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The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

2022: THE PUBLIC'S PRIORITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

As nearly 800,000 Americans died due to the pandemic and the economy experiences a surge of inflation and an employment slowdown, most Americans are pessimistic about the year ahead. COVID-19 continues to top the list of Americans' priorities for the government to address, but not as overwhelmingly as last year.

To explore the public's agenda for 2022, The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research conducted a poll in December 2021 in which respondents provided up to five volunteered issues that they believe should be priorities for the federal government in 2022.

Various aspects of the economy remain a major issue for the government to work on in 2022, and inflation specifically has been mentioned for the first time in years. And 24% name pocketbook issues like gas prices as a priority for the government.

Immigration has grown once again as a top priority after slipping last year. Education and climate change remain mid-tier issues. While still named as priorities by some, racism and police brutality have declined since last year.

The survey began a few days after the 28th school shooting of the year, when four students were killed and seven injured at Oxford High in Michigan on November 30, 2021. The poll finds 24% name gun issues as a problem for the government should be handling during 2022.

As always, Republicans and Democrats have different items on their agenda. Democrats are particularly concerned about guns. Forty-one percent of Democrats consider gun issues a top problem, up from 6% in 2020. In 2021, only 6% of Republicans mention gun issues.

However, Republicans and Democrats are equally as likely to prioritize the financial issues affecting American households as a top issue for the government to address in 2022.

For the problems named by the public, few have much confidence in the government's ability to make any progress toward solutions in 2022.

The nationwide poll was conducted December 2-7, 2021, using the AmeriSpeak Panel®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,089 adults. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

Findings from the poll include:

- Twenty-four percent name personal financial issues as pressing for 2022, similar among both Republicans and Democrats. That includes 10% who specify gas prices, named by 15% of Republicans and 6% of Democrats.

- Abortion is considered a top priority by 8%, up from 2% last year and 3% the year before. Thirteen percent of Democrats name abortion as a priority, up from less than 1% last year. Five percent of Republicans name abortion, just about the same as last year.

- As Americans enter the third year of the pandemic, only 26% expect 2022 to be better than last year for the nation. Half think 2022 will look much like 2021, and 22% anticipate a worse year. In 2020, 54% thought 2021 would be an improvement for the country.

- The public is slightly more positive about the coming year for themselves personally. Thirty-four percent are looking forward to a better year and 15% think they will have a worse year in 2022. Half expect things in their life to stay pretty much the same.

- Democrats are more likely than Republicans to expect an improved 2022 compared with 2021 both personally and for the country. Republicans are more inclined than Democrats to say 2022 will be worse for them personally and for the country.

DOMESTIC ISSUES CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE PUBLIC'S AGENDA

The public was asked about which problems facing the United States and the world today they would like the government to work on in 2022. Among all policy areas, domestic issues continue to be cited as Americans' most pressing policy concerns. This has been the case since AP-NORC first priorities study in 2015.

Looking at specific issues, 33% of Americans cite COVID-19 and another 6% mention the vaccine as one of their top policy concerns. This is down from 53% last year. The survey was fielded before the spike of cases in the United States in mid-December.

