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Tiller Civic Engagement Survey Finds:

WHEN IT COMES TO ELECTING A PRESIDENT, CHARACTER STILL COUNTS

Trump Proclaims *National Character Counts Week*, But Biden More Often Seen as Walking the Walk:

- At Least 7 in 10 Americans **Strongly Agree** That It Is Important for a POTUS to Tell the Truth, Respect the Military, Have a Strong Vision, Treat Others with Respect
 - Biden Outpolls Trump on Treating Others with Respect (48% to 26%), Telling the Truth (42% to 28%), and Listening to Others/Taking Advice (47% to 28%)
 - Trump Deemed More Prepared to Make Unpopular Decisions (45% to 31%)
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Across Gender and Party Lines, Americans Are Increasingly Frustrated . . .

- 87% Say Political Climate Would Improve If We Spent More Time Helping Others
- 81% More Frustrated About the State of the Union than They Were Four Years Ago
- 75% Say It Is Hard to Know What's Best for the Country

. . . But Responsible and Engaged

- 90% Say Doing Small Things Regularly as Important as Formal, Organized Efforts
 - Most Say They Are At Least Somewhat Engaged in Social/Civic Activities
 - Among the Very Engaged, 75% Plan to Be Even More Engaged If Their Candidate Wins
 - 70% Would Pay 10% More in Taxes If It Meant Eliminating Poverty and Hunger in U.S.
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**Percentage-wise, Election Could See Largest Turnout Since 1900:
9% Had Already Voted, 59% Said They Were Very Likely to Vote, 16% Somewhat Likely**

To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate? Who Will We Turn to For Advice?

- Family Physician (47%), CDC/Medical Authorities (40%) Cited as First or Second Most Trusted Source of Expertise on Vaccinations
 - The Media (50%) and President Trump (41%) Cited as Least Reliable Sources of Guidance
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NEW YORK, N.Y., OCT. 19, 2020 – When it comes to electing a president, character clearly still counts.

Americans strongly value a candidate's truthfulness, respect for the military, having a vision for the country, and treating others with respect, according to the results of the Tiller Civic Engagement Survey, released here today by Tiller, LLC, a leading advocacy marketing consultancy. Those values were consistently expressed across both gender and party lines.

In terms of most character attributes, Democratic candidate for president and former vice president Joseph Biden outpolled the Republican candidate and incumbent President Donald Trump, with roughly the same double-digit lead that many national polls were showing in early October relative to the general election.

The 2020 Tiller Civic Engagement Survey was designed to generate insights into Americans' attitudes and behaviors relative to personal values and social and civic engagement. It was conducted from October 5 to October 7, 2020 by ENGINE Insights among a sample of 1,004 adults 18 years of age and older as part of its online CARAVAN omnibus study, which is conducted three times a week among a demographically representative U.S. sample of adults. Completed interviews are weighted by five variables: age, sex, geographic region, race and education to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the total U.S. population. The margin of error for a sample size of 1,004 adults is +/- 3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Biden Leads Trump on Most Character Markers

At least seven in 10 Americans **strongly agree** that it is important for a POTUS to “tell the truth” (74%), “respect the military” (72%), “have a strong vision for the country’s future” (71%), and “treat others with respect” (70%).

Among men and women alike, Biden outpolled Trump on most character markers. Asked which candidate is better described by a particular important characteristic, Biden outpolled Trump by significant margins on “treats others with respect” (48% to 26%), “tells the truth” (42% to 28%), and “seeks counsel/listens well” (47% to 28%). President Trump was deemed more prepared to make unpopular decisions (45% to 31%).

Character-wise, Biden polled stronger with urban and suburban poll participants; Trump, with rural participants. Biden led among Americans describing their political affiliation as “Independent” – 16% of the survey sample – but both candidates may have an opportunity to move opinions on the character front. While Biden outpolled Trump by a significant margin among Independents on “tells the truth” (27% to 11%), 62% of respondents said the term described neither candidate or both the same. Similarly, when it comes to “treats others with respect,” Biden outpolled Trump (35% to 10%) but most Independents (55%) said it described neither or both the same.

“Character counts and, in a very real way, it is on the ballot this November,” said Tiller CEO Rob Densen. “Americans want to be able to count on their president’s character.”

Time for “A Climate Change” in Tone and Tenor of Political Conversation

As much as Americans value truth telling and listening skills, they don’t particularly feel those qualities are being brought to bear by our political parties.

