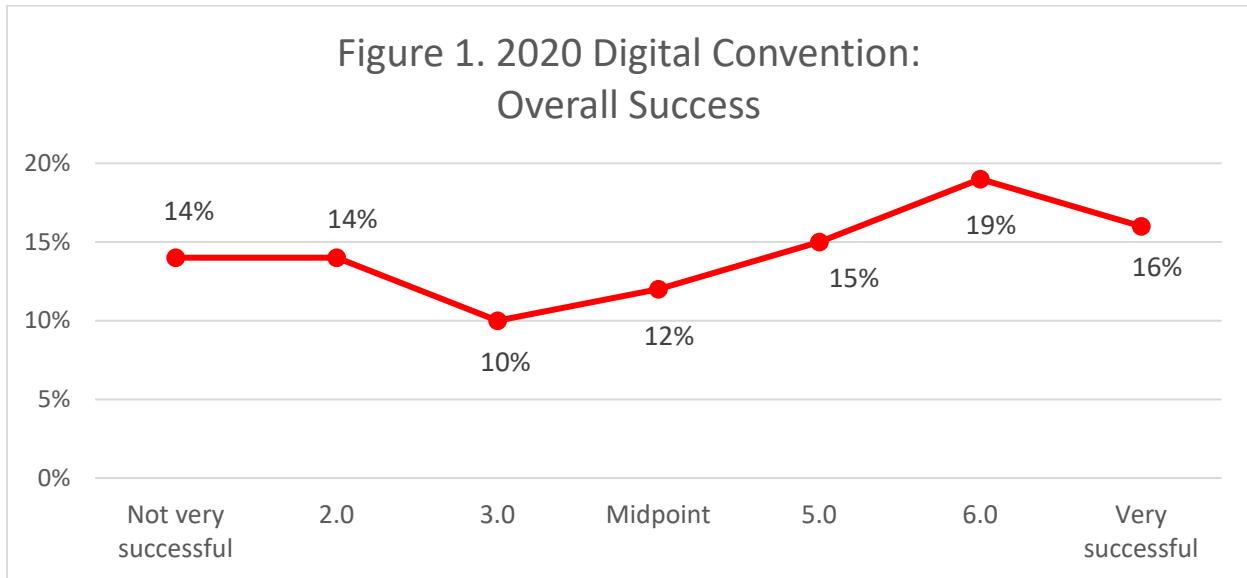


**ASSESSING THE DIGITAL CONVENTION:
2020 DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION DELEGATES**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a change in the format of the 2020 Democratic National Convention, shifting from a largely in-person gathering to a largely digital event. How did the Democratic convention delegates view this experience? To find out, three political scientists—John Green of the University of Akron, John Jackson of Southern Illinois University, and Geoffrey Layman of the University of Notre Dame—recently conducted a survey of delegates to the 2020 Democratic National Convention.*

Overall Assessment

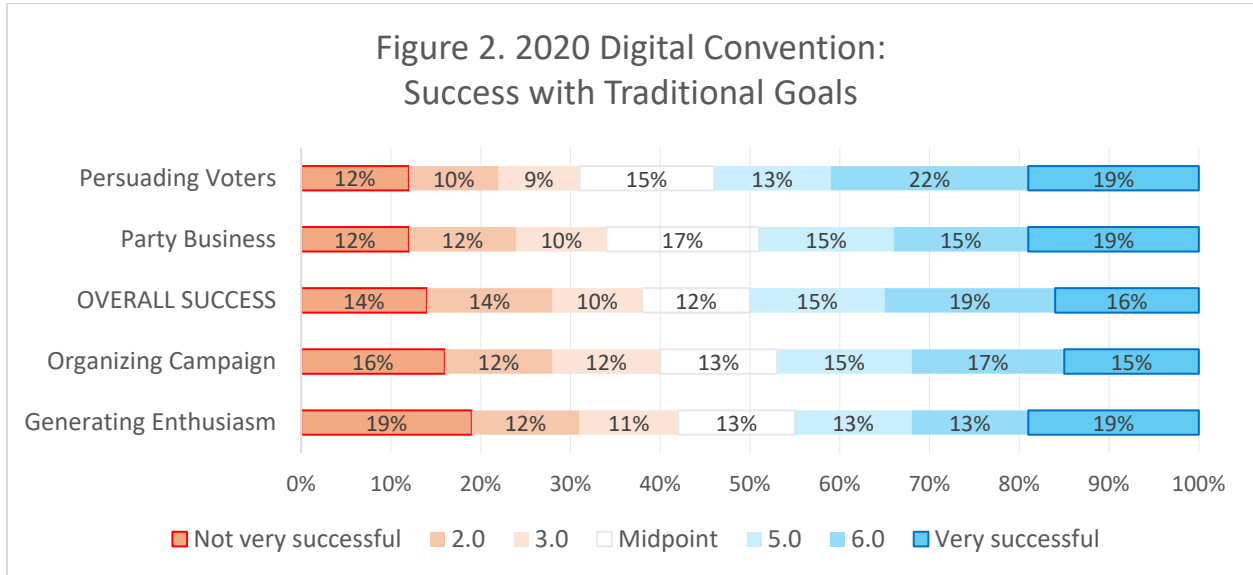
When asked “Overall, how successful was the digital format of the 2020 Democratic National Convention?” (Figure 1), the 2020 delegates say it was on balance successful, with 50 percent offering positive assessments versus 38 percent negative assessments.