The second most cited issue, immigration, is mentioned by 32%, up from 18% last year. Now, immigration has just about returned to the level of importance mentioned in the 2019 survey (35%).
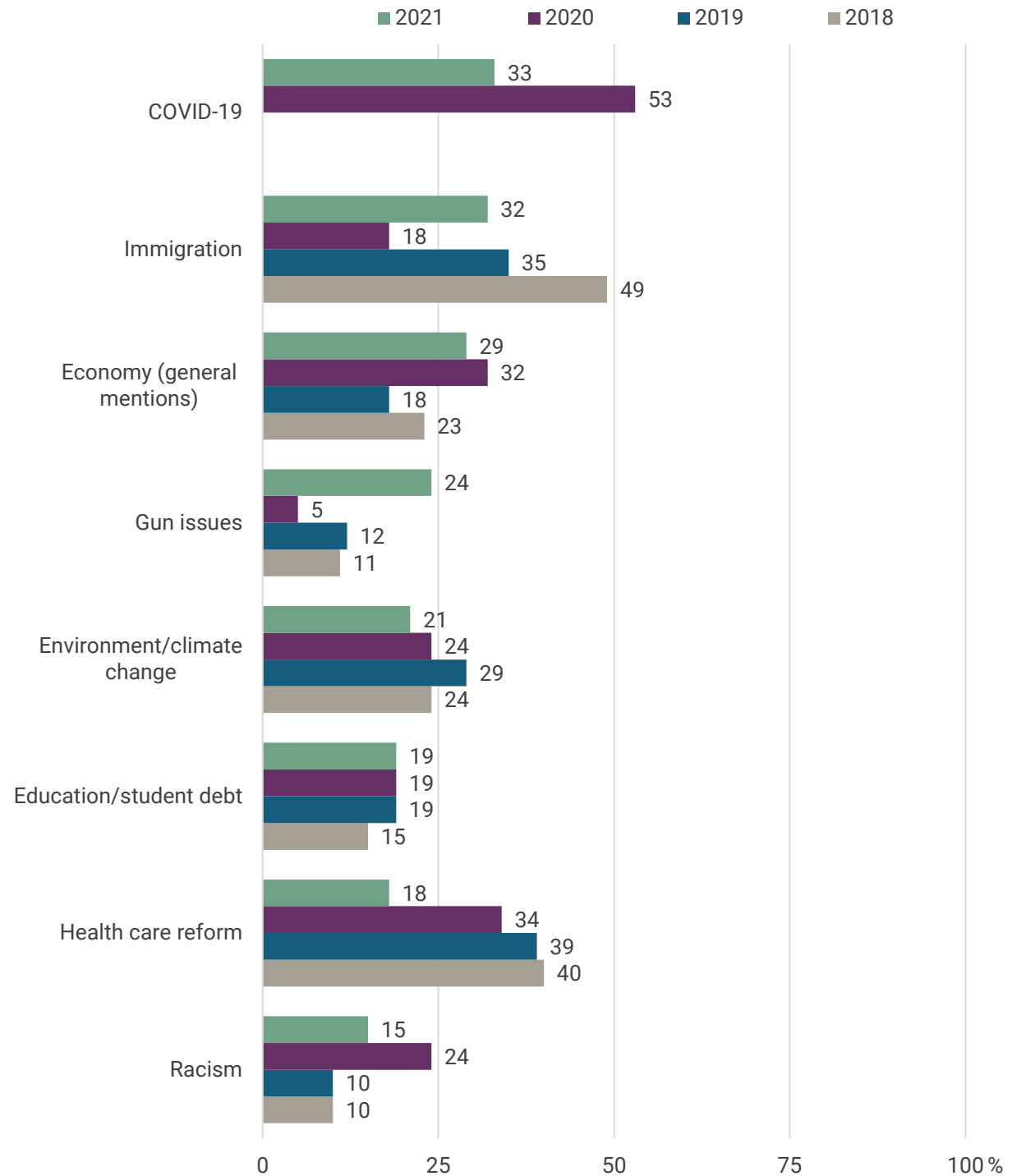
The economy in general (29%), gun issues (24%), and the environment and climate change (21%) round out the top five issues. The economy and the environment are cited at similar rates as on the 2020 survey.

Not only are more people citing gun issues than last year, twice as many are mentioning guns now as did so in the 2019 survey. The survey was fielded days after the Oxford High School shooting and during the subsequent investigation and legal proceedings.

In the wake of George Floyd's murder in May 2020 and the subsequent protests across the country, 24% listed racism as one of their top concerns, up from 10% the previous two years. There were fewer protests in 2021, and racism as a top concern dropped to 15%.

What problems would you like the government work on in the coming year?
Percent of adults

