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New National UMass Amherst Poll on Issues Finds One-Third of Americans Believe ‘Great Replacement’ Theory

Two-thirds support gay marriage, majorities support marijuana legalization and federal pardons, and pluralities support gun control legislation and federal abortion legalization

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

AMHERST, Mass. – One-third of Americans and two-thirds of Republicans endorse some form of the tenets of the “Great Replacement” theory, which espouses that the growth in the number of immigrants in the U.S. means the country is in danger of losing its culture and identity, a [new national University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll](http://www.umass.edu/poll) on a number of issues facing the nation has found.

The results are the latest in a series released from a survey of 1,000 respondents nationwide conducted by YouGov Oct. 17-19 on behalf of the UMass Poll.

“We can see why immigration is such a boiling issue,” says [Raymond La Raja](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “One-third of Americans believe that the growth in the number of immigrants in the country means that America is in danger of losing its culture and identity. But 41% of voters disagree. A remarkable 37% of voters think some elected officials want more immigration to bring in obedient voters who will vote for them, while 33% disagree. Grappling with immigration policy will continue to be among the most challenging tasks for political leadership. There is no dodging the strong emotions that drive people’s politics on this issue.”

The poll found 60% of Republicans, and 64% of Trump voters, say the growth in the number of immigrants in the country means that America is in danger of losing its culture and identity, while 66% of Republicans and 72% of Trump voters believe that elected officials want more immigration to bring in obedient voters who will vote for them.

“A disturbing proportion of the American public endorses this right-wing conspiracy theory, which holds that politicians and corporations are conspiring to replace native-born white people with docile immigrants from developing countries,” says [Jesse Rhodes](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “Although frustration with immigration is undoubtedly related to the nation’s failure to

adopt comprehensive immigration reforms, it is also likely that these attitudes are influenced by conservative media, which have increasingly circulated themes related to the ‘Great Replacement’ theory on programs such as ‘Tucker Carlson Tonight.’”

Abortion

The nation’s views on abortion remain largely unchanged since [the last UMass Poll on the issue in May](#) following the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* decision. Support for Congress passing a law to legalize abortion nationally is held by 47% of the latest poll’s respondents, up two percentage points from May, while the percentage of those supporting a federal ban on abortion remains roughly the same at 14%. The percentage in favor of leaving the abortion issue up to the states remained unchanged at 39%.

“In the wake of the *Dobbs* decision, a number of political pundits and commentators decried that the Supreme Court was out of step with the public on the question of abortion,” says [Tatishe Nteta](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll. “While the plurality of the public does indeed desire a federal law to protect a woman’s right to choose, close to four in 10 believe that each state should determine the legality of abortion, and this sentiment is particularly and unsurprisingly popular among conservatives and Republicans. It is no wonder that few Republicans have publicly declared their support for a national ban on abortion, as the new status quo may be viewed by some as a middle ground in the fight to protect a woman’s right to choose.”

“As the nation moves closer to Election Day,” Nteta continues, “President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party have pledged to protect a woman’s right to have an abortion and have signaled their support for efforts to pass federal laws to codify this right in the wake of the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. With such a decision in line with the growing plurality of opinion, and the 2024 presidential election on the horizon, it is highly likely that the question of a federal law on abortion will remain an issue of partisan contention.”

Same-Sex and Interracial Marriage

The new poll also found that views on same-sex marriage have [stayed steady since May](#), and that 90% support interracial marriage, though one in 10 respondents (9%) oppose marriage between races.

“There has been no change in Americans’ support for gay and lesbians being able to marry,” La Raja says. “A solid two-thirds of Americans (66%) favor same-sex marriage. By contrast, 90% of Americans support interracial marriage. As we know, that level of support did not happen overnight – I’m assuming that support for same-sex marriage will eventually reach similar levels.”

“In the wake of the *Dobbs* decision, a number of prominent Republican elected officials and Justice Clarence Thomas have gone on the record questioning the constitutionality of same-sex marriage and some have questioned the right to interracial marriage in the

United States,” Nteta notes. “As the courts and state legislatures decide whether to challenge these rights to marriage, strong majorities of Americans across demographic divides support same-sex marriage and nine in 10 Americans support interracial marriage. If the court decides to reconsider these rights, it will likely face strong public opposition that will further erode perceptions of the legitimacy of the court.”

“Justice Thomas’s beliefs are far outside the political mainstream,” Rhodes adds. “Same-sex marriage is favored by a strong majority in every demographic group, with the exception of conservatives and Republicans. The consolidation of support for marriage equality in American society represents a profound transformation in public opinion. Just 25 years ago, support for marriage equality was a relatively fringe view. Now, belief in the right of all adults to marry is the political mainstream. These patterns suggest that the court would severely – and perhaps fatally – undermine its legitimacy if it were to attack marriage rights for these couples.”