* All 2020 Democratic convention delegates for which US mail and email addresses were located by the researchers were contacted multiple times between July 2023 and March 2024. A total of 554 usable responses were obtained and were weighted to match the characteristics of the original list of convention delegates (region, delegate type, candidate pledged, and gender). The resulting data varied little by date of participation in the survey. The overall response rate was 21 percent (excluding undeliverable contacts) and the margin of error for the total sample is plus or minus 4.2 percentage points.

Traditional Goals

When asked about traditional goals of national conventions, the delegates also say that the digital convention was on balance successful (Figure 2, OVERALL SUCCESS included for purposes of comparison).



The 2020 delegates say some traditional goals were more successful than others. Greater success included:

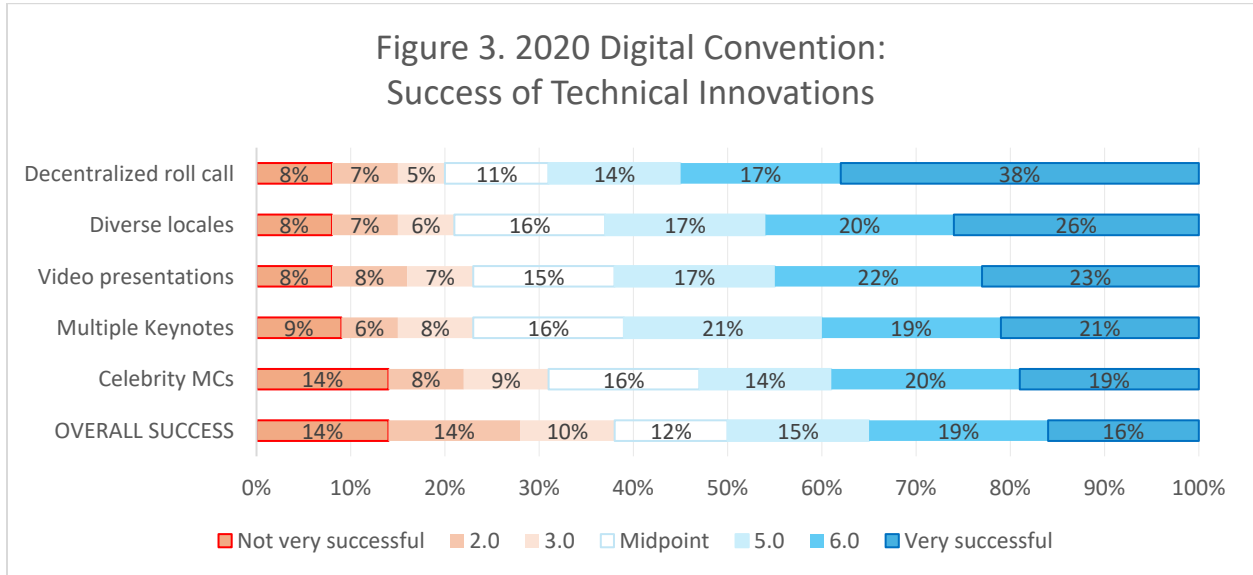
- *“Persuading independent and swing voters to cast a ballot for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris”* (54 percent positive vs 31 percent negative assessment)
- *“Conducting regular party business, including the platform and rules”* (49 positive and 34 percent negative assessment)

Lesser success included:

- *“Building a strong and cohesive organization to carry out the general election campaign”* (47 percent positive versus 45 percent negative assessment)
- *“Generating enthusiasm and excitement among grassroots activists and key constituencies”* (44 percent positive versus 42 percent negative assessments).

Technical Innovations

When asked about technical innovations at the 2020 convention, the delegates have generally positive views as well (Figure 3, OVERALL SUCCESS included for comparative purposes).

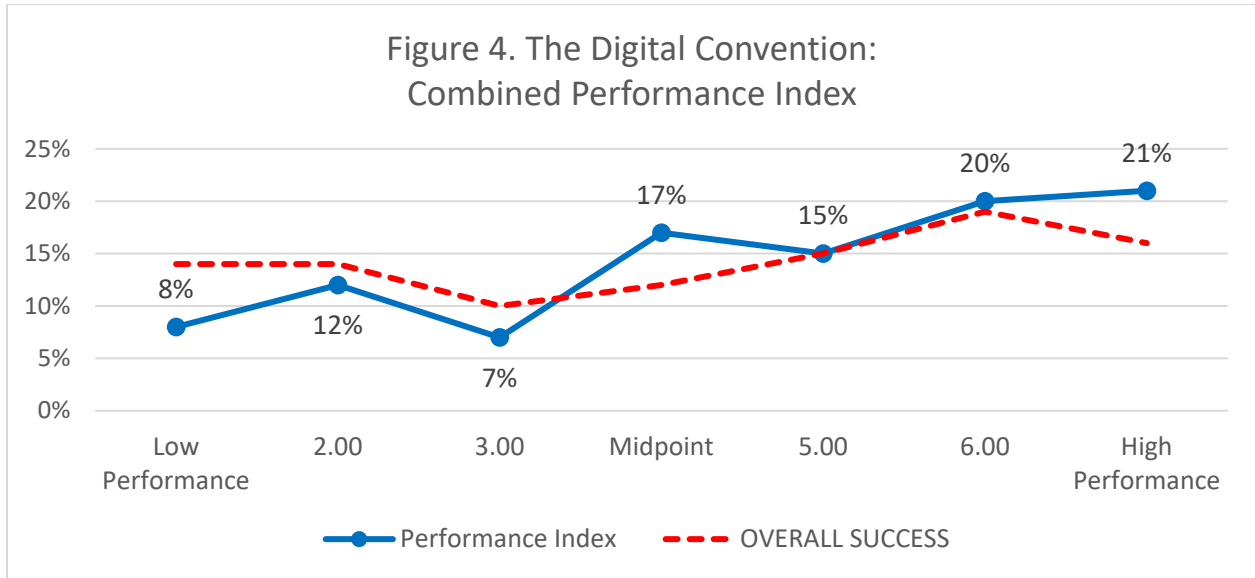


The delegates' views of the technical innovations are on balance more positive than their overall assessment of the convention and success with traditional goals, including:

- *“The decentralized roll call of the states from scenic locations in each state”* (69 percent positive versus 20 percent negative assessment)
- *“Traditional events delivered at diverse locales, such as Joe Biden's acceptance speech”* (63 percent positive versus 21 percent negative assessment)
- *“The greater reliance on video presentations with high production values”* (63 percent positive versus 22 percent negative assessment)
- *“The multi-voice keynote address by rising stars in the Democratic Party”* (62 percent positive versus 24 percent negative assessment)
- *“The greater use of celebrities as masters of ceremonies for the sessions”* (53 percent positive versus 31 percent negative assessment)

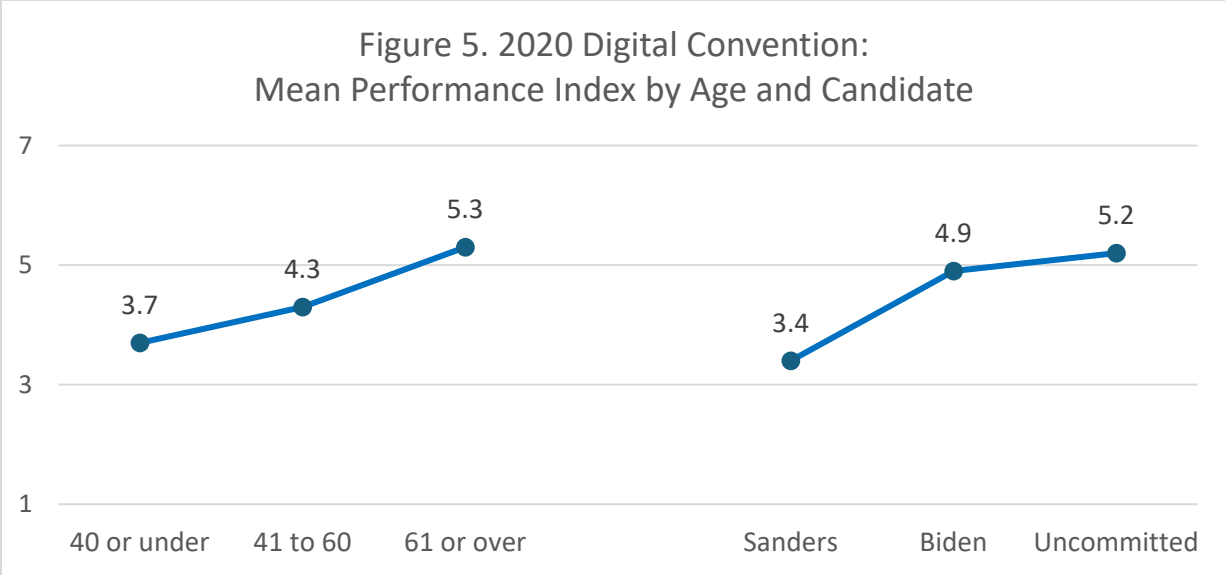
Combined Performance Index

The responses to all the digital convention questions were closely associated with one another and were combined into a single “performance index” (Figure 4; OVERALL SUCCESS included for comparative purposes). On the combined performance index, 56 percent of the 2020 delegates have a positive assessment and 27 percent a negative assessment.

