.

IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT: Formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Iran Nuclear Agreement was reached when the US, the European Union, Russia, and China convinced the Iranian government to restrict Iran's nuclear research so that it would not be able to produce a nuclear weapon for at least ten years. In exchange, Iran would be able to trade with the rest of the world. Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018, citing Iranian non-nuclear missile testing and military operations in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen. He reintroduced sanctions and cut Iran off from US markets and banks. In May 2019, Iran's president announced that Iran would re-launch its nuclear program in response to America's withdrawal.

ENDNOTES

[1] In 2017 dollars

[2] Spending data drawn from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. "Military Expenditure | SIPRI." Accessed June 5, 2019. https://sipri.org/research/armament-and-disarmament/arms-transfers-and-military-spending/military-expenditure. "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database | SIPRI." Accessed June 5, 2019. https://sipri.org/databases/milex.

[3] "Heading South: U.S.-Mexico Trade and Job Displacement after NAFTA," *Economic Policy Institute* (blog), Accessed June 5, 2019, https://www.epi.org/publication/heading_south_u-s-mexico_trade_and_job_displacement_after_nafta1/. "The China Toll Deepens: Growth in the Bilateral Trade Deficit between 2001 and 2017 Cost 3.4 Million U.S. Jobs, with Losses in Every State and Congressional District | Economic Policy Institute," Accessed June 5, 2019, https://www.epi.org/publication/the-china-toll-deepens-growth-in-the-bilateral-trade-deficit-between-2001-and-2017-cost-3-4-million-u-s-jobs-with-losses-in-every-state-and-congressional-district/.

[4] For a non-technical description of the argument see Cocco, Federica, "Most US Manufacturing Jobs Lost to Technology, Not Trade," Financial Times, December 2, 2016, https://www.ft.com/content/dec677c0-b7e6-11e6-ba85-95d1533d9a62.

[5] For a graphic representation, see Stephanie Savell. "This Map Shows Where in the World the U.S. Military Is Combating Terrorism." Smithsonian, January 2019. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/map-shows-places-world-where-us-military-operates-180970997/. Data drawn from the Costs of War project at Brown University.

[6] Data drawn from the Costs of War Project at Brown University. For an overview, "Summary of Findings | Costs of War," https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/summary.

[7] https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/.

[8] Michael Brown and Pavneet Singh, *China's Technology Transfer Strategy*, Defense Innovation Unit Experimental, January 2018.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS

Helena is a new type of institution that seeks to address critical societal problems. Helena's first project, "Factory in the Sky," supported the construction of the first commercial carbon capture factory by the Swiss company Climeworks, which is now operating 14 plants globally. Its second project, "Shield," catalyzed state and federal action to help protect the North American electrical grid from threats due to solar storms and cyber-attack, including a 2019 Presidential Executive Order. Helena operates its Projects with a small group of leaders it calls "Helena Members." They include Nobel Laureates, Academy Award winners, Four-Star Generals, Olympic athletes, NGO leaders, technology entrepreneurs, explorers, and more.

The Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University is housed in the Department of Communication. The CDD is devoted to research about democracy and public opinion obtained through Deliberative Polling®. The method of Deliberative Polling has been used in 28 countries around the world through over 100 projects, at varying levels of government and society.

NORC at the University of Chicago is an objective, non-partisan research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions. Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration. Today, government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world partner with NORC to transform increasingly complex information into useful knowledge.

By the People Productions is an independent and nonpartisan broadcast and event management company that produces civic engagement projects and related documentaries. By the People's mission is to develop and produce civic engagement events and related broadcasts that bring informed citizen discussion to the public square. Originally a unit of the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour and the PBS NewsHour, By the People became an independent organization in 2015. From its inception in 1996 By the People has worked closely with the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University on local, state-wide and national Deliberative Poll projects and broadcasts on a broad array of policy issues. BTP is based in Washington DC.

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