

To: Interested Parties

From: Sean McElwee & Bilal Baydoun

Re: Voters Continue to Support Decriminalization of and Protection for Unhoused People During Pandemic

Date: 12/9/2020

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, unhoused people, uniquely vulnerable to the spread of disease, have borne the brunt of government inaction. Yet in some places where the government has taken action it came in the form of crackdowns and [new ordinances](#) that criminalize the status of living without a home—[actions that contradict CDC guidance](#), exacerbate existing problems, and harm those most in need of help. Such actions continue to be at odds with the views of most voters, who want the government to play a bigger role in helping and protecting people experiencing homelessness, according to new polling.

Rather than criminalize homelessness, during the pandemic voters want investments in temporary housing, including by purchasing and repurposing unoccupied buildings. Polling from Data for Progress and The Justice Collaborative Institute underscores how voters see the risks to public health by neglecting a large unhoused population that is [expected to grow as evictions loom](#), and how those risks are compounded by the criminal legal system. Among the findings:

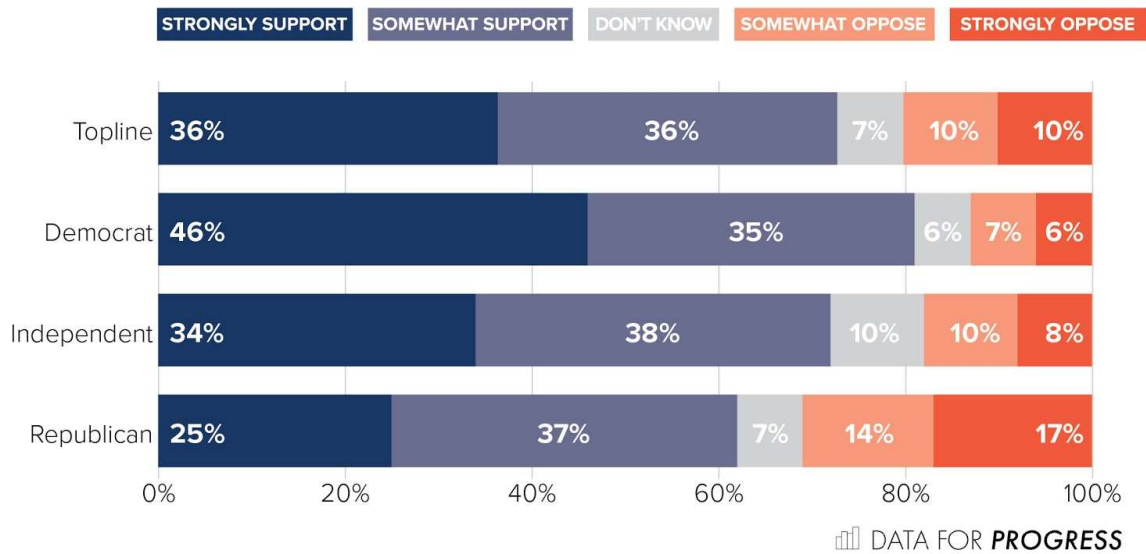
- 72% of voters, including 62% of Republicans, support the government purchasing unoccupied buildings and repurposing them as temporary housing.
- Over three-quarters of voters want more government aid for people experiencing homelessness, including through temporary rental assistance (77% of respondents) and increased funding to non-profit housing providers (82% of respondents).
- 62% of voters want a temporary ban on towing vehicles in which people are living during the pandemic.

In March, a national poll by The Justice Collaborative Institute and Data for Progress showed [overwhelming bipartisan support](#) for measures to protect—and not punish—the unhoused, and that public opinion aligns with the views of experts that housing the homeless is proven to enhance public health and safety. This new polling, nine months later, shows that such support has not wavered.