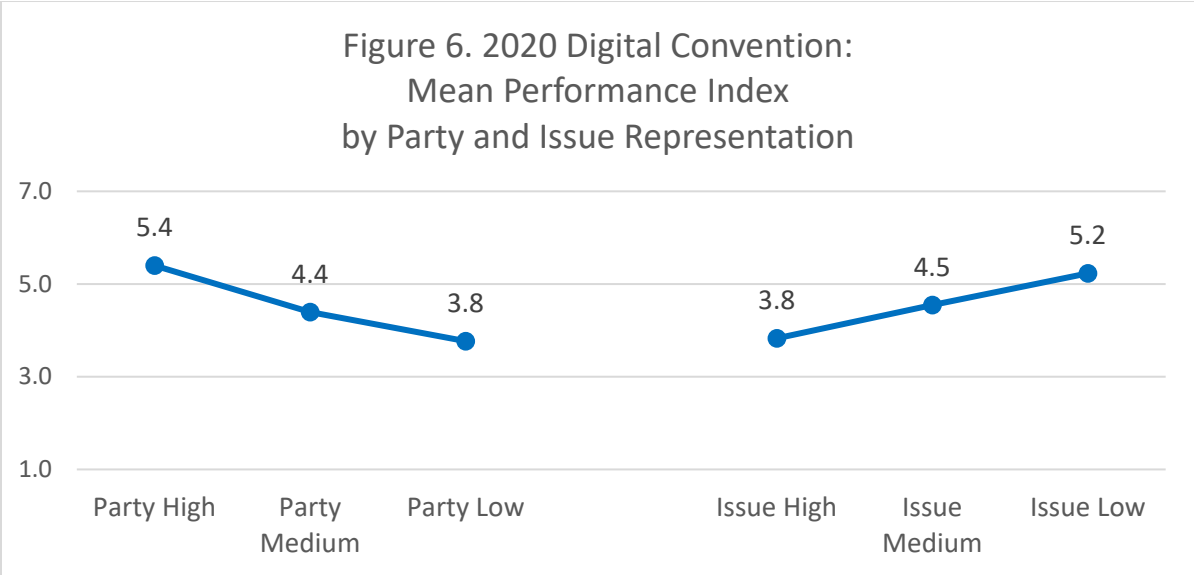


Factors associated with the Performance Index

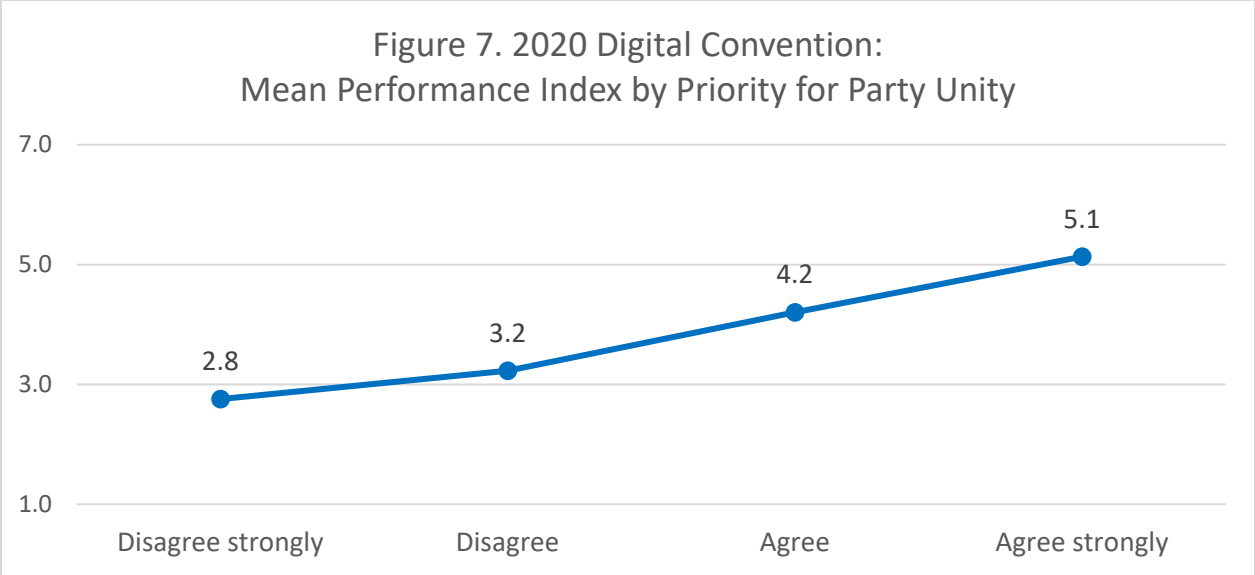
The strongest demographic factor associated with the performance index is age, with younger delegates reporting a *lower* mean score on the performance index than older delegates. In terms of political factors, a similar pattern held for the presidential candidates the delegates were pledged to support at the convention, with Sanders delegates reporting a *lower* mean score on the performance index than Biden and uncommitted delegates (Figure 5).



In addition, delegates who prioritized representing state and local party organizations report a *higher* mean score on the performance index. Meanwhile, delegates who prioritized representing issue/ideological organizations report a *lower* mean score on the performance index (Figure 6).



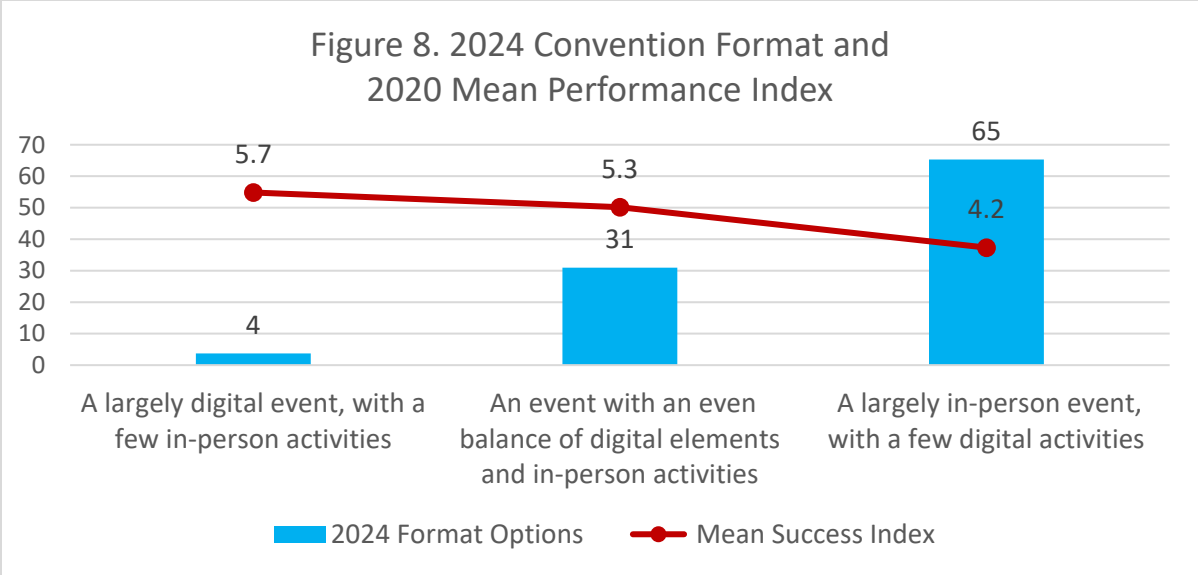
A similar pattern holds for prioritizing party unity, illustrated by agreement with the statement “You should always support the candidate nominated by the party even if you did not support that candidate during the nomination contest” (Figure 7). Delegates who strongly agree with the statement reported *higher* mean scores on the performance index than those who strongly disagreed.



