

September 2020

# Sun Belt Voices Project

A Collaboration Between KFF and The Cook Political Report

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# Sun Belt Voices Project – The Role Of The ACA In The 2020 Election

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With the recent news of the passing of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the latest from the Sun Belt Voices Project – a collaboration between KFF and The Cook Political Report – takes a look at how increased attention to *California v. Texas*, the Supreme Court case challenging the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act, could motivate voters in the 2020 election. The poll, conducted prior to the death of Justice Ginsburg, found that the top issues for Arizona, Florida and N.C. voters two months out from the 2020 election were the economy, the coronavirus outbreak, race relations and criminal justice and policing. Health care as an election issue ranked lower for these voters. Yet with less than two months before the Supreme Court hearing of the highly politicized ACA case, health care policy may once again dominate election coverage.

## Key Findings

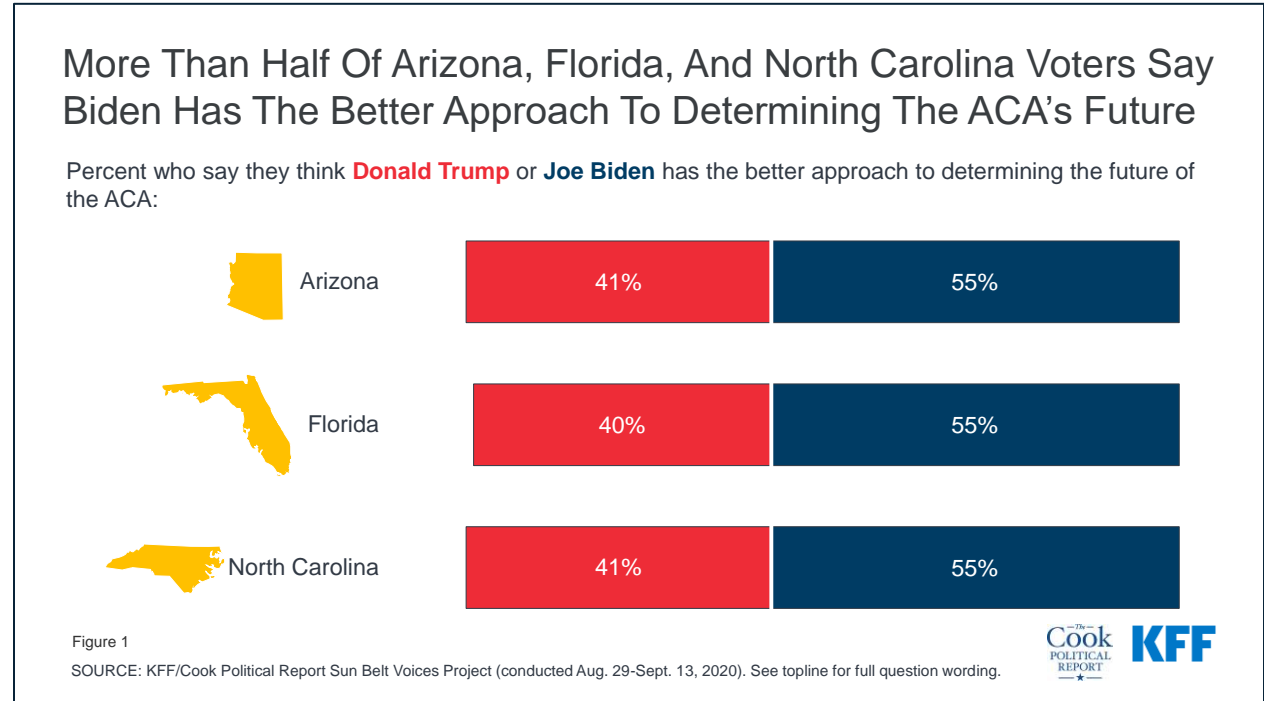
- Joe Biden has a slight advantage over President Trump among Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina voters on two key health care issues in the 2020 presidential campaign: the future of the Affordable Care Act and maintaining protections for people with pre-existing conditions. Yet, these are largely driven by partisanship with majorities of Democratic voters saying Biden has the better approach while most Republican voters say the same about President Trump.
- Swing voters, on the other hand, give Biden the overwhelming advantage on all key health care issues including the ACA (Biden: 65%, Trump: 28%) and pre-existing condition protections (Biden: 64%, Trump: 28%). These are voters who say they are either entirely undecided or not firm in their vote choice and for some, there is a chance they may vote for the other candidate
- Health care has long been an important voting issue among suburban voters, including in the 2018 midterm elections. The latest polling in Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina finds suburban voters are closely divided on which presidential candidate they trust to handle health care. Suburban women give Biden a slight edge on his handling of health care, while other groups of suburban voters say they trust Trump. When it comes to specific key health care policy areas, suburban voters prefer Biden on the ACA (Biden +10 percentage points) and maintaining pre-existing conditions protections (Biden +8 percentage points), but are divided on their trust of the candidates to lower the costs of health care and prescription drugs.