Polling & Findings

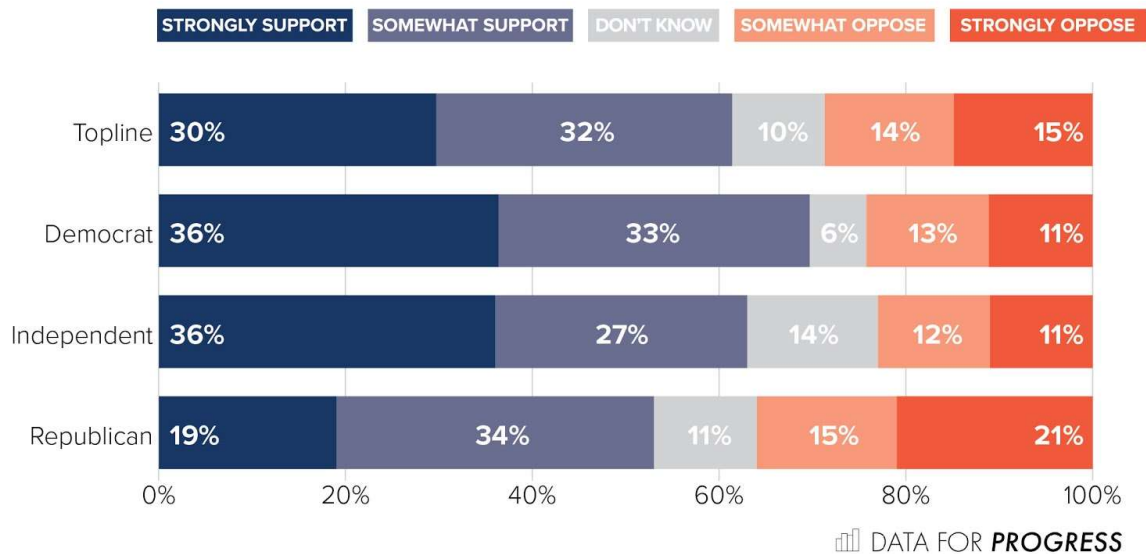
Across party and demographic lines, voters strongly support measures to purchase unoccupied buildings for temporary housing for the duration of the pandemic.

Would you support or oppose measures by the government to purchase or take control of unoccupied buildings and housing to temporarily house people experiencing homelessness for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic?



72% of voters—including 81% of Democrats, 72% of Independents, and 62% of Republicans—would support a temporary ban on towing vehicles in which people are living during the pandemic.

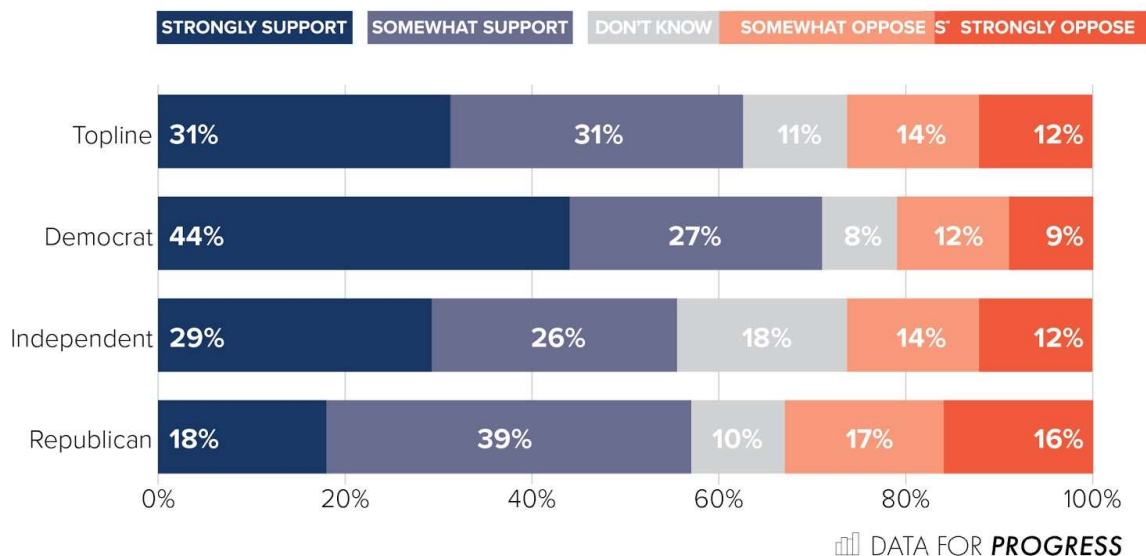
Thinking about the state in which you live, would you support or oppose a temporary ban on towing vehicles in which people are living, that extends for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic?



Likewise, when presented with the CDC recommendation to not clear homeless encampments, 62% of respondents said they would support a temporary ban on such law enforcement activity for the duration of the pandemic.