The 2024 Democratic National Convention

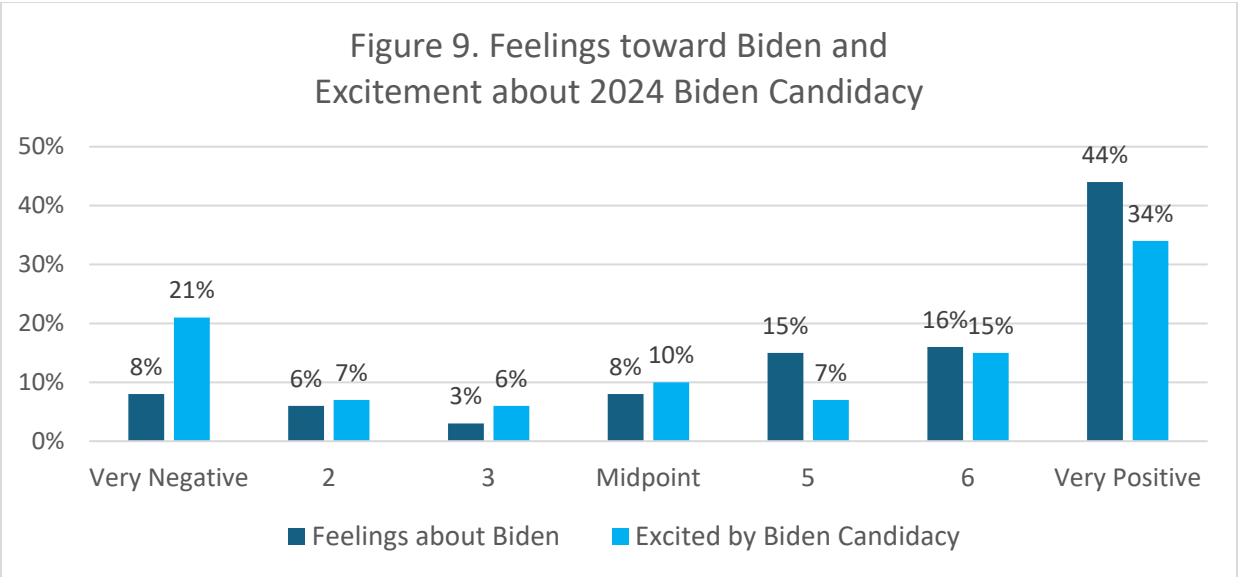
How are the assessments of the 2020 digital convention related to preferences for the 2024 Democratic National Convention? When asked *“Looking forward to the 2024 Democratic National Convention, which of the following best describes what you think the format of the convention should be?”* (Figure 8), 65 percent of the delegates prefer *“A largely in-person event, with a few digital activities.”* In contrast, 31 percent refer *“An event with an even balance of digital elements and in-person activities,”* and just 4 percent prefer *“A largely digital event, with a few in-person activities.”*

In addition, preferences for the 2024 convention format are *negatively* associated with the performance index, with those favoring a largely digital event having more positive views of the 2020 convention and those favoring a largely in-person event having more negative views (also in Figure 8).



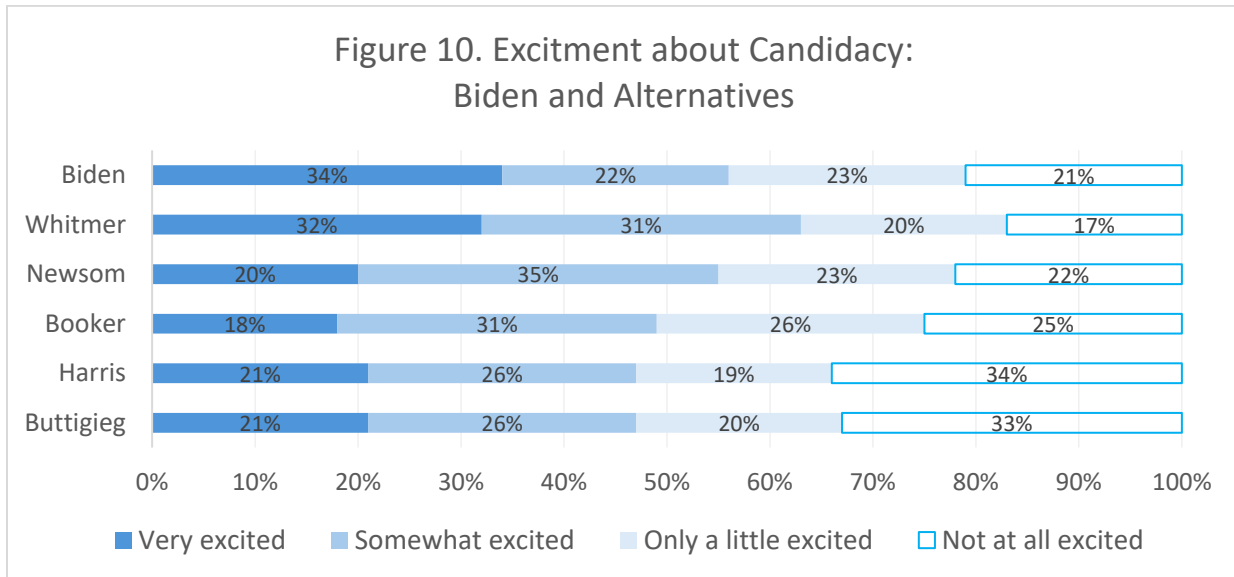
Views of the 2024 Campaign

Looking forward to the 2024 presidential campaign, the 2020 Democratic delegates report on balance positive feelings toward President Biden, with 44 percent reporting very “warm” feelings and only 8 percent very “cool” feelings (Figure 9).