# The Future Of The Affordable Care Act

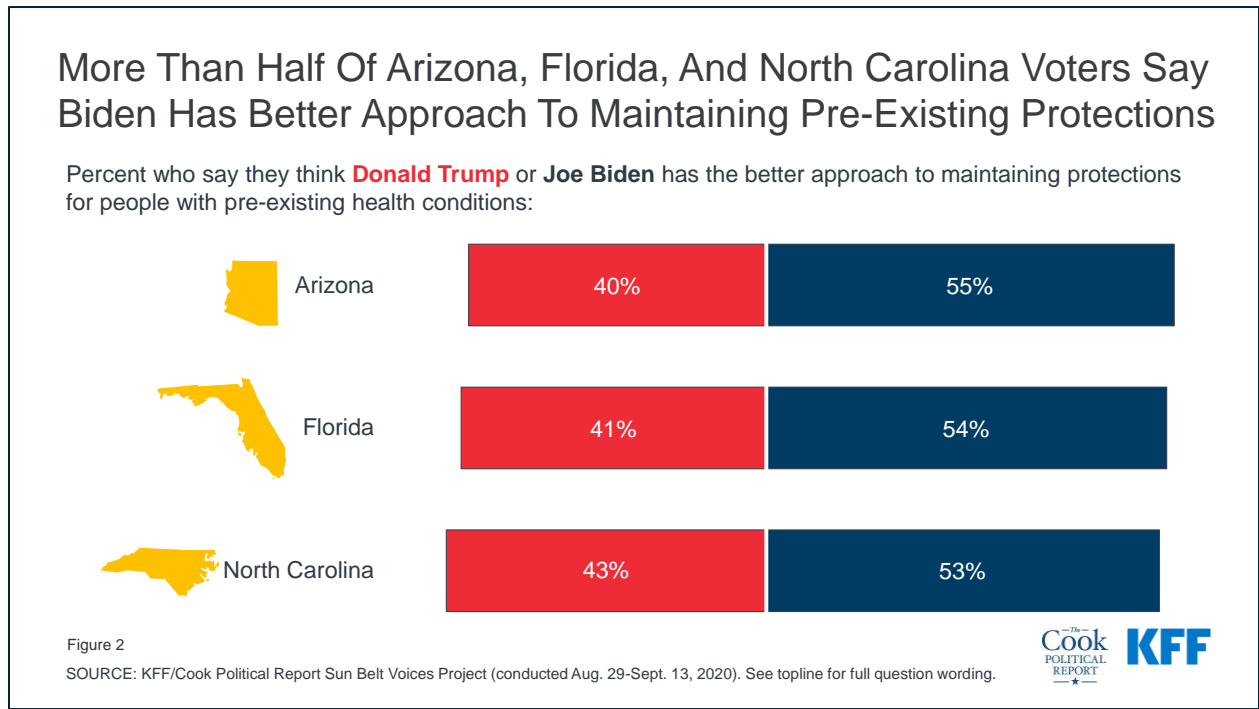
One of the top issues deciding the 2018 election was health care, most notably – the continued protections for people with pre-existing medical conditions. An analysis of campaign advertisements by the [Wesleyan Media Project](#) found nearly half (46%) of airings in federal races mentioned health care as did three in ten gubernatorial ads. In addition, [one-third of health care ads](#) were about coverage for people with pre-existing conditions. This is consistent with [KFF polling](#) which found voters in two bellwether states, Florida and Nevada, were more likely to say they would vote for candidates who wanted to maintain the ACA's protections for people with pre-existing conditions.