Legend: ■ 2021 ■ 2020 ■ 2019 ■ 2018

COVID-19
- 2021: 33
- 2020: 53

Immigration
- 2021: 32
- 2020: 18
- 2019: 35
- 2018: 49

Economy (general mentions)
- 2021: 29
- 2020: 32
- 2019: 18
- 2018: 23

Gun issues
- 2021: 24
- 2020: 5
- 2019: 12
- 2018: 11

Environment/climate change
- 2021: 21
- 2020: 24
- 2019: 29
- 2018: 24

Education/student debt
- 2021: 19
- 2020: 19
- 2019: 19
- 2018: 15

Health care reform
- 2021: 18
- 2020: 34
- 2019: 39
- 2018: 40

Racism
- 2021: 15
- 2020: 24
- 2019: 10
- 2018: 10

X-axis: 0, 25, 50, 75, 100 %

Question: Thinking about the problems facing the United States and the world today, which problems would you like the government to be working on in the year 2019/2020/2021/2022? Please list up to five problems. [Percentages above among those who provided at least one problem. Problems named by at least 15% in 2021 are shown above.]
Source: Polls conducted by AP-NORC, the latest December 2-7, 2021 with 1,089 adults nationwide.
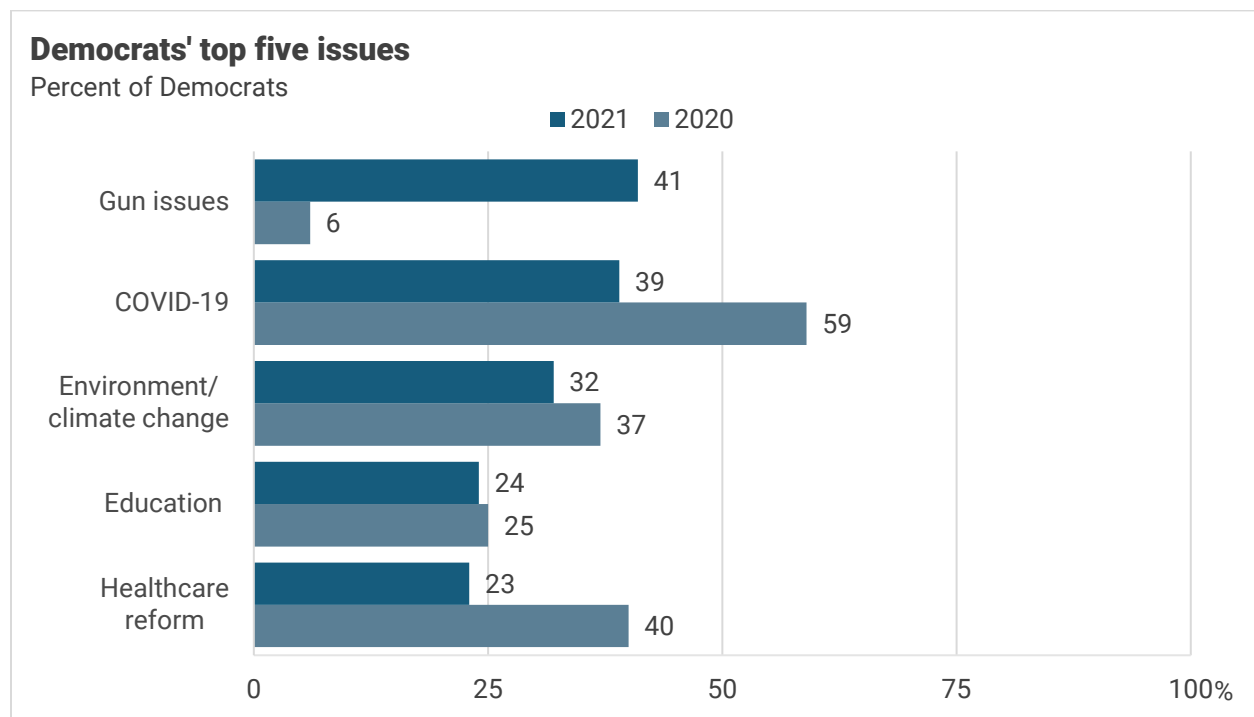
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Again, COVID-19 is a top priority, regardless of party identification. Both Democrats and independents also cite healthcare reform as a top issue, while Republicans and independents are more concerned about the economy and immigration.

Gun issues have replaced COVID-19 as the top issue for Democrats, with significantly more citing it than they did last year. And while still on the list of Democrats' top five concerns, fewer name COVID-19 and healthcare reform as priorities compared with last year. Racism has dropped from 35% last year to 17% this year, while education is back as one of the top five issues.