At the same time, however, the 2020 delegates also report a lack of excitement about Biden’s 2024 presidential candidacy, with 34 percent being “very excited” about his candidacy and 21 percent “not at all excited” (also in Figure 9).

The discrepancy between the delegates’ feelings toward Biden and excitement about his 2024 candidacy may reflect the challenges of a close campaign. Interestingly, the level of excitement for the Biden candidacy is comparable to alternative candidates among the 2020 delegates (Figure 10).

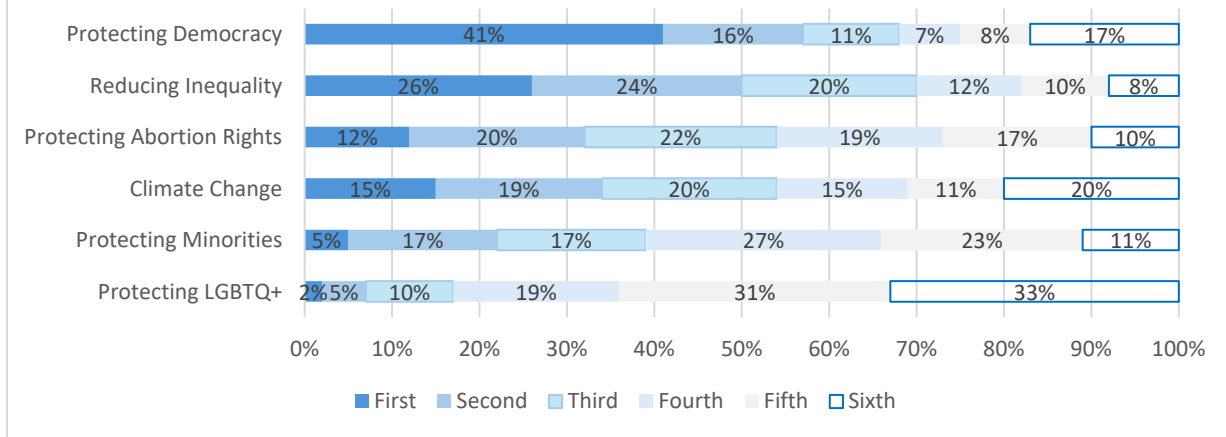


The percent of 2020 delegates who say they are “very enthusiastic” about the Biden candidacy (34 percent) is about the same as those who say they are “very enthusiastic” about Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer (32 percent), and ahead of California Governor Gavin Newsome (20 percent), New Jersey U.S. Senator Corry Booker (18 percent), Vice President Kamala Harris and U.S. Secretary of State Pete Buttigieg (both at 21 percent).

2024 Issue Priorities

The 2020 delegates were also asked to rank the relative importance of six prominent issues in the 2024 campaign (Figure 11, listed by mean score).

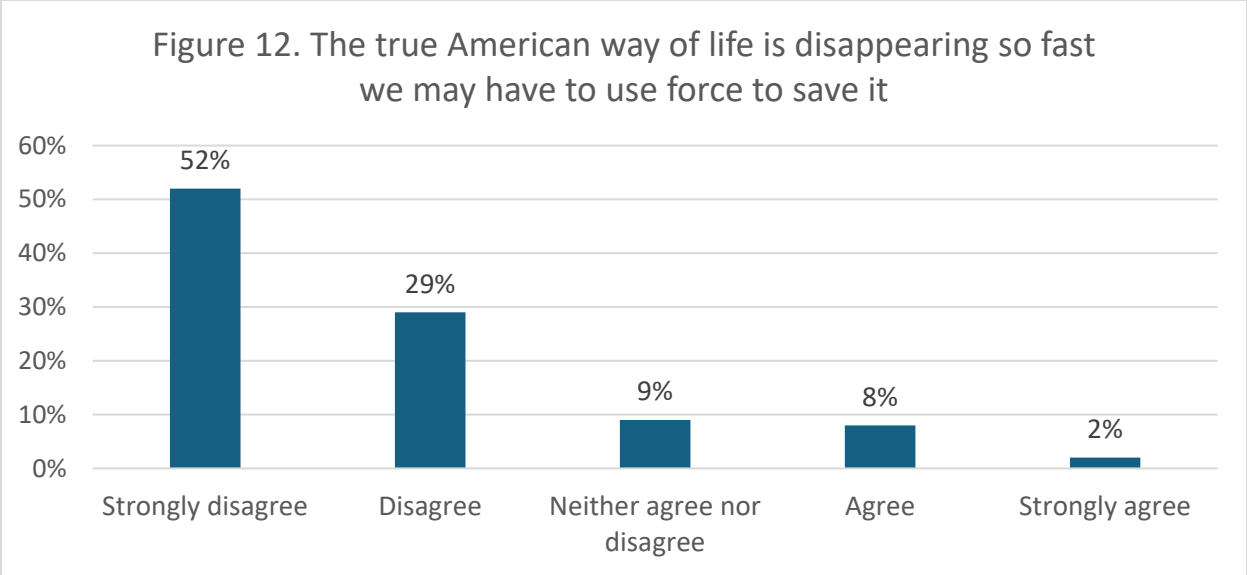
Figure 11 Issue Priorities in 2024 Campaign:
Order of Importance