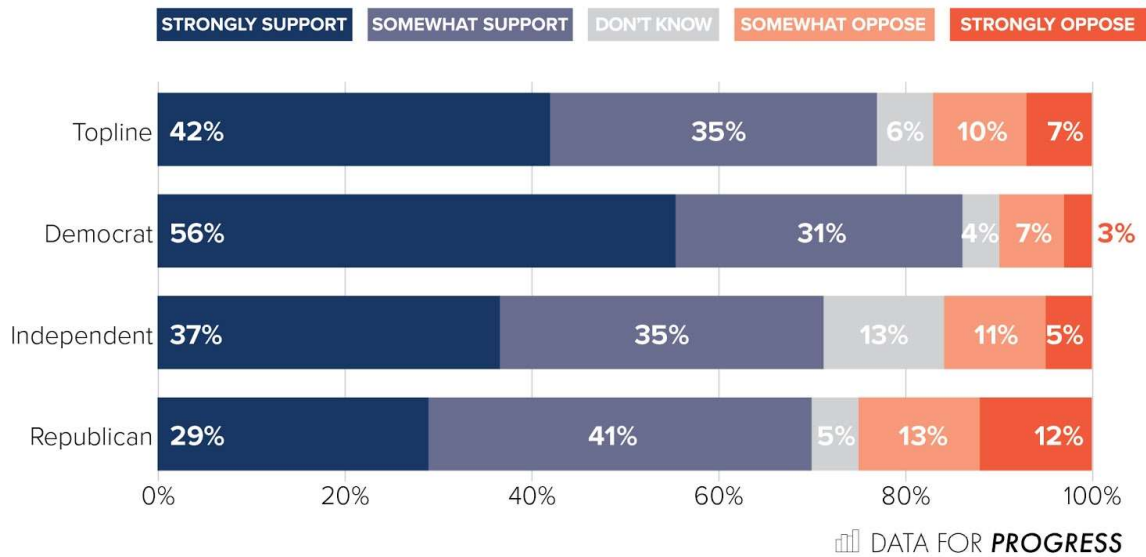
The Centers for Disease Control issued the following guidelines for the pandemic: “Unless individual housing units are available, do not clear encampments during the community spread of COVID-19. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious spread.”

Would you support or oppose a temporary ban on law enforcement clearing out of homeless encampments, for the duration of the pandemic?



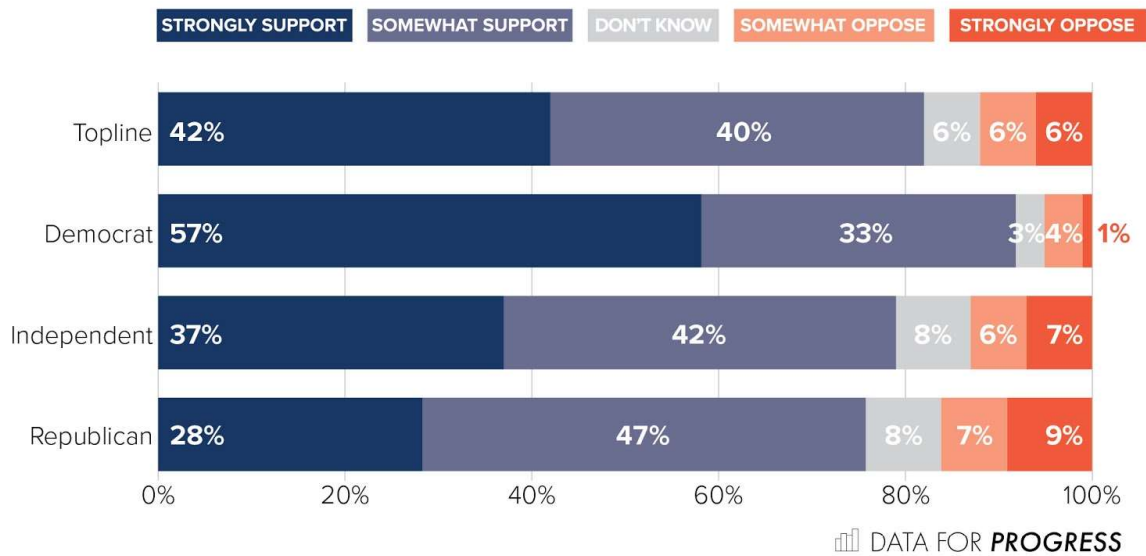
The data indicates that voters understand the limitations of the criminal legal system in curbing, if not exacerbating, community spread of COVID-19. But they also support active housing assistance. Seventy-seven percent of respondents support temporary rental assistance for those experiencing homelessness, including 70% of Republicans, 72% of Independents, and 87% of Democrats. The support is steady among voters young and old, drawing 78% support from respondents over 45 and 75% among voters under 45.

Given the coronavirus pandemic, would you support or oppose temporary rental assistance to Americans experiencing homelessness for as long as the pandemic continues?



Finally, voters would approve of more government assistance to non-profit housing providers, ensuring those providers can successfully provide stable housing throughout the pandemic. More than 80% of all voters surveyed would support this measure, with broad consensus across partisan and demographic subgroups.

Given the coronavirus pandemic, would you support or oppose government assistance to non-profit housing providers to ensure that those providers are able to continue to provide stable housing to their tenants for as long as the pandemic continues?



Polling Methodology

From December 4 to December 6, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,080 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 3.0 percentage points.