Independents are more likely to cite immigration this year, and unemployment is no longer among their top five concerns. The other top priorities – the economy, COVID-19, healthcare reform, and poverty – are the same as last year, although fewer name COVID-19 or healthcare.
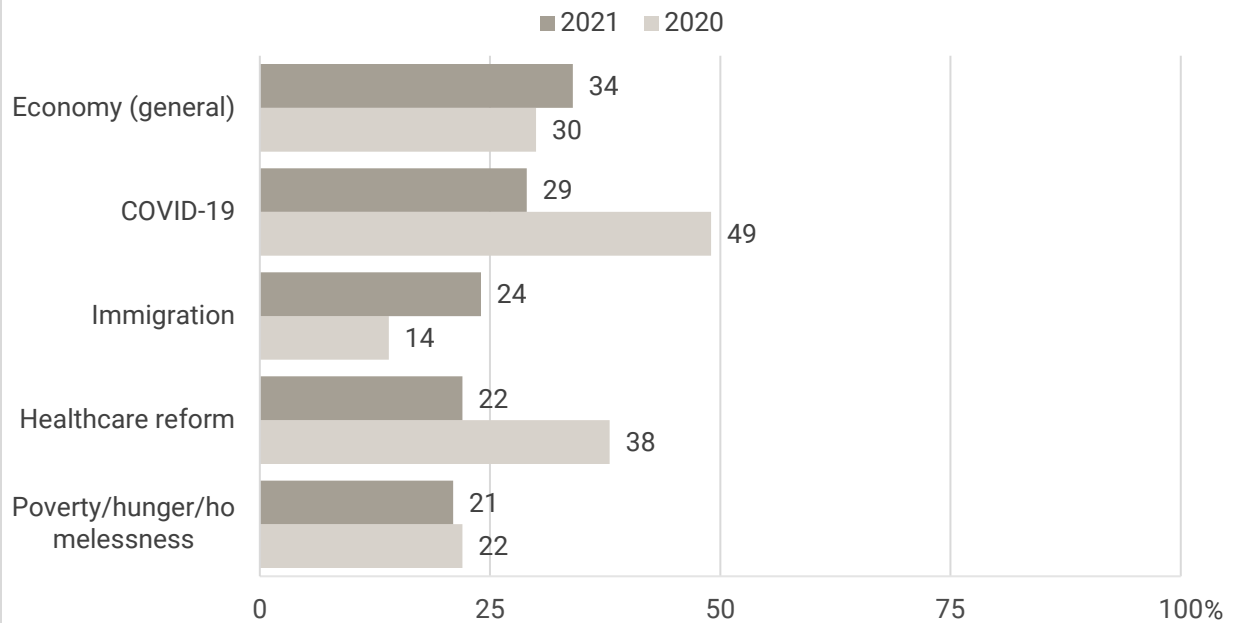
Immigration is still a top issue for Republicans, named by more than twice as many as last year. In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Foreign policy issues overall went up among Republicans from 42% last year to 64% this year.

Last year, no one named inflation as one of their concerns. Now, after consumer prices jumped 6.8% over the past year, nearly a fifth of Republicans name it as a priority.

Democrats' top five issues
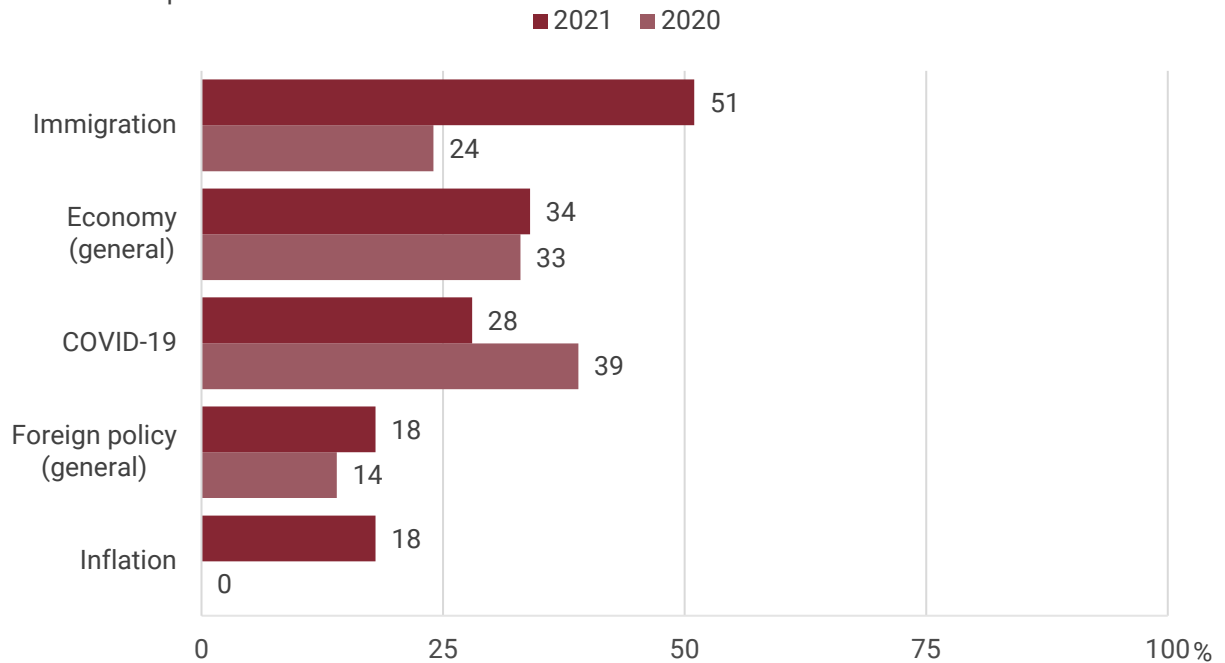Percent of Democrats

