

Americans want government to address COVID-19 above all else, survey finds

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As Joe Biden enters his presidency, he will prepare to govern a country still in the grips of a pandemic. In a recent poll, more Americans listed COVID-19 as a major concern than any other policy area. Credit: René DeAnda on Unsplash

Headed into 2021, COVID-19 tops the list of Americans' priorities for government to address. Health care, in general, and economic issues continue to be high on the public's agenda as well. Compared to prior years, Americans have more confidence in the government's ability to

make progress on many of the public's top priorities.

In order to explore the public's agenda for 2021, a December 2020 poll conducted by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research at the University of Chicago accepted from each respondent up to five volunteered issues they want to see the government address.

The pandemic took the top spot on the list of Americans' priorities, with 53% citing COVID-19 as a top policy concern. Health care reform continues to be a major issue (34%) for the public, followed closely by economy in general (32%). The poll also found significant concerns about unemployment (26%), as well as racism and the environment (both 24%).

Most Americans are at least moderately confident that Washington will make progress on the country's top problems. Fifty-five percent think they will personally have a better 2021 than 2020, and 13% think it will be a worse year. Thirty-one percent do not expect much difference between 2020 and 2021.

In reaction to the [economic hardship](#) caused by the coronavirus pandemic, [economic problems](#), particularly unemployment, have risen in importance. And mentions of racial and policing issues have increased in the wake of protests against police brutality and racism earlier this year.

The poll also found that, with the election of Joe Biden, Democrats are now more positive about the state of the country and where it's heading than Republicans. Although 75% of Democrats expect 2021 to be an improvement over 2020, only 37% of Republicans agree—a reversal of trends from the past two years.

Other findings from the poll include:

- In 2018 and 2019, 10% of Americans mentioned racism or [racial issues](#) as one of their top five priorities, and 2% cited the police and policing issues. This year, 24% say racism is one of their top concerns, and 11% mention police and law enforcement.
- In 2018, immigration was the number one priority for Americans, cited by 49%. In 2020, only 18% mention immigration as one of their top five problems. Twenty-five percent of Republicans cite it as one of their concerns, down from 51% in 2019. Among Democrats, the number mentioning immigration dropped to 15% compared with 29% in 2019.
- Sixty-six percent of Democrats say things in the country will improve in the next year, and 59% think the national economy will get better. In contrast, only 26% of Republicans think the country will get better over the next year, and just 25% expect the economy to improve.

There are also substantial partisan differences on several high-profile problems, including the importance of immigration, education and the environment. In addition to differences on what problems should be addressed in the coming year, Republicans and Democrats have conflicting opinions about how things are going in the United States, the condition of the national economy and where the country is headed.

The nationwide poll was conducted Dec. 3-7, 2020, 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 1,117 adults. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Provided by University of Chicago

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