EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Down Periscope: Americans’ Views of the D.C. Swamp

THE FRONTIER LAB
ABOUT EAR TO THE GROUND

The Ear to the Ground Listening Project (ETTG) is a collaboration between individuals in grassroots and public policy arenas seeking to understand and reflect the voice of the American people through the tools of market research. ETTG sources insights about the American culture from its unique consortium of academics, policymakers, media, analysts, and market researchers who together are committed to listening better to the American people. Learn more at www.eartotheground.us.

ABOUT THE DOWN-PERISCOPE #SWAMPPOLL

The Down-Periscope survey was conducted by McLaughlin & Associates on behalf of the Ear to the Ground Listening Project in April 2018. 1,000 likely voters were surveyed as part of the poll.
This summary provides topline findings and context for “Down-Periscope: Americans’ Views on the D.C. Swamp,” a poll fielded by McLaughlin & Associates for Ear to the Ground Listening Project.

In April 2017, The Frontier Lab’s Ear to the Ground Listening Project (ETTG) set out to examine Americans’ attitudes and beliefs about the Washington, D.C.-centered political culture known as the “Swamp.” Our goal was to measure the degree to which American voters perceive a “swamp problem” exists in their political leadership, how they define that problem, and the impediments that exist to removing its influence over political culture.

Our polling data is unique in that we begin from a starting point of listening -- utilizing the qualitative work of The Frontier Lab as a starting point to formulate questions that flow directly from the American people’s concerns. This SwampPoll originated from our work at The Frontier Lab over the past several years, where we have been tracking new areas of shared concern that supersede ideological and demographic divides. We began to track a form of the Swamp-concern in our studies of mass movement affiliation and saw it reach its heights in the 2016 election cycle.

We wondered: is the Swamp concern more than rhetoric? Does it represent real angst, anger, and distrust -- or is it an easily tossed-aside slogan? How do Americans of all political affiliations relate to a concept of the Swamp?

The Frontier Lab’s work with the Black Lives Matter movement suggested that Americans on both the left and the right -- and those who don’t fit into either category -- may feel equally cut off from the self-governance our country promises to its citizens. Working with pollster McLaughlin & Associates, we designed a series of questions that measured:

1. The level of concern, across political ideology
2. Who Americans hold responsible for The Swamp
This summary details on each of these five points, and we conclude with context from The Frontier Lab’s ongoing market research world to cultivate a new, united American character.

**LEVEL OF SWAMP CONCERN**

More than half the country – 55% -- say they are concerned about the DC Swamp (36% say “very concerned”). Amongst Republicans, that number rises to 66% who say they are concerned.

Conservatives felt more strongly about the Swamp than Liberals or Moderates: 59% of those who identified as very conservative say they are “very concerned,” whereas 38% of those who are very liberal, and 26% who are moderate, are “very concerned.”

On a scale from 1-5, 1: not concerned at all, 4: neutral, 5: very concerned, how concerned are you about the D.C. Swamp?

When we described The Swamp, rather than just calling it by name, that number from from 55% to 60%, and increased to 74% of Republicans.
Taken together, Americans in general and Republicans in particular have significant concern about the Swamp’s effect on the political culture.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR “THE SWAMP”

If between 55 to 60% of Americans are concerned about the Swamp and feel it is important to see it drained, whom do they hold responsible? Nearly half (46%) of Americans think the GOP leadership is supporting the Swamp.

- 41% of conservatives, 44% of moderates, and 50% of Independents believe the GOP leadership supports the Swamp
- 45% of voters who reside in states Trump won in the 2016 presidential election believe the GOP leadership supports the Swamp
They also feel Washington is out-of-touch with their level of concern about their freedoms: 53% of Americans disagree that their elected officials in Washington share their level of concern for threats to their freedom.

**UNDERSTANDING OF THE SWAMP**

The terminology for The Swamp may not be as well understood as the concept itself. As we noted earlier, when the Swamp was described in greater detail, 60% of voters said it was important to drain the Swamp (compared to 54% concerned when it was only named).

Americans are clearly concerned about the Swamp-effect on D.C., but they have slightly different ways of ordering the components that make it up.

When asked to name the top three impediments to draining the Swamp, only Trump voters identified the media as the top obstacle. Americans of all political ideologies identified lobbyists as one of the top 3 impediments to draining the Swamp, but only liberals and moderates identified the bureaucracy in the top 3; conservatives did not.
Top 3 Impediments to Draining The Swamp (In order of Priority):

- **OVERALL**: Lobbyists, GOP Leadership, and Bureaucrats
- **Trump Voters**: Media, Democrat Leadership, and Lobbyists
- **Conservatives**: Democrat Leadership, Media, and Lobbyists
- **Moderates**: Lobbyists, GOP Leadership, and Bureaucrats
- **Liberals**: GOP Leadership, Lobbyists, and Bureaucrats

THE SWAMP AND SELF-GOVERNANCE

If the Swamp provides immunity to a healthy self-governance system, following-through on campaign promises is a symptom of resistance to The Swamp.

Overall, voters have greater trust Trump will keep campaign promises than Republicans -- 31% of all voters believe Trump will keep his campaign promises, 27% believe the Democrats will, and 6% believe the Republicans will.

The GOP has a campaign-promise crisis within its own base, especially when contrasted with the trust the Democrats have from their base:

- 9% of conservatives trust the Republicans to keep their campaign promises
- 52% of liberals trust the Democrats to keep their campaign promises
- 30% of moderates trust the Democrats to keep their campaign promises; 4% of moderates trust the Republicans.

BROADER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

Americans across the ideological spectrum indicated that even as they feel boxed out by the Swamp situation, they feel threatened from another area: the social movements, public bullying, and political violence. 80% said they agree that American traditions of freedom and individual rights are being threatened by social movements, public bullying, and increasing political violence.

CONCLUSION

Americans are concerned about The Swamp culture and associate GOP leadership with supporting that same environment. They do not see any entity as effectively battling this,
and the concerns spans political identification and party label. When only 39% of Americans feel their elected officials share their level of concern for the threats to their freedom, it’s clear that Washington is on a different page from the American people.