■ 2021 ■ 2020

Issue	2021	2020
Gun issues	41	6
COVID-19	39	59
Environment/climate change	32	37
Education	24	25
Healthcare reform	23	40

0   25   50   75   100%

Independents' top five issues
Percent of independents

■ 2021 ■ 2020

Issue	2021	2020
Economy (general)	34	30
COVID-19	29	49
Immigration	24	14
Healthcare reform	22	38
Poverty/hunger/homelessness	21	22

0   25   50   75   100%

Republicans' top five issues
Percent of Republicans

■ 2021 ■ 2020

Issue	2021	2020
Immigration	51	24
Economy (general)	34	33
COVID-19	28	39
Foreign policy (general)	18	14
Inflation	18	0

0   25   50   75   100%

Question: Thinking about the problems facing the United States and the world today, which problems would you like the government to be working on in the year 2022?
Source: AP-NORC poll conducted December 2-7, 2022, with 1,089 adults age 18 and older nationwide.
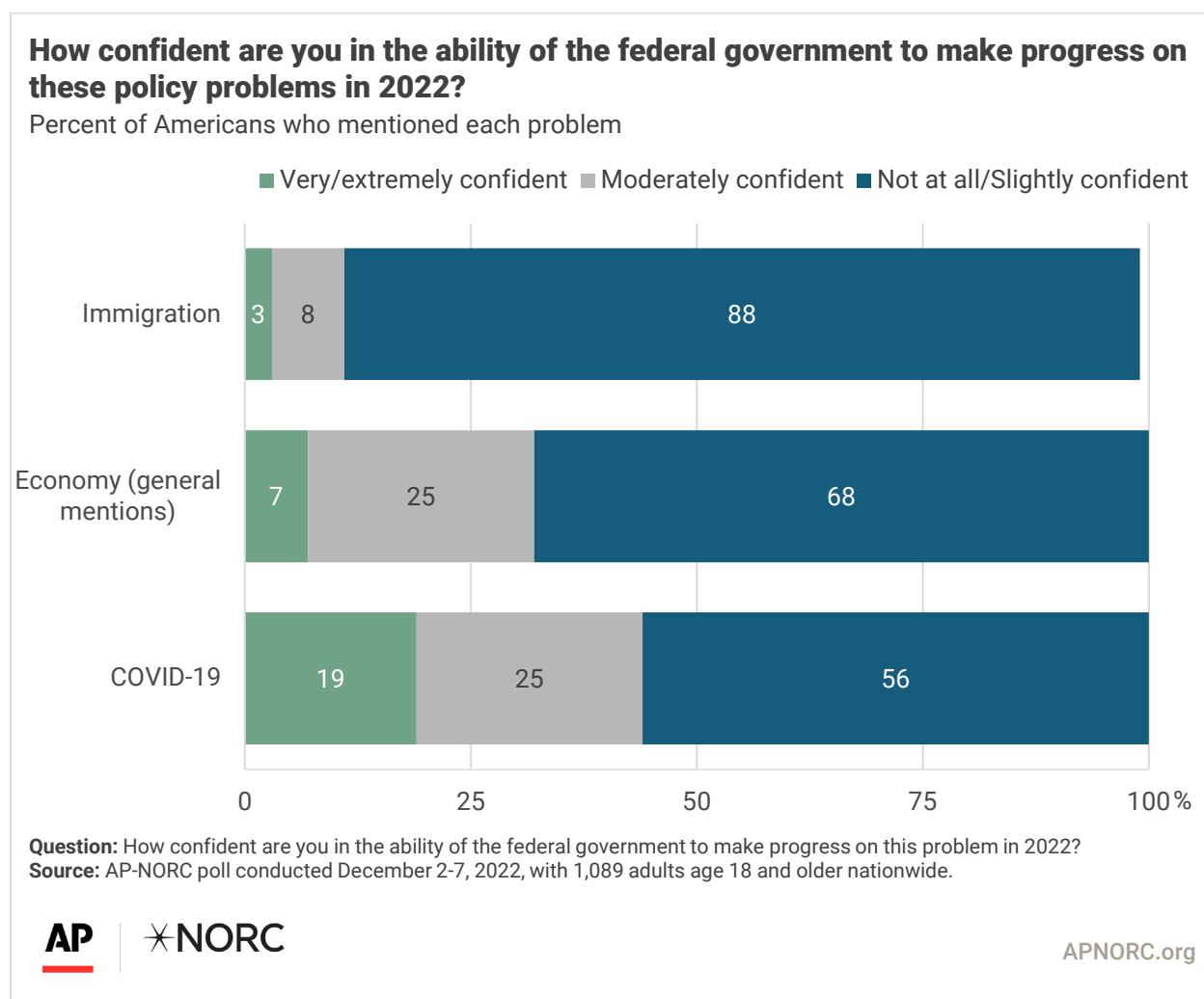
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AMERICANS HAVE LITTLE CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO DEAL WITH THEIR PRIORITIES