With the Supreme Court deciding not to hear California v. Texas, the case challenging the future of the ACA, until after the 2020 election, many experts expected this issue to be a smaller issue during the campaigns. Yet with the recent passing of Supreme Court Justice Ginsburg, this case is now front-and-center in the 2020 election as a new justice could determine the future of the 2010 Affordable Care Act.

The latest polling from three key sun belt states (Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina) finds former Vice President Biden has a considerable advantage among voters on which presidential candidate they think has the better approach to determining the future of the Affordable Care Act as well as maintaining protections for people with pre-existing health conditions. More than half of voters in Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina say Joe Biden has the better approach on the ACA (AZ: 55%, FL: 55%, N.C.: 55%) compared to four in ten voters from each state who say Donald Trump.



This is similar to the share who say Biden has the better approach to maintaining protections for people with pre-existing conditions (AZ: 55%, FL: 54%, N.C.: 53%) compared to President Trump (AZ: 40%, FL: 41%, N.C.: 43%).



Views on which candidate has the better approach to handle all health care issues – including the future of the ACA and pre-existing conditions – are largely driven by party identification. As seen in Table 1, vast majorities of Democratic voters in Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina say Biden has the better approach on health care issues while at least eight in ten Republican voters in each of the three states say Trump has the better approach. Independents in Arizona and Florida mostly give the advantage on health care issue to Biden, while independent voters in North Carolina are more divided on some health care issues.

**Table 1: Partisans Say Their Party's Candidate Has Better Approach to Handle Key Health Care Issues**

Do you think Donald Trump or Joe Biden has the better approach to...?	Arizona			Florida			North Carolina		
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Dem	Ind	Rep	Dem	Ind	Rep
<b>...lowering the cost of health care for individuals</b>									
Donald Trump	3%	36%	87%	2%	41%	86%	4%	45%	91%
Joe Biden	95	58	8	96	56	11	95	50	6
<b>...determining the future of the Affordable Care Act, sometimes called Obamacare</b>									
Donald Trump	3	36	82	3	34	80	2	39	87
Joe Biden	96	60	14	95	59	15	98	57	9
<b>...lowering prescription drug costs</b>									
Donald Trump	5	39	87	3	45	87	5	48	93
Joe Biden	92	53	8	94	51	9	93	49	6
<b>...protecting people from surprise medical bills from out-of-network care</b>									
Donald Trump	4	33	82	3	35	84	3	40	87
Joe Biden	92	57	11	94	58	10	95	53	8
<b>...making sure everyone has access to health care and insurance</b>									
Donald Trump	3	30	81	2	38	85	3	39	88
Joe Biden	96	63	14	96	61	12	96	57	9
<b>...maintaining protections for people with pre-existing health conditions</b>									
Donald Trump	3	32	82	3	34	84	3	39	88
Joe Biden	95	61	14	95	61	11	96	57	8

## SWING VOTERS GIVE BIDEN ADVANTAGE ON HEALTH CARE ISSUES

Swing voters, the crucial group of voters who are either entirely undecided or probably going to vote for a candidate but haven't decided yet, overwhelmingly give Biden the advantage on all key health care issues including the ACA and maintaining pre-existing conditions. More than twice as many swing voters say Biden (65%) has the better approach on the ACA than President Trump (28%) as well as on maintaining pre-existing condition protections (64% v. 28%). In fact, on all key health care issues asked about in the survey, Biden has the advantage among swing voters. This is despite the fact swing voters don't have a candidate preference with 24% saying they are probably going to vote for President Trump, 29% saying they are probably going to vote for Joe Biden, and 47% truly undecided.

## Sun Belt Swing Voters Overwhelmingly Trust Biden To Handle Key Health Care Issues

AMONG SWING VOTERS: Percent who say **Donald Trump** or **Joe Biden** has the better approach to...

