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## **President Biden's Approval Falls Below 40% for First Time in New National UMass Amherst Poll**

*Poll finds two-thirds of Republicans still question legitimacy of Biden's win and nearly half want former President Trump charged for role in the leadup to the Jan. 6 Capitol riot; majority also want to continue providing military weapons and support to Ukraine*

**Topline results and crosstabs for the poll can be found at [www.umass.edu/poll](http://www.umass.edu/poll)**

AMHERST, Mass. – President Joe Biden's approval rating has dipped below 40% for the first time, according to the results of a [national University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll](#) released today. Biden's approval, which was a net-positive 51% in an [April 2021 UMass Poll](#), ticked down to 38% in the latest poll.

Biden's approval ratings dropped over the past year among all demographic groups in the new poll, including a 16-point drop (from 91% to 75%) among those who voted for Biden in 2020 and among women (from 53% to 37%); an 18% drop among those making less than \$40,000 per year (55% to 37%); a 20% drop among respondents age 18-29 (52% to 32%) and those with a high school education or less (46% to 26%); a 17% drop among African Americans (74% to 57%); and a 19% drop among Latinos (59% to 40%).

"The president's sinking approval rating among his most loyal constituencies, most notably people of color, young Americans and even Democrats must be ringing alarm bells in the White House," says [Tatishe Nteta](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll. "If Biden hopes to remain in the White House, he will have to shore up the support among his base or risk potentially becoming another name on the list of one-term presidents."

### **Biden and Issues Facing Americans**

Asked about Biden's performance handling various issues, the poll's 1,000 respondents gave the president less-than-middling marks across the board, with no issue topping 50% approval. Biden receives his highest grade in his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, breaking even with 46% saying he's handled it well and 46% saying that he has not. At least 50% disapprove of his handling of all other issues, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict (50% disapproval) and immigration (59% disapproval). He receives his worst

grades, however, on the economy and pocketbook issues – 61% say he hasn’t handled the economy well, 57% disapprove of his handling of taxes and 69% are disappointed in his handling of inflation.

“Perceptions about the economy continue to be a drag on Democrats and the clock is running out before the midterms,” says [Raymond La Raja](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “Views have not budged since December – 42% of Americans think the economy is ‘poor’ and 37% rate it only as ‘fair.’ Almost one in three voters put the biggest blame on the president for their high grocery and gas bills.”

“If voting in 2022 is still all about ‘the economy, stupid,’ then President Biden and the Democratic Party are in real trouble as we approach the midterm election,” Nteta says. “Amidst continuing supply chain woes, record inflation, a chaotic stock market and rampant income inequality, declining numbers of Americans hold positive views of the national economy and their own personal well-being. If the economy does not rebound in the coming months, the Democratic Party’s hold over both houses of Congress will be a thing of the past.”

“Women were essential to the Democrat comeback in the 2018 and 2020 elections,” La Raja notes. “But their support for Biden has declined in the past four months, dropping 10 percentage points from 47% to 37%. On a range of issues, including crime and foreign policy, they give him somewhat lower marks than men.”

The poll asked respondents who they blame most for various troubles facing the U.S., both at home and abroad.

“White House efforts to deflect blame for high gas prices onto Vladimir Putin have made less of an impression on voters than Democrats hoped,” says [Paul Musgrave](#), assistant professor of political science at UMass Amherst and an expert on U.S. foreign policy. “More than twice as many respondents in the new poll blame President Biden for the high prices of gas and groceries as Vladimir Putin. When it comes to volatility in the stock markets, the story is the same: 40% of voters named President Biden or Democrats as most responsible for the markets’ decline, with only 15% saying it was Trump or the Republicans and just 9% blaming Putin.

“On the other hand,” Musgrave continues, “efforts to convince the American public that President Biden’s foreign policy is to blame for the Ukraine crisis will face a hard road: an overwhelming majority of Americans think Vladimir Putin bears the responsibility for the war.”

Overall, the percentage of Americans who believe the country is on the wrong track increased by from 54% in April 2021 to 65% in the new poll, up one percentage point from December’s poll. Only 21% feel the country is headed in the right direction, down 10 points since April 2021, and steady from December.

## **The “Big Lie” and the Jan. 6 Riot**

“Our poll results show a country still deeply polarized on the legitimacy of the 2020 election and January 6,” says [Alexander Theodoridis](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll.

Although the percentage of the poll’s respondents who question the legitimacy of Biden’s 2020 election has decreased since April 2021, just over two-thirds of Republicans (68%) and Trump voters (69%) still say that Biden was not legitimately elected.

“Time apparently does not heal all wounds,” Nteta says. “As the nation approaches the second anniversary of President Biden’s 2020 electoral victory, while strong majorities of the young and the old, men and women, people of color and whites, and the working class and middle class view Biden’s victory as legitimate, Republicans have not stopped believing in the ‘Big Lie’ that Biden and the Democratic Party stole the election from former President Trump. Large numbers of Republicans, conservatives and Trump voters still question the president’s legitimacy.”

“Meanwhile, the House committee investigating the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 is facing at least two looming challenges,” says La Raja. “First, they need to complete their work before the next Congress and likely Republican takeover. Second, they need to rally public attention and support. While a solid 42% support efforts to hold individuals who took part accountable, this figure reflects a 10-point decline from a year ago. Still, regardless of the staying power of Trump among Republicans, about half of Americans, 49%, appear to favor Trump being charged with a crime for his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 elections.”