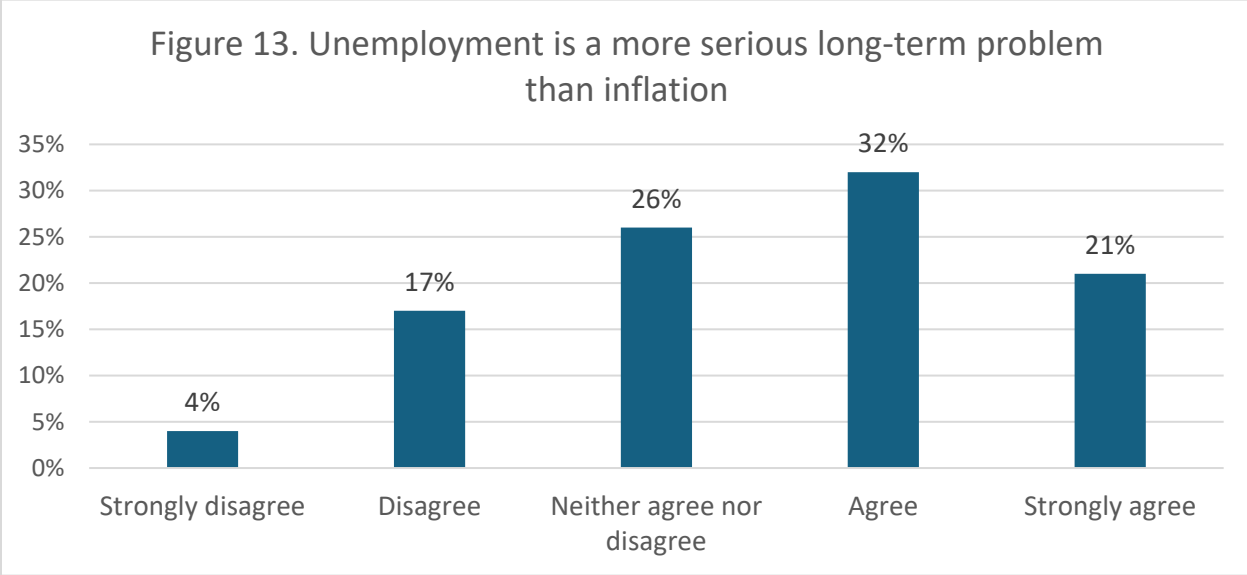
Overall, the delegates give top priority to protecting democracy from domestic extremists (41 percent first choice), followed by reducing economic inequality (26 percent first choice), protecting abortion rights (first choice 12 percent), fighting climate change (15 percent first choice), protecting minority rights (5 percent first choice), and protecting LGBTQ+ rights (2 percent first choice).

Issue Positions

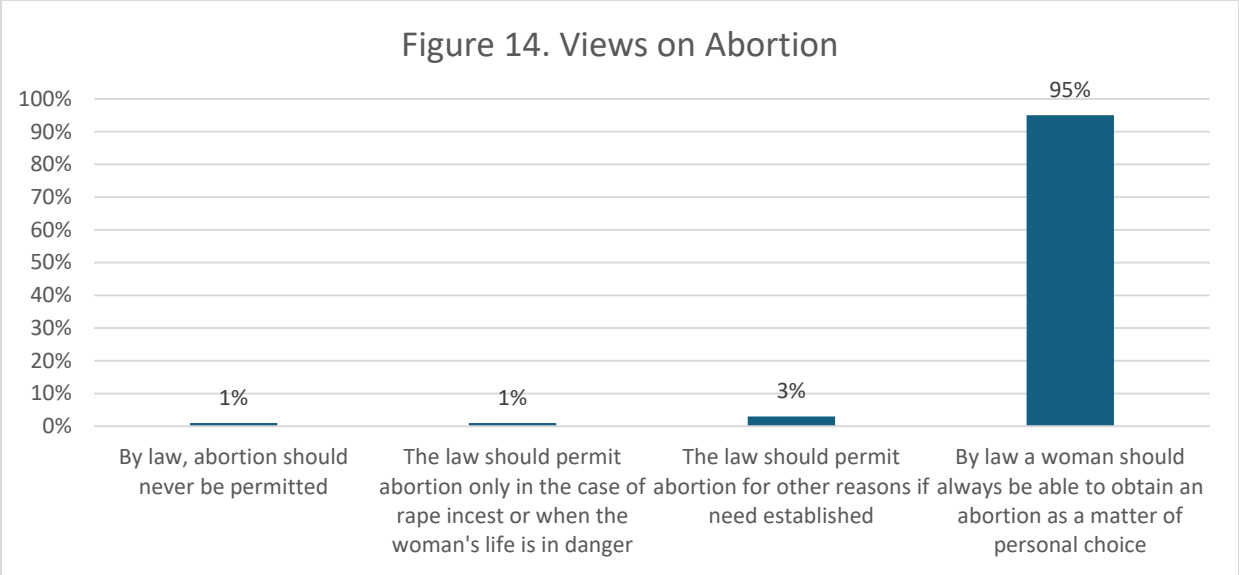
Regardless of relative priority, the 2020 delegates report liberal attitudes on questions pertaining to these matters. For example, when asked about threats to democracy, more than one-half (52 percent) of the 2020 delegates strongly disagree and more than one-quarter (29 percent) disagree with the statement *“The true American way of life is disappearing so fast we may have to use force to force to save it”* (Figure 12). Very few delegates strongly agree (2 percent) or agree (8 percent) with the statement.



