

ISSUEPULSE

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**A QUARTERLY PULSE CHECK
ON AMERICANS' TOP ISSUES**

Research By:



**Research
INSTITUTE**

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INTRODUCTION

Less than three months before U.S. midterm elections, the economy—traditionally a top issue preceding any national election—remained uncertain. Companies' expectations of profits were still down and concerns about rising wages still up, though North America was growing more positive than Europe and Asia. The Federal Reserve had raised interest rates five times already in 2022 and was expected to do so again.

In August, President Joe Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act to address climate change, corporate taxes and healthcare coverage. His approval rating rose by October 2022 to 44%, up from a low of 36% in July. Congressional and state majorities after the midterm elections were far from certain, though, and NPR reported on October 6 that half the country thought their candidates should refuse to concede if they weren't declared the winners in their races.

Add women's issues, Hurricane Ian, periodic mass shootings, Russia's threat of nuclear warfare in Ukraine and the death of the United Kingdom's Queen Elizabeth II, and that's the news greeting Americans since the inaugural Issue Pulse report in May.

Whatever news Americans face, they also still live with the social issues that affect them and the people they love. Thus, the Ad Council Research Institute (ACRI) examines how social issues receiving large amounts of news coverage resonate. We use the Ad Council's insight-driven approach to assess and analyze public awareness and attitudes toward social issues so that movements and organizations can best inspire people to act. Each quarter, ACRI and decision-intelligence company Morning Consult report this data, identifying trends among the general population and among key demographic and psychographic segments such as generation, region, urbanicity and race.

This, the second report of 2022, summarizes topline findings from our September 2022 study, which includes similar research from our inaugural May study and insights specific to voting and elections.



PURPOSE

Our purpose is to provide brands, agencies and cause organizations with information about the issues Americans care the most about and how those issues change as new ones arise or values shift so that they can be better armed to inform, persuade or incite action.

Why they care: Personal importance and relevance of Americans' top issues.

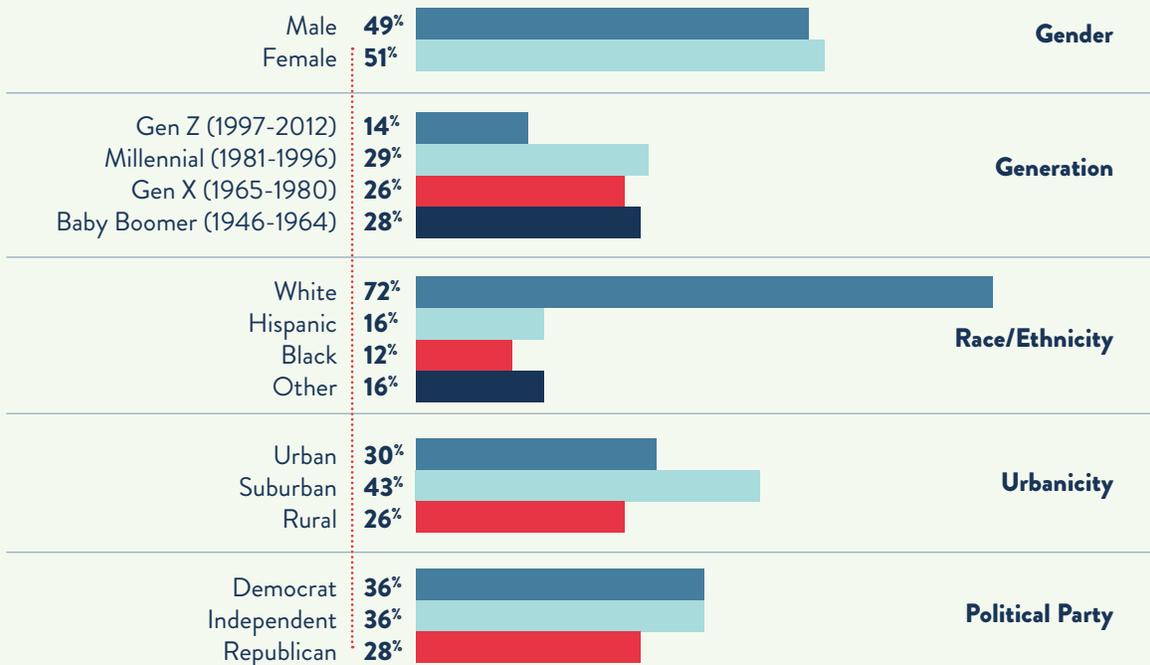
What they feel: Knowledge, perceptions and attitudes around issues people say they care most about.