As efforts to overturn elections move to individual states, and just over half (53%) of Americans appear suspicious of allowing state legislatures to intervene in the post-election results, nearly one in four (22%) of the poll’s respondents said that they would favor such a change.

## **Ukraine and Russia**

“Economic sanctions have been a hallmark of the Biden administration’s response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine,” Musgrave says. “Overall, we find robust support for sanctions. Some worry, however, that sanctions will harm ordinary Russian citizens – and American consumers. We find that mentioning these costs to respondents does cause support for sanctions to drop, but not by all that much. There’s strong public support for staying the course even as the costs to Russians – and consumers – continue to accrue, at least for now.”

Asked about what measures they would support or oppose the U.S. carrying out to provide military assistance to Ukraine in its defense against the Russian invasion, more than half (56%) support providing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his

nation's armed forces with more weapons and other military assistance. Nearly half (44%) support carrying out cyberattacks against Russian military targets in Ukraine, while just under four in 10 (39%) support cyberattacks against Russian military targets in Russia. More than half (54%) of poll's respondents oppose using the U.S. military to attack Russian military targets in Russia, while just 14% support the idea.

"Biden and the American people are together on strategy in Ukraine," La Raja says. "Majorities support Biden administration's policy of providing more weapons and other military assistance to Ukraine, but they are decisively opposed to using the U.S. military to attack military targets in Russia."

"There is a partisan divide on this issue," Musgrave notes. "Democrats tend to support more forceful and stern measures to support Ukraine than do Republicans. One major story, however, is that a majority of young respondents do not support even providing weapons to Ukraine. Older Americans are much more likely to support assistance to Ukraine than younger or middle-aged respondents. That generation gap may reflect Cold War experiences on the part of older Americans, memories of the 2003 Iraq invasion for younger Americans, or a mix of both."

"The Russian attack on Ukraine is an awkward issue for GOP elites and voters," Theodoridis says. "Republican elites have spent the last few years downplaying the nefariousness of Putin's regime and portraying Ukraine as a hopelessly corrupt hotbed of profiteering for the Biden family. In the weeks before the invasion, Tucker Carlson, Steve Bannon and Donald Trump, among others, peddled takes flattering to Putin. This stance has grown uncomfortable as Russia and Putin have clearly played the role of unprovoked aggressor, and Ukrainians and Zelenskyy emerge as both sympathetic and heroic. The resulting cognitive dissonance faced by Republicans on Ukraine plays out in our latest poll results. Republicans seem to be less hawkish on Ukraine and less likely to describe Russia as our enemy than Democrats."

While just under one quarter of the poll's respondents (23%) said they would support the U.S. having a more direct role in supporting Ukraine, including the possibility of using force against Russian troops, when presented with the possibility that such an escalation may increase the risk of a potential nuclear strike against U.S. cities the number in support falls to just 17%.

"Russia is a leading nuclear power, and Americans fear escalation that could lead to even an increased risk of the use of Russian nuclear weapons," Musgrave says. "The poll found that Americans are also almost as worried about the prospect of cyberwar being brought to American businesses, governments and utilities. The public is clear in its desire to support Ukraine but avoid a direct conflict with Moscow."

The poll's respondents were not entirely willing to give up on U.S.-Russian relations however, Musgrave notes.

“Perhaps surprisingly given the generally hostile attitudes toward Russia,” he says, “Americans seem willing to work with Moscow when it could benefit both countries – or the entire world. Half of Americans favor continuing to work with Russia on scientific projects like the International Space Station (even though Moscow has recently threatened to cease working with the United States and other partners on the ISS). Three-fifths of Americans are also open to working with Russia on nuclear disarmament and on global public health. This reflects an enduring interest in finding ways to cooperate that even persisted during the depths of the first Cold War, when Soviets and Americans occasionally worked together on issues like eradicating smallpox.”

## **International Refugees**

Finally, the poll asked about Americans’ attitudes toward accepting refugees, not only from Ukraine, but also those who may be fleeing Syria, Venezuela or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and support for accepting Ukrainian refugees polled a full 10-points higher than those from the other nations.

“In general, the American public tends to be more open to letting in newcomers if they view them as refugees, as opposed to migrants,” says [Rebecca Hamlin](#), associate professor of political science and legal studies at UMass Amherst, and an expert on the politics of migration. “This sentiment is reflected in the fairly high levels of across-the board support for seeing people with refugee status resettled in their community.”

“Immigration is a hot topic, but the public is relatively supportive of seeing Ukrainian refugees be welcomed in the United States compared to refugees fleeing other conflict zones and troubled countries,” Musgrave says. “The biggest boost for Ukrainian refugees comes from Republicans, who are almost twice as supportive of having Ukrainian refugees settle in their communities as they are of refugees from other countries.”

“At the base of the Statue of Liberty it reads: ‘Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,’” Nteta says. “Since its founding, the United States has welcomed individuals fleeing the ravages of war, emerging as a beacon of hope for millions around the world. With Europe facing a refugee crisis unseen since World War II, the nation has returned to its roots and a strong majority of Americans support the resettlement of Ukrainian refugees here in the United States. However, some Americans are not as enthusiastic in their support for the resettlement of refugees fleeing years of war and economic ruin in Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Venezuela. For these Americans, the acceptance of ‘your tired, your poor, and your huddled masses’ may end at the borders of the European continent.”

## **Methodology**

This [University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll](#) of 1,000 respondents nationwide was conducted by YouGov May 5-9. YouGov interviewed 1,056 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 and years of education. 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 3.5%.

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