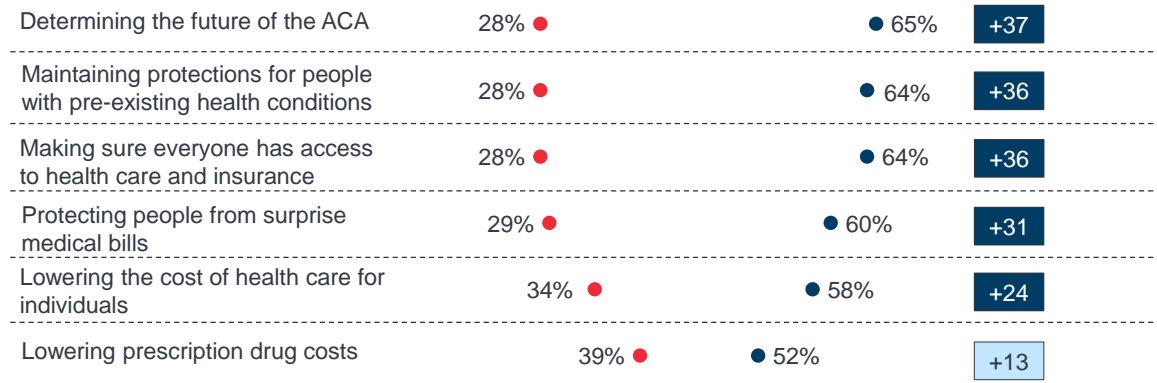


Figure 3

NOTE: Swing voters are voters who say they are probably going to vote for a candidate but haven't decided yet, or are undecided.  
SOURCE: KFF/Cook Political Report Sun Belt Voices Project (conducted Aug. 29-Sept. 13, 2020). See topline for full question wording.



The advantage Biden has on key health care issues is consistent among swing voters in Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina.

<b>Table 2: Swing Voters In Key Sun Belt States Trust Biden On Health Care Issues</b>			
<b>Do you think Donald Trump or Joe Biden has the better approach to...?</b>	<b>Arizona Swing Voters</b>	<b>Florida Swing Voters</b>	<b>North Carolina Swing Voters</b>
<b>...lowering the cost of health care for individuals</b>			
Donald Trump	35%	31%	41%
Joe Biden	53	63	50
<b>...determining the future of the Affordable Care Act, sometimes called Obamacare</b>			
Donald Trump	32	24	33
Joe Biden	60	69	61
<b>...lowering prescription drug costs</b>			
Donald Trump	38	39	42
Joe Biden	49	54	51
<b>...protecting people from surprise medical bills from out-of-network care</b>			
Donald Trump	30	27	32
Joe Biden	55	63	56
<b>...making sure everyone has access to health care and insurance</b>			
Donald Trump	25	27	32
Joe Biden	63	67	60
<b>...maintaining protections for people with pre-existing health conditions</b>			
Donald Trump	28	26	33
Joe Biden	60	68	59

## Suburban Voters and Health Care

In the 2016 presidential election, President Trump won overwhelming support from [rural voters](#) while Secretary Clinton garnered majority support from urban voters; suburban voters were more divided between the two candidates. The Sun Belt Voices Project interviewed over 500 suburban voters in each of the three states polled (571 in Arizona, 683 in Florida, and 527 in North Carolina) and finds President Trump holding a slight lead among North Carolina suburban voters (50% v. 41%) while suburban voters in Arizona and Florida are more divided (AZ: 45% v. 41%, FL: 43% v. 43%).

## Suburban Voters Are Divided In Arizona And Florida, Trump Has Advantage In North Carolina Suburbs

Percent who say they are “definitely” or “probably” going to vote for each candidate:

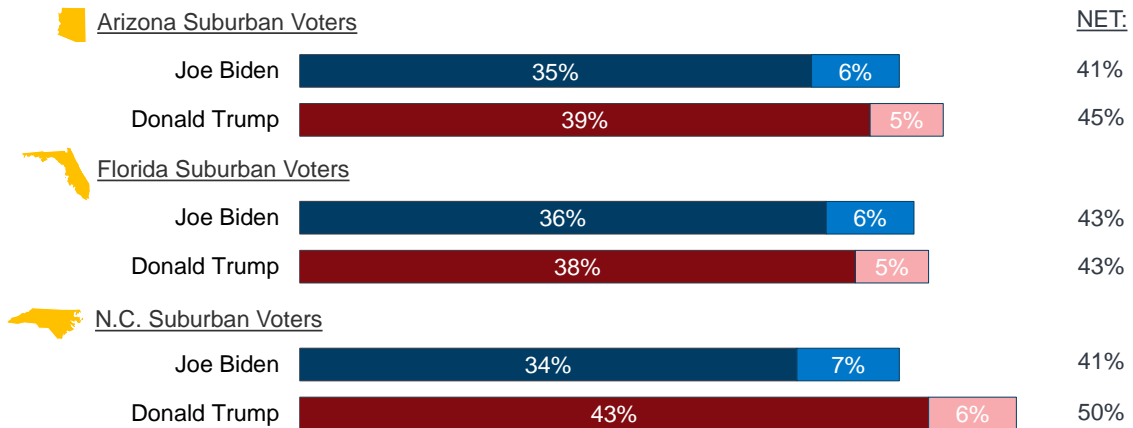


Figure 4  
SOURCE: KFF/Cook Political Report Sun Belt Voices Project (conducted Aug. 29-Sept. 13, 2020). See topline for full question wording.



But the suburbs are increasingly demographically diverse and candidate preference varies across key demographic groups. President Trump garners support from at least half of suburban men (51%), white suburban voters (54%), and suburban voters with lower levels of education (50% of those with a high school diploma or less). Former Vice President Biden, on the other hand, garners support from at least half of Black (73%) and Hispanic voters (50%) living in the suburbs, and those with higher levels of education (52% of those with at least a college degree).

### Not All Suburbs Are The Same

Just as suburban areas are becoming increasingly demographically diverse, many suburban areas within states look and vote very differently. Looking at suburban voters in Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina, we examine some key suburban areas:

**Arizona** – Former Vice President Joe Biden has a strong lead in Pima County (the area around Tucson) over President Trump, but voters in Maricopa County are more divided in their 2020 vote choice with similar shares of voters in this county saying they plan to vote for President Trump (42%) and Joe Biden (42%). Within Maricopa County, Phoenix voters overwhelmingly support Biden. The economy is by far the top issue for Maricopa County voters (34%) while Pima County voters are divided between the economy (28%) and the coronavirus outbreak (24%).

**Florida** – Florida suburbs are also divided along geographic regions of the state with Miami suburbs voting very differently than northern parts of the state including the