How they act: Current behaviors around top issues and predisposition to action or involvement.

Who they are influenced by: Sources of information and trusted messengers for top issues.

METHODOLOGY

ACRI and Morning Consult fielded a 15-minute online survey on September 13-17, 2022, among U.S. adults ages 16 and up. A representative, nationally generalizable sample mix was achieved, with quotas and results weighting applied to key demographic variables such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment and region. A total of 3,000 surveys were completed for a margin of error of $\pm 2\%$. This survey was offered in English and Spanish.





TOP ISSUES: ECONOMY, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, CLIMATE CHANGE



ECONOMY - 45%

A majority of Americans who listed the economy among their top three issues of concern put it as their most important. A wide gap exists between Republicans' (57% rank as top issue) stated concern about the economy and that of Democrats (37%), with Independents (43%) closer to the latter than the former.



WOMEN'S RIGHTS - 22%

People under 35 cared more about women's rights than other age groups. Those who cared ranked the issue as number one or two and said women's health and reproductive rights were important—and 62% of those who ranked women's rights as their top issue had taken action.



CLIMATE CHANGE - 21%

Of the one-fifth of adults who said climate change was a top three issue, a plurality (40%) ranked it number one—and most of those (70%) had taken action within the last 90 days. Adults who are most likely to say climate change is one of their top three issues include Democrats (32%), adults ages 65+ (29%), higher income adults (27%), and college educated adults (27%).

AGE BREAKDOWN: TOP THREE ISSUES BY AGE

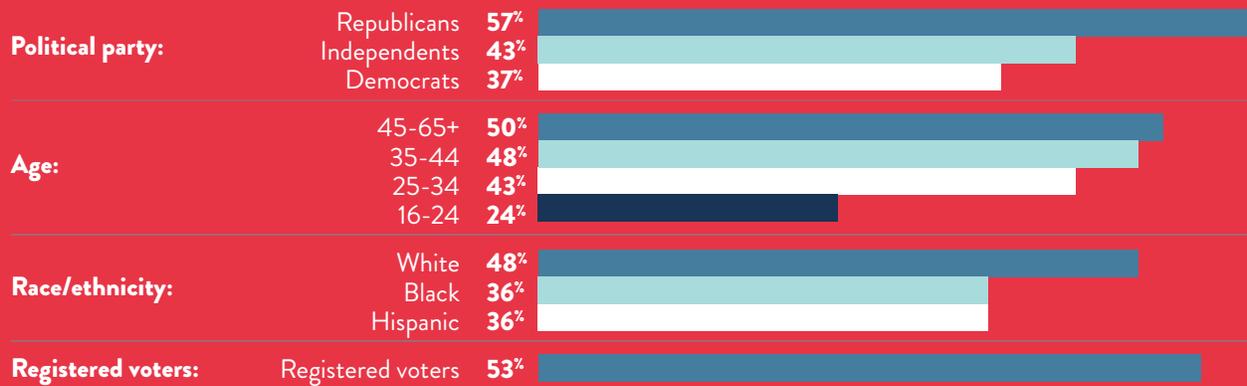
AGES 16-24	
Women's rights	38%
The economy	24%
Social justice/civil rights/racial issues	24%
AGES 25-34	
The economy	43%
Women's rights	28%
Climate change	22%
AGES 35-44	
The economy	48%
Economic equality/justice	23%
Hunger / food insecurity	21%
AGES 45-64	
The economy	50%
Hunger / food insecurity	21%
Climate change	20%
AGES 65+	
The economy	50%
Senior / elderly issue	33%
Climate change	29%
Immigration	28%



ECONOMY

Well into 2022 midterm election season, 45% of adults ages 16 and up put the economy among their top three issues of concern, and a majority of those same adults (56%) ranked it as their number-one issue. Those who put the economy in their top three were more likely also to have said reducing inflation was important and to get information about the issue from a national (26%) or a local (19%) news media anchor, reporter or personality. Republicans, white adults 35+ and registered voters (see next section) were most likely to rank the economy as a top three issue.