Lost in all the Democrats' and Republicans' crosstalk and acrimony is the damage being done to public confidence. Better than eight in 10 (81%) of those surveyed said that they are more frustrated about the state of the union than they were four years ago. Three in four say it's hard to know what's best for the country given the tone of the political discussion today.

“For years, our nation’s political dialogue has been getting more contentious and less civil. For sure, the first Trump/Biden debate – which was painful to watch – didn’t help,” Densen said. “Ten years ago, presidential historian Douglas Brinkley used the term ‘hyper-partisanship’ to describe the political climate at the time. Things are worse today.”

“We’re like a family where the family members can’t even have a civil dinner table conversation,” Densen said. “But the tone and tenor of the country’s political ‘conversation’ can’t obscure the fact that character still counts with most Americans.”

Americans Frustrated But Responsible and Engaged

Encouragingly, frustrated though Americans may be, they recognize the opportunity to make things better.

Critically, there is agreement across party lines on the problem – and a possible way forward. Seventy-seven percent of those who describe themselves as Republican or leaning that way and 71% of Democrats/“Leaners” agree that “the tone of the political discussion today makes it hard to know what’s best for the country.” And, as noted, the vast majority of Americans (87%) – including 91% of Democrats and 87% of Republicans – believe “the political climate would improve if Americans spent more time helping others.”

Most (53%) of those surveyed said that they are very engaged (18%) or somewhat engaged (35%) in societal or civic activities (including volunteering, joining organizations, writing letters/speaking out, signing petitions, posting opinions on social media, participating in a march/demonstration, etc.).

Men (22%) are more likely than women (14%) to describe themselves as **very** engaged, while women (25%) are much more likely than men (15%) to say they are **not at all** engaged.

And among the very engaged, 75% said they plan to be more engaged going forward, even if their candidate wins.

“We could be experiencing a new and sustained era of social and civic engagement,” said Tiller President Jim Marren. “The public has stepped up its engagement across the political spectrum, and many Americans say they won’t let up even if ‘their side’ wins in November. The critical question always will be whether individual citizens engage with the same level of constructiveness, respect and basic civility that they would like from their president.”

Voting remains a key measure of engagement and, in that regard, the poll offers some encouraging signs. Indeed, there is a chance that voter participation this year could exceed 70% – a level not seen in a presidential election since 1900 – as 59% of respondents said they were “very likely to vote,” 16% said they were “somewhat likely to vote” and 9% reported having already voted.

Two-thirds of Americans feel a candidate’s support for environmental issues has at least some effect on their decision whether to vote for him or her, with an even split between those who feel it has a strong effect versus some effect (both 34%). Men (38%) are significantly more inclined than women (29%) to say a candidate’s support for environmental issues has a strong effect on their voting decision.

Importantly, 90% of those polled say doing small things regularly that make the world a better place is as important as formal, organized efforts and, interestingly, 70% said they would pay 10% more in taxes every year if it meant eliminating poverty and hunger in the U.S.

To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate? Whom Will We Turn To?

Many Americans will have a fateful decision to make in coming months regarding the prospective COVID-19 vaccination – a decision complicated by some conflicting opinions and what many deem misinformation, political maneuvering and bad science.

Asked whom they would rely on most for help in deciding whether to be vaccinated, family physicians (47%) and the CDC/other medical authorities (40%) were cited by respondents most frequently as their first or second most trusted source of advice. The media (50%) and President Trump (41%) were most often cited as the least trusted sources of advice.

Commenting on these findings, Richard Tomasco, Vice President at ENGINE Insights, said, “The Tiller research confirms some patterns we have seen in our weekly *Beyond COVID-19: The Pulse of the American Consumer* surveys. Specifically, when it comes to vaccination, Americans are much more likely to trust their personal physician or medical experts than they are either the President or the media.”

Interestingly, the President’s COVID-19 diagnosis seems to have had a net neutral effect on the election. Fifty-five percent of poll respondents said that the President’s diagnosis has not affected their inclination to vote for him one way or the other; 24% said they were more inclined and 20% said they were less inclined.

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[Tiller, LLC](#) is one of the nation’s leading consultancies in the creation and implementation of advocacy marketing programs for major U.S. corporations and non-profits. For a copy of the full posted questionnaire, please write us at civicengagementsurvey@tillerllc.com.

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