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**While Still Low, Biden’s Approval Ticks Upward in New National
UMass Amherst Poll**

Half the country thinks the nation would be better off if Joe Biden and Donald Trump stepped away from politics, though they remain their parties’ top choices for 2024

Topline results and crosstabs for the poll can be found at www.umass.edu/poll

AMHERST, Mass. – While [a new national University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll](http://www.umass.edu/poll) finds President Joe Biden’s job approval inching up to 40% for the first time in 2022, more than half of the country say it would be better off for the nation if both he and former President Donald Trump stepped away from politics in 2024.

The president, who held a 51% approval in an April 2021 UMass Poll and was at 41% last December, had seen his rating sink as low as 38% in a UMass Poll conducted this past May. His current overall approval is nearly equal to the 41% of the poll’s respondents who expressed “strong disapproval” for his performance in office.

“While not the great bounce back that some Democrats may have hoped for, President Biden has indeed stabilized his falling approval numbers from earlier this spring,” says [Tatishe Nteta](mailto:nteta@polsci.umass.edu), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll. “In the midst of falling approval numbers, President Biden went back to the well and followed through on a number of campaign promises, from appointing Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court to forgiving thousands of dollars in student loan debt. This coupled with his legislative success in passing a truncated version of his Build Back Better bill has seemingly increased Biden’s approval numbers, most notably among young people, women and independents, constituencies that Biden will need to turn out in support of the Democratic Party if Biden and the Democrats have any hope of maintaining control of the U.S. Congress on November 8.”

“Biden’s approval ratings are very low, and the nation’s economic woes are largely to blame,” says [Jesse Rhodes](mailto:jrhodes@polsci.umass.edu), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “Americans rate him very poorly in terms of his handling of the economy in general (31-61), and strongly disapprove of his handling of inflation (26-64) and taxes (32-54), too. The prospect of another round of ‘stagflation’ – a combination of a recession and high inflation – has Americans in a very critical mood going into the midterm elections, and President Biden is bearing the brunt of the criticism.”

Nteta adds, however, that “While his handling of the economy and inflation continue to receive low marks from the public, close to a majority (47%) laud his efforts at handling the COVID-19 crisis and four in 10 Americans believe that the president has handled foreign policy (38%) and the Russia-Ukrainian conflict (42%) well. Whether this will be enough to save the president from losing seats in the U.S. Congress and potentially Democratic control of the two legislative branches is still to be seen.”

Voters also find Biden struggling on the issues of immigration and crime, as well – 60% disapprove his handling of our country’s borders and 55% disapprove of his response to the nation’s crime levels.

“Biden’s approval ratings have gone down across all groups since he entered the Oval Office, but critically among key members of the Democratic coalition – women and African-Americans,” [Raymond La Raja](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll, says with an eye toward the midterms. “That is not comforting for Democrats as they hope for good turnout among these groups. Biden gets low marks from voters on how he has handled inflation, immigration and crime, so it is not surprising Republicans are hammering on these issues in their campaigns.”

“Polarization means presidential approval numbers just don’t vary like they once did,” says [Alexander Theodoridis](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “Biden’s could certainly be lower, but they are not a hopeful sign for Democrats heading into the midterm elections.”

“While the honeymoon is clearly over and Biden’s approval numbers have declined sharply across the board since his inauguration in 2021,” Nteta says, “he and the Democratic Party are hoping that recent legislative successes and the aggressive use of executive orders in forgiving student loan debt, pardoning those convicted of marijuana possession and on the climate remind the core constituencies of the Democratic Party why they turned out in record numbers two years ago to elect Biden the 46th president of the U.S. and gave Democrats power in both branches of Congress. Biden and the Democratic Party have two weeks to make their case or risk losing control of the U.S. Congress.”

Nevertheless, looking at historical precedent, La Raja says of Biden’s 40% overall approval, “That’s low, but not that different from the approval of previous presidents at this point in time, including Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan. Both those presidents rebounded successfully before the next presidential election.”