WORTH NOTING: The only age groups to include hunger/food insecurity in their top three issues of concern were two of the three groups that ranked the economy as their number-one issue: ages 35-44 and 45-64.



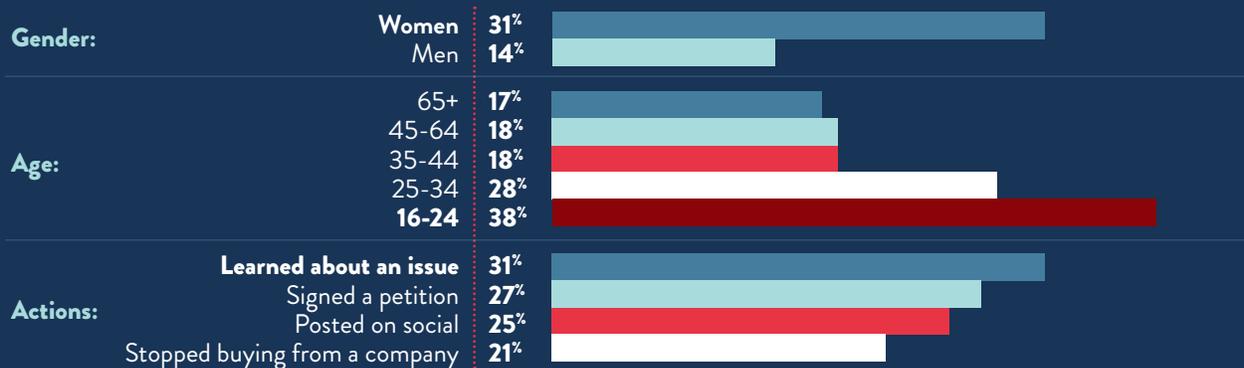


WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women's rights dropped from the top three issues of concern after age 35, and those groups age 16-24 and 35-44 are tied at 17% for the least concern about climate change of all ages. Yet, those who felt strongly about these issues did take action.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's overturning of Roe V. Wade's abortion choice protections, 22% of adults said women's rights was among the top three issues they care about the most. Among those same adults, 38% ranked women's rights as number one, 34% as number two. Those who put women's rights in their top three were more likely to have said reproductive rights/abortion access and women's health were important; they also were most likely to get their information on this issue from a national (21%) news media anchor, reporter or personality or by a social media friend or connection (14%).

Among adults who ranked women's rights as their number-one issue, 62% had taken action on the issue within the past 90 days: they took time to learn about the issue (31%), signed a petition (27%), posted or shared content on social media (25%) or stopped or decreased buying from a company because of their misaligned values (21%).