Americans are much less confident in the government's ability to make headway with their top issues. Last year, 65% of Americans who cited COVID-19 as a concern were at least moderately confident in the government's ability to deal with the pandemic during 2021. A year later, just 44% are confident the government will make progress on the pandemic during 2022.

Similarly, 56% were at least moderately confident that the government would make progress on the economy during 2021, while just 32% have that level of confidence for this year.

In fact, most Americans have little or no confidence that the government will make progress on any of their top concerns during 2022.

How confident are you in the ability of the federal government to make progress on these policy problems in 2022?

Percent of Americans who mentioned each problem

Legend: ■ Very/extremely confident ■ Moderately confident ■ Not at all/Slightly confident

Problem	Very/extremely confident	Moderately confident	Not at all/Slightly confident
Immigration	3	8	88
Economy (general mentions)	7	25	68
COVID-19	19	25	56

Question: How confident are you in the ability of the federal government to make progress on this problem in 2022?
Source: AP-NORC poll conducted December 2-7, 2022, with 1,089 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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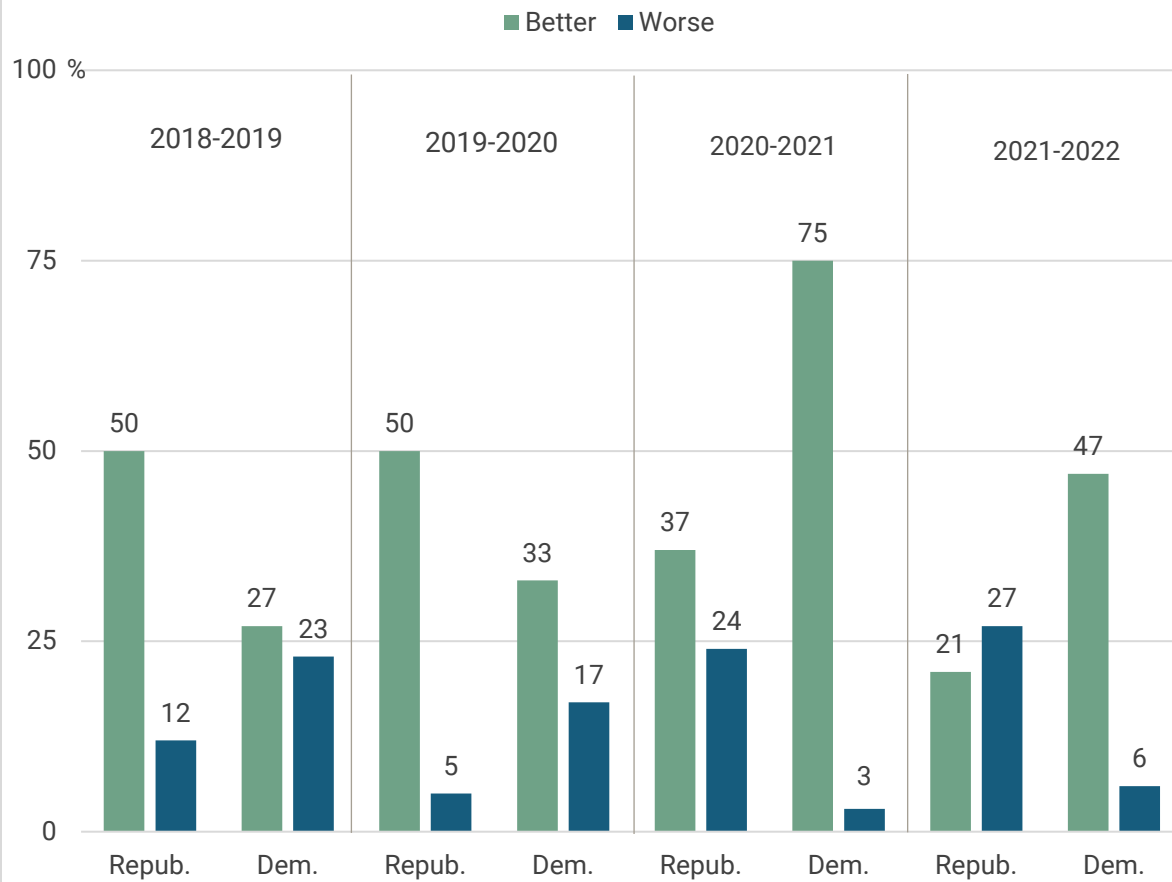
PARTISAN DIFFERENCES IN OUTLOOK FOR THE COUNTRY