Looking Toward 2024

Once again, the UMass Poll asked respondents about their views of possible 2024 presidential candidates, and while Biden and Trump continue to lead their respective parties’ fields, a desire to move on from each is developing among their bases.

“As President Biden and former President Trump maintain their position as the favorites for their party’s nomination in 2024, a majority of the American public believe that these two soon-to-be-octogenarians may be doing more harm to the nation than good and would support them both stepping away from the political landscape,” Nteta says. “With two years until the 2024 presidential election, it is up to the American public to communicate whether they want to see an electoral sequel to 2020 or if it is time for new voices to lead the nation.”

“Americans seem pretty dissatisfied with the leadership of both the Democratic and Republican parties,” Rhodes says. “In a reflection of their negative evaluation of his economic management, more than half of Americans (52%) think it would be better if Joe Biden doesn’t run for reelection in 2024. At the same time, though, they are not clamoring for the return of former President Donald Trump, either. More than half of those polled (53%) say it would be better if Trump stepped away from politics, as well.”

However, “The overwhelming number of Republican voters don’t seem interested in seeing Trump leave the national stage,” La Raja counters. “Just 25% of Republicans think it would be better for the nation if Trump stepped away from politics. And only 22% thought it would be better for the Republican Party without him around. Understanding his connection with party loyalists will spawn countless books in the coming years.”

“The Republican supporters who rank Trump as their first pick for the presidential nomination have not wavered,” La Raja says of the field of potential 2024 candidates. “More than half of GOP voters – 53% – want him as their first choice. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, however, has gained support in the past year, going from 20% to 29% of voters ranking him at the top. Once the midterms are over, we expect to see intense jockeying among presidential aspirants in the GOP – with political intrigue worthy of “House of Cards” – between the Trump and DeSantis camps. Buckle your seat belts.”

“Among Republicans, Trump remains the clear frontrunner for the presidential nomination in 2024, with DeSantis a distant second and the other potential candidates barely registering. This reality poses a challenge for Republicans,” Rhodes adds. “While Trump is still quite popular among the GOP base, his brand has been seriously hurt among the mass public by the January 6 Committee investigation, the revelation that he retained classified presidential documents at his personal residence and several ongoing criminal investigations into his business affairs and efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election. At present, Trump could be a liability in a 2024 general election race. But it’s unclear whether DeSantis represents a viable alternative, especially as Trump is unlikely to go quietly and would likely do everything in his power to try to destroy DeSantis. While Democrats are currently suffering due to their perceived economic mismanagement, it’s unclear whether either Trump or DeSantis would represent a powerful alternative.”

“When we asked people to rank their top choices for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2024,” La Raja says, “it appears support for Biden has diminished quite a

bit. Just 29% rank him as first choice today compared to 40% almost a year ago. But no other candidate we listed gained very much from Biden's softening support. The 2024 election is a long way off, but once midterms are over Biden has work to do shoring up confidence in him from Democratic loyalists."

Rhodes agrees, saying, "Among Democrats, enthusiasm for Joe Biden as the party's nominee in 2024 has fallen sharply over the past year. Although he remains the most popular choice, only 29% of Democrats elect him as their first choice. This is a very soft level of support, and likely reflects a combination of factors: the reality that Biden was never a source of great enthusiasm among the Democratic base; the fact that, if nominated, Biden would be the oldest presidential nominee in American history; and the strongly negative evaluations that have arisen as a result of Biden's perceived economic mismanagement. Although none of the other candidates we polled draw strong support, the softness of enthusiasm among Democrats means that it's possible that another Democrat could make a serious challenge for the nomination."

Lock Him Up?

Asked about two of the many legal entanglements Trump finds himself facing, half of the poll's respondents say he should be charged with a crime for both his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election (50%) leading up to the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, and for not returning the hundreds of classified documents (51%) found by the FBI at Mar-a-Lago this past summer. A broad plurality of four in 10 say that Trump "definitely" should face charges in each of the matters, although the poll's directors point to partisanship driving much of the views surrounding this issue.