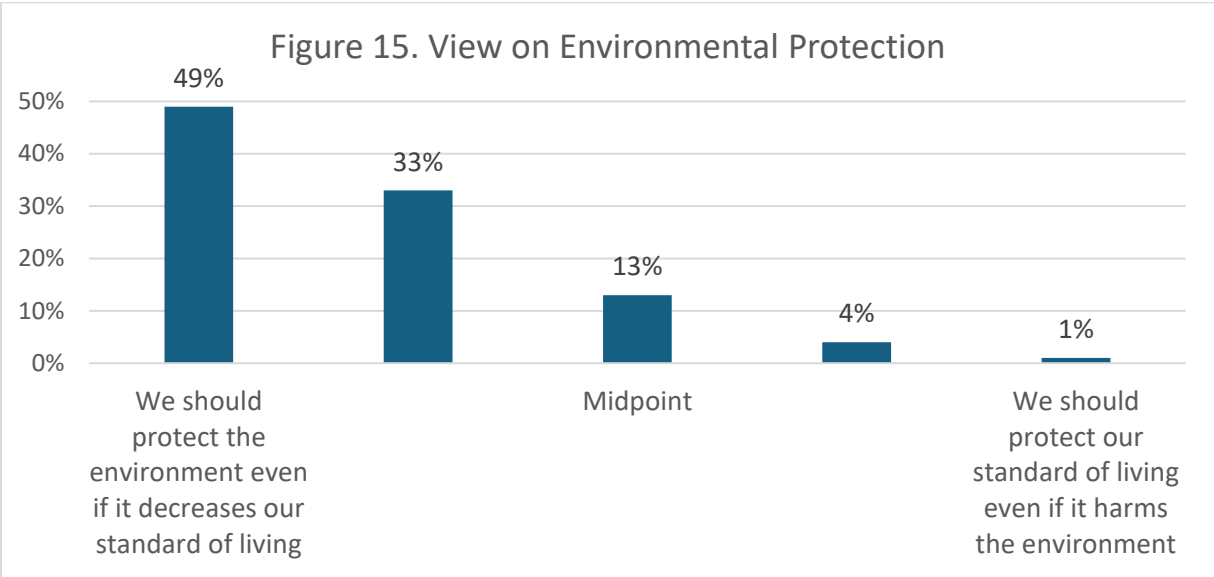
When asked about the trade-off between unemployment and inflation, one-fifth (21 percent) of the delegates strongly agree and one-third agree (32 percent) with the statement *“Unemployment is a more serious long-term problem than inflation”* (Figure 13). Less than one-twentieth (4 percent) of the delegates strongly disagree and less than one-fifth (17 percent) disagree with the statement.



When asked about abortion, the delegates agree nearly unanimous (95 percent) with the statement *“By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice”* (Figure 14). Very few delegates agree with alternative statements on abortion.

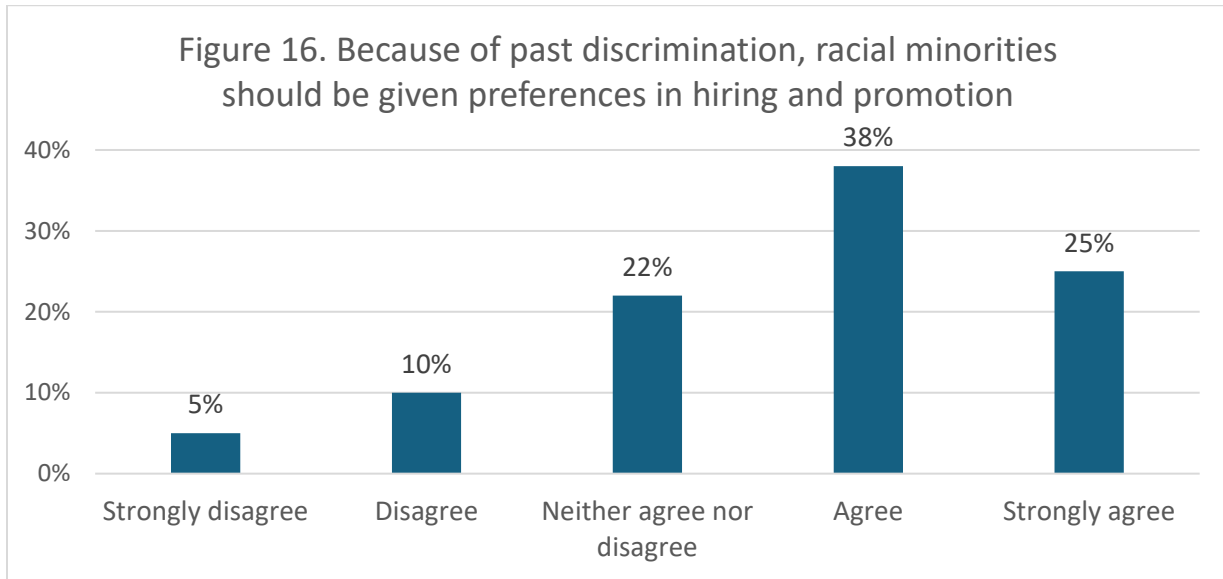


When asked about environmental protection, nearly one-half (49 percent) of the delegates agree with the statement *“We should protect the environment even if it decreases our standard of living”* (Figure 15) and another one-third (33 percent) hold views close to this position. In contrast, just one percent of the delegate agree with the statement *“We should protect our standard of living even if it harms the environment”* and four percent hold views close to this position.



When asked about the remedies for past discrimination, one-quarter (25 percent) of the delegates strongly agree and some two-fifths agree (38 percent) with the statement *“Because of past discrimination,*

racial minorities should be given preference in hiring and promotion” (Figure 16). About one-twentieth (5 percent) of the delegates strongly disagree and one-tenth (10 percent) agree with the statement.



When asked about business services for same-sex couples, about two-thirds (68 percent) of delegates agree with the statement *“Business owners should be required to provide services regardless of a couple’s sexual orientation”* (Figure 17) and another one-sixth (15 percent) hold views close to this position. In contrast, just three percent of the delegates agree that *“Business owners should be allowed to refuse services to same-sex couples”* and another three percent hold views close to this position.