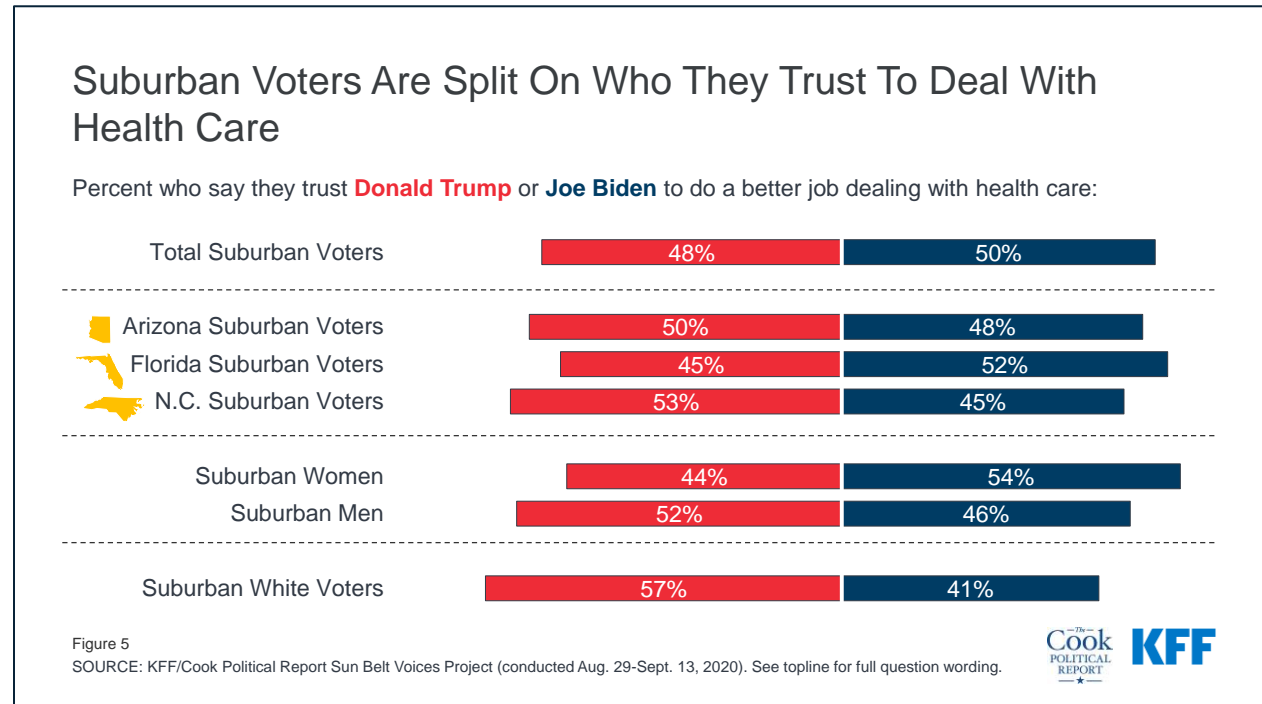


panhandle. Recent elections have looked closely at areas along the expanded I-4 corridor, an area [many experts](#) say is crucial to President Trump’s re-election. Voters in this area of Florida choose the economy as their top 2020 issue (28%) but are currently divided in which presidential candidate they plan to vote for with 40% saying President Trump and 45% saying Joe Biden. Biden has a commanding lead in the Miami suburbs while President Trump holds the advantage in the northern part of the state.

**North Carolina** – There is an increasing trend within N.C. with voters living on the edges of urban city centers voting more like traditionally suburban voters. Using categories developed by [Old North State Politics](#) we find that “urban county suburban” voters are one group that are prioritizing criminal justice and policing (22%) as a top 2020 voting issue along with the economy (27%). In addition, voters in these areas within North Carolina are more divided in their vote choice with 42% saying they plan to vote for President Trump and 48% saying they plan to vote for Joe Biden.

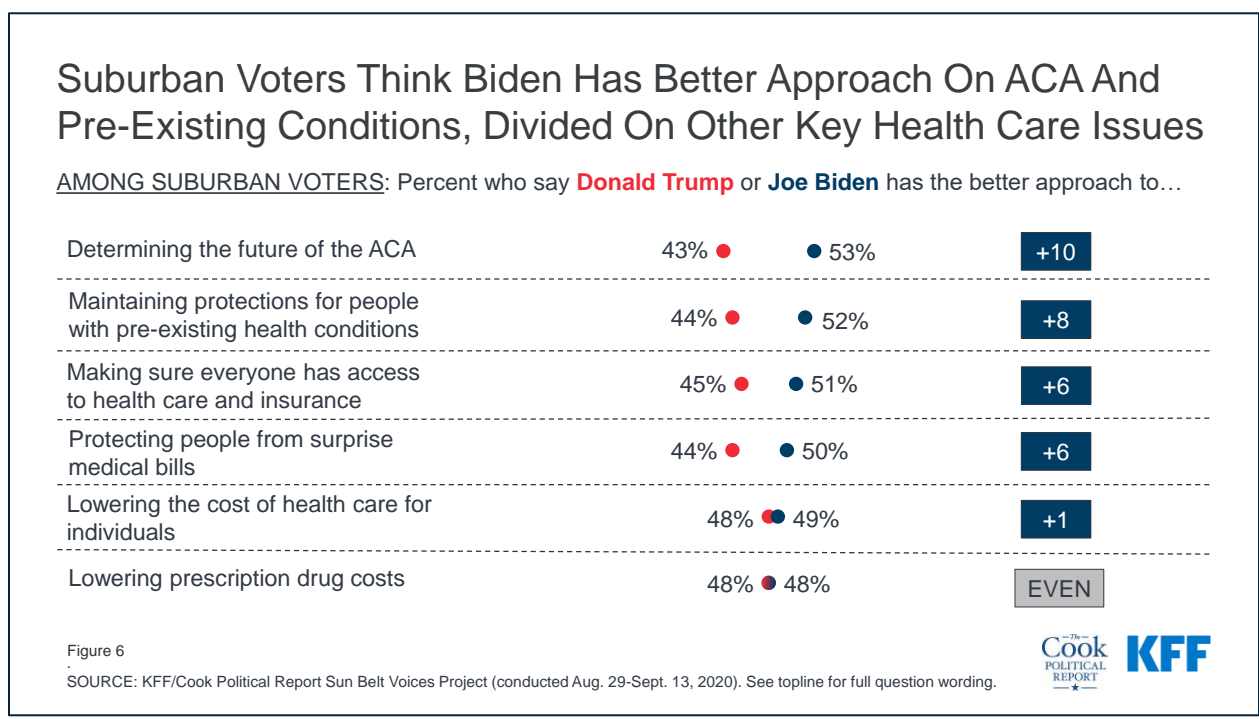
## SUBURBAN VOTERS ARE DIVIDED ON WHICH CANDIDATE THEY TRUST ON HEALTH CARE, BUT MOST SAY BIDEN HAS BETTER APPROACH TO ACA AND PRE-EXISTING CONDITION PROTECTIONS