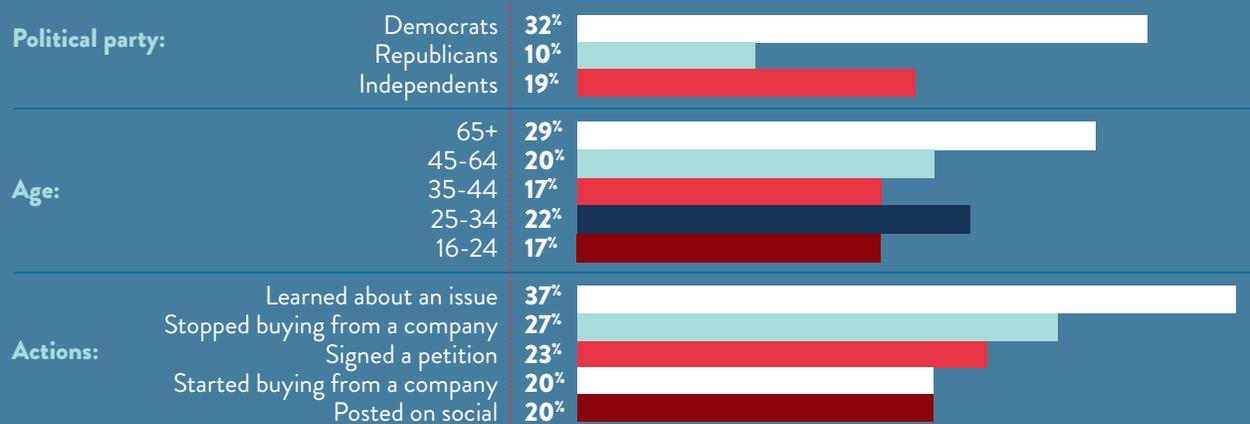




CLIMATE CHANGE

21% of adults said climate change was a top three issue of concern for them. Among those, (40%) ranked it number one, and 70% had taken action within the last 90 days. The top-three group was most likely to get their information from a national (26%) or local (14%) news media anchor, reporter or personality. The adults most likely to put climate change at the top were Democrats (32%), ages 65+ (29%), higher income (27%), and college educated (27%).

WORTH NOTING: Climate change was not among the top three for the youngest age group, and the economy was tied with social justice/civil rights/racial issues for this group's number-two issue.

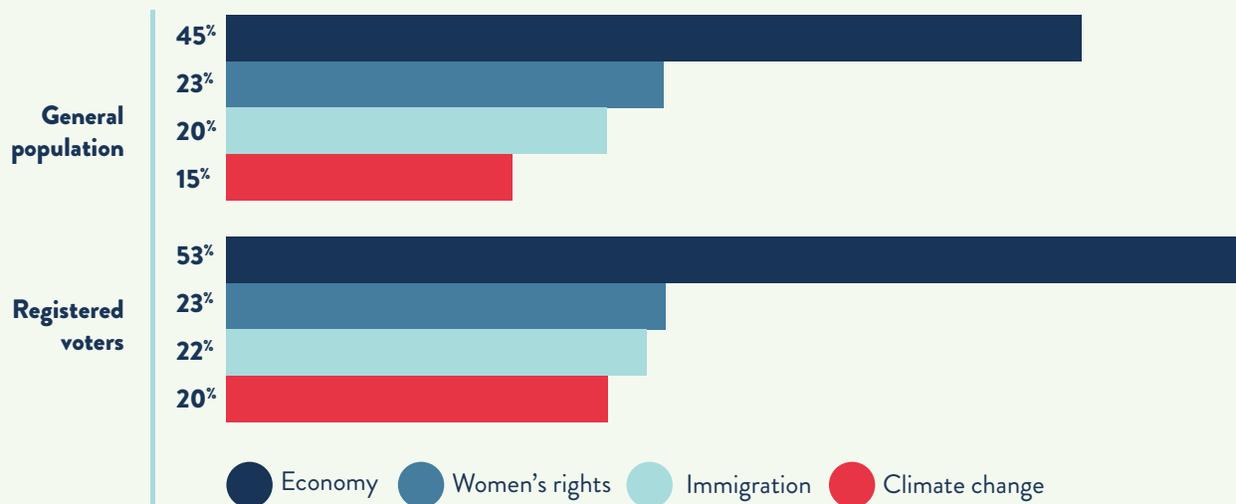




LANDSCAPE OF REGISTERED VOTERS 18+

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of registered voters said they believe the most impactful political action is casting a vote in general elections. When asked about local and midterm elections specifically, more than half of all registered voters said that voting in local (58%) and midterm (53%) elections are impactful. An even greater percentage of all registered voters (85%) said they plan to vote in the November 2022 midterms, with 10% of registered voters still undecided if they'll visit the polls or not.

Not surprisingly, the top three issues of most concern to registered voters matched the top three most-concerning issues for adults overall (see “Top Issues” above) but with a higher concentration among the voters.



When registered voter responses were categorized by political party, the top issues for Democrats were a near tie between women's rights (40%) and the economy (39%), followed by climate change (31%). The economy was the top issue by wide margins for Independents (56%) and Republicans (68%), with immigration (42%) following for the latter group.