"Trump is clearly the most polarizing figure in American politics, even though he no longer holds elective office," La Raja says. "It plays out in battles over his guilt or innocence in recent federal investigations. Nine in 10 Democrats –89% – want him charged for inciting the Jan. 6 insurrection, while 73% of Republicans oppose this. The same percentage of Democrats want him charged for withholding classified documents while 76% of Republicans oppose this."

The poll also asked whether the respondents' views on continuing efforts by federal authorities to identify, arrest and charge individuals who participated in the events at the Capitol on Jan. 6. Half of those polled – 49% – continue to support such efforts, while slightly more than one-quarter (27%) expressed opposition.

"As it pertains to the events of Jan. 6, Americans look to be of two minds," Nteta says. "As the January 6 Commission makes its final case to the American public that former President Trump was the driving force behind the attack at the U.S. Capitol, a majority of the public remain steadfast in their support for efforts to learn more about the events that led up to that day and believes that he should be brought up on charges for his role in inciting violence on that day. However, there is waning support for continuing efforts at bringing individuals who committed violence that day to justice, as support for the

identification, arrest and charging of these individuals has dropped 16 percentage points since April of 2021.”

“A strong plurality of Americans still wants a thorough investigation into the events of January 6, 2021, as well as the continued investigation, arrest and prosecution of those involved,” Rhodes says. “But enthusiasm has eroded somewhat over the past few months, as economic woes have overwhelmed other issues at the top of the list of people’s priorities. This reflects the reality that, for most people most of the time, basic pocketbook issues – putting food on the table and gas in the car, and paying rent and mortgages – tend to dominate more abstract issues as priorities for the nation.”

The Permeation of the ‘Big Lie’

While the overall percentage of those responding that Biden’s election was legitimate has remained relatively stable over the last 18 months, Rhodes notes that there has been a drop in those expressing certainty about his legitimacy.

“In a troubling development, the share of Americans who believe that President Joe Biden was definitely legitimately elected has fallen somewhat over the past year, to a new low of 43%,” he says. “In part, this likely reflects a pattern of ‘expressive responding,’ in which those polled take out their frustration with Biden’s perceived economic mismanagement by expressing doubt about the legitimacy of his election. But this trend also reflects the power of the conservative media propaganda machine, which has relentlessly circulated false information about the 2020 election to undermine Biden’s presidency.”

“Has time healed the wounds of 2020?” Nteta asks. “A majority of almost all demographic groups view Joe Biden as the legitimately elected president of the United States. However, as has become well documented, large numbers of Republicans, conservatives and, of course, Trump voters maintain their disbelief that Biden was victorious in November of 2020 and suspect that electoral chicanery directed by the Democratic Party is responsible for President Trump’s purported loss. However, support by Republicans for Biden’s legitimacy has crept up since 2021, with over a quarter of Republicans (26%) now viewing Biden as legitimate. Whether this thawing of views regarding the 2020 election among Republican voters will lead President Trump and prominent members of the Republican Party to move on from the 2020 election remains to be seen.”

“The Republican Party remains very much in Donald Trump’s clutches,” Theodoridis summarizes. “The vast majority of Republicans still believe Trump’s Big Lie about Election 2020. Only one in four Republicans think the nation or their party would be better off if Trump stepped away from politics. Very few GOP supporters think Trump should be charged for his role in the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol or failing to surrender classified documents. And, above all, Trump continues to dominate the potential field of GOP presidential candidates, as more than half of Republicans list him as their top choice, and three-quarters have him in their top three.”

Methodology

This [University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll](#) of 1,000 respondents nationwide was conducted by YouGov Oct. 17-19. YouGov interviewed 1,065 total respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 1,000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacement, using the person weights on the public use file.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 and 2020 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories) and education (4-categories) to produce the final weight.

The margin of error within this poll is 3.6%.

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