Suburban voters are divided on which candidate they trust to do a better job handling health care with half of suburban voters saying they trust each candidate. A larger share of suburban women voters say they trust Joe Biden on health care, while President Trump garners more support among all suburban white voters. To see which candidate suburban voters trust to handle all key issues, see Appendix Table 1.



While suburban voters overall are divided on which candidate they trust to do a better job dealing with health care, when it comes to the future of the Affordable Care Act and maintaining pre-existing conditions protections, a slightly majority of suburban voters give Biden the advantage.

Among suburban voters, Former Vice President Biden has a 10 point advantage over President Trump on determining the future of the ACA (53% v. 43%), a landmark legislation of the Obama/Biden presidency. In addition, Biden also has a slight advantage on maintaining pre-existing condition protections (52% v. 44%). On all other key issues, the difference between the two candidates is within the margin of sampling error.



There is some variation across states with North Carolina suburban voters more closely divided in which candidate has the better approach to handle some health care issue including the future of the ACA and maintaining protections for people with pre-existing conditions, and President Trump having a clear advantage on lowering overall health care costs and prescription drug costs.

**Table 3: Suburban Voters On Which Candidate Has The Better Approach To Deal With Key Health Care Issues**

<b>Do you think Donald Trump or Joe Biden has the better approach to...?</b>	<b>Arizona Suburban Voters</b>	<b>Florida Suburban Voters</b>	<b>North Carolina Suburban Voters</b>
<b>...determining the future of the Affordable Care Act, sometimes called Obamacare</b>			
Donald Trump	46%	40%	49%
Joe Biden	51	55	48
<b>...maintaining protections for people with pre-existing health conditions</b>			
Donald Trump	46	42	49
Joe Biden	50	54	47
<b>...lowering the cost of health care for individuals</b>			
Donald Trump	49	45	55
Joe Biden	47	52	42
<b>...lowering prescription drug costs</b>			
Donald Trump	51	45	55
Joe Biden	45	51	43
<b>...protecting people from surprise medical bills from out-of-network care</b>			
Donald Trump	47	42	50
Joe Biden	47	52	44
<b>...making sure everyone has access to health care and insurance</b>			
Donald Trump	45	44	51
Joe Biden	51	53	46

# Appendices

Appendix Table 1									
Percent who say they trust ... to better handle each of the following issues:	Suburban Voters In Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina								
	Total Suburban Voters	Men	Women	White, Non-Hispanic	Black, Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	HS diploma or less	Some college	College degree +
<b>The economy</b>									
Donald Trump	56%	61%	52%	65%	19%	46%	61%	59%	49%
Joe Biden	41	38	45	34	73	50	36	40	48
<b>Criminal justice and policing</b>									
Donald Trump	51	56	47	62	12	36	57	55	43
Joe Biden	46	42	50	37	82	60	40	44	56
<b>The coronavirus outbreak</b>									
Donald Trump	47	52	43	57	14	28	54	49	39
Joe Biden	49	46	52	40	78	66	43	48	57
<b>Race relations</b>									
Donald Trump	44	48	40	54	11	23	50	47	35
Joe Biden	53	50	56	44	84	70	47	50	62
<b>Health care</b>									
Donald Trump	48	52	44	57	10	32	55	49	39
Joe Biden	50	46	54	41	84	65	42	49	59
<b>Immigration</b>									
Donald Trump	51	57	46	61	14	36	55	56	42
Joe Biden	47	42	51	38	81	61	42	42	56

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