Race & Affirmative Action

The UMass Poll found significant uncertainty among respondents on racial issues, including affirmative action.

While nearly three in five Americans (57%) say that racial and ethnic diversity tends to strengthen the character of a nation, three in 10 (29%) neither agree nor disagree and 14% disagree. More than one in five respondents to the poll (22%) said that the growth in the size of minority communities in the country will result in declining influence of white Americans, while nearly half (45%) said they neither agree nor disagree with that statement. Less than one-quarter (23%) of Republicans, conservatives and Trump voters said that the growth of minority communities would *not* result in the declining influence of white Americans.

More than one-quarter (27%) said that racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations, with one in five (21%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Asked whether they are angry that racism exists, nearly one-third (30%) either disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed.

When asked their views on affirmative action in college admissions and workplace hiring and promotions, respondents were similarly split. One-third of those polled support such policies in both colleges (34%) and the workplace (32%), while four in 10 expressed opposition to these policies, with the remainder (28%) neither expressing support nor opposition.

“Affirmative action policies almost evenly divide the American public, with slightly more opposing them than supporting them,” Rhodes says. “At the same time, more than a quarter of Americans are in the mushy middle. Public ambivalence is a big part of the explanation for why fights over affirmative action in hiring and college admissions have been so difficult and protracted. With no clear signal from the public, policymakers,

interest groups and social movements fight out struggles over racial preferences incrementally, and usually in the courts.”

“In a few weeks the Supreme Court will once again revisit the constitutionality of the consideration of race in college admissions,” Nteta explains. “With the court firmly in the hands of a conservative majority, it is likely that the policy known as ‘affirmative action’ will not survive this most recent legal challenge. If the court does deem affirmative action unconstitutional, on this issue they will be in step with a plurality of the public who expresses opposition to the use of race in decision making in college admissions and in employment decisions.”

Marijuana Legalization and Federal Pardons

A significant majority of the poll’s respondents supports the federal legalization of recreational marijuana (56%) and pardons for those federally convicted of marijuana possession (58%).

“Increasingly, marijuana is becoming part of the American mainstream,” Rhodes says. “Americans strongly support recreational use of marijuana by people over 21 years of age, as well as pardons for individuals convicted of marijuana possession under federal law. This reflects both changing social mores and increasing recognition that drug possession convictions inflict severe harms, particularly on already disadvantaged communities.”

“For decades, Americans have consistently opposed the legalization of marijuana with many viewing this drug as a gateway to the use of more illicit drugs by the nation’s youth,” Nteta says. “More recent years have seen a number of states, many through the use of referendums, legalize not only the medicinal use of marijuana but the recreational use of the drug as well. With President Biden making good on his promise to address the federal status of marijuana and the impact that this has had on many of the nation’s most vulnerable communities, a clear majority of Americans express support for pardoning those convicted of possession of marijuana under federal law and for legalization of the drug by the federal government. As Bob Dylan famously sang, ‘The times, they are a changing.’”

Gun Control

La Raja explains that the UMass Poll found opinions on gun control issues are nearly evenly split.

“One of the biggest conundrums is why guns are not regulated more in the U.S.,” he says. “But our poll shows that Americans are clearly divided on much-talked about proposals. Except for requiring background checks for all gun sales – which 78% of voters support – on other proposals the public is divided. One-third support and 32% oppose making it easier for adults to obtain a concealed carry-permit, while 39% support and 40% oppose allowing teachers and school officials to carry guns in K-12 schools. We observe a

possible winning margin for banning the manufacture and sale of assault weapons – with 48% in support of and 30% opposed to the idea – but there is a very vocal group of Americans who don't want to see this kind of regulation.”

Student Loan Forgiveness

Finally, the UMass Poll asked respondents of their views on student loan forgiveness for federal borrowers. Nearly half (46%) of those surveyed support President Biden's recently announced plan to forgive up to \$20,000 of such debt, with one-third (33%) strongly in support. Just over one-third oppose the plan, with just over one-quarter (27%) strongly opposed.

“As legal challenges to President Joe Biden's plan to forgive up to \$20,000 in student loan debt make their way through the federal courts, a plurality of Americans express support for Biden's attempt to ease the financial burden of millions of Americans,” Nteta says. “Unsurprisingly, this plan is most popular among Americans who currently have student loan debt (77% support) and less so with those who currently have no debt (40% support). Whether Biden's policy will mobilize these voters to the polls will remain to be seen, but expect Biden and the Democratic Party while on the campaign trail to remind Americans of his efforts to address this crisis by using the singular power of the presidency.”

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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