Overall, half of Americans do not expect their lives in 2022 to be very different from 2021. Thirty-four percent are optimistic about the new year and 15% anticipate their lives will deteriorate in 2022. When looking ahead to 2021, the public was much more hopeful, as 55% said 2021 would be better for them than 2020.

The public was also more optimistic about how things would turn out for the country as a whole in 2021. Most, 54%, said 2021 would be an improvement for the country over 2020, while 24% didn't think there would be much difference and 20% expected things to get worse. During the Trump administration, Republicans were more positive than Democrats about the following year. After Joe Biden's election in November 2020, Democrats became more optimistic about their lives in the next year.

Now, 50% expect life in the United States to remain constant, while 26% say 2022 will be a better year for the country and 22% think 2022 will be worse. Democrats are more positive about the direction of the country than Republicans. Thirty-seven percent of Democrats expect the country to improve during 2022, while 37% of Republicans think the country will get worse.

Will next year be better for you?
Percent of adults

■ Better ■ Worse

Question: Looking ahead to 2019/2020/2021/2022, which of the following comes closest to your opinion? For you personally, 2019/2020/2021/2022 will be a better year than 2018/2021, 2022 will be a worse year than 2021, there won't be much of a difference between 2022 and 2021.
Source: AP-NORC poll conducted December 2-7, 2021 with 1,089 adults nationwide.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from The Associated Press and NORC at the University of Chicago.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between December 2-7, 2021, with adults aged 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,089 completed the survey—1,012 via the web and 77 telephone. Panel members were invited by email or by phone from an NORC telephone interviewer. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for completing the survey. The final stage completion rate is 16.1 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 17.1 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 75.6 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 2.1 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/-4.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error and there may be other unmeasured error in this or any other survey.

Quality assurance checks were conducted to ensure data quality. In total, 29 interviews were removed for nonresponse to at least 50% of the questions asked of them, for completing the survey in less than one-third the median interview time for the full sample, or for straight-lining all grid questions asked of them. These interviews were excluded from the data file prior to weighting.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2021 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

The sample is weighted to match the average of self-identified party identification in the previous two waves of the AmeriSpeak Omnibus survey and this current survey. The sample is also adjusted to match the benchmark of the percent of adults who have received at least one dose of a vaccine by Census region as of December 7, 2021 according to the CDC COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker data.

For the open-ended question PROB1, responses were classified using a supervised machine learning model using an R package called RTextTools. Nearly 20,000 responses from previous AmeriSpeak Omnibus surveys were used to train a support vector machine to classify responses into nearly 70 codes. These codes were validated by a human coder and were then collapsed into more general categories based on topic for reporting.
The machine learning model has a measure of fit called an F-score. The F-score, a weighted average of precision and recall, is 0.78.

Complete questions and results are available at: apnorc.org

Additional information on the AmeriSpeak Panel methodology is available at:
https://amerispeak.norc.org/about-amerispeak/Pages/Panel-Design.aspx.

For more information, email info@apnorc.org.

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