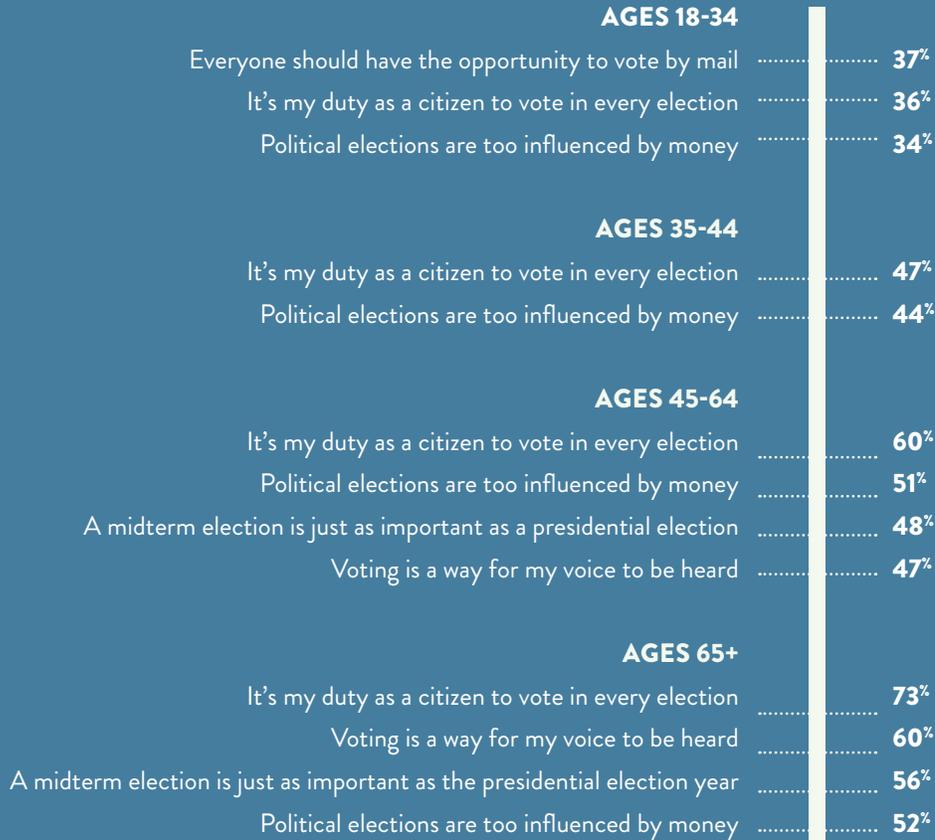
Voters turned to news sources for information on candidates and issues appearing on the ballot. Among recent voters, the most trustworthy sources of such information were local news (73%), national news anchors (65%) and national news (64%); thus, about a third of voters were most likely to use each.

Across all age groups, registered voters agreed that elections are influenced too much by money. Younger voters (ages 18-34) strongly agreed that every American should be able to vote by mail. More voters 35 and older strongly agreed that voting is a civic duty, midterm elections are just as important as presidential elections, and voting is a way for their voice to be heard.

The top reason registered voters said they did not vote in recent elections was dislike for the candidates (30%) and disbelief that their vote matters much (19%).



AGE BREAKDOWN: TOP BELIEFS ABOUT VOTING (% STRONGLY AGREE)



CONCLUSION

In November, elections will be held for every seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and 35 seats in the Senate, while 36 states will vote for governors. According to the U.S. Vote Foundation, “In a typical presidential election year, when barely 50% of eligible voters cast a ballot, a third or more of those voting don’t bother to fill out the entire ballot.” As this means most voters won’t be voting on local issues or for state and local representatives, the 2022 midterms could have an enormous effect on state and local governments. What Americans are concerned about today may change dramatically after the election depending on the actions of the winners. ACRI and Morning Consult will continue to check Americans’ pulse for the issues they care about. Only by knowing how people feel can the Ad Council, brands and causes understand how to motivate them.