

The Public's Views on the Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today

In a new SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus poll, the public ranks inflation as the most important issue facing the country, followed by threats to democracy, gun policies, and crime.

Republicans and Democrats who consider threats to democracy a major issue are sharply divided when it comes to defining what the threats actually are.

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Introduction

This report, based on a new SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus poll, examines the views of the U.S. public at a time when the 2024 political campaigns for President and Congress are getting underway but do not yet dominate the news.

First, the report looks at what the public believes are the most important issues facing the country today.

Second, the report focuses on the views of those who believe threats to democracy constitute one of the most important issues facing the country.

Specifically, the report examines the different concerns people have when they say that threats to democracy are a major issue.

Third, we look at the current status of public attitudes about abortion, specifically their views of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* a year after the Supreme Court's ruling. The report focuses on how attitudes about *Dobbs* vary by party identification and religious attitudes.

The survey was conducted online and by telephone by SSRS, an independent research company, via the probability-based SSRS Opinion Panel. Interviews were conducted July 7 – 11, 2023, in English and Spanish among a nationally representative sample of 1,031 adults (1,001 reached online and 30 reached via telephone). The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.



The questionnaire was developed and the data analyzed by SSRS staff with assistance from SSRS contributor, John M. Benson. [View the topline.](#)

John M. Benson is a public opinion researcher, academic writer, and editor with over thirty years' experience examining public attitudes about health policy and other domestic policy issues. He has directed numerous national and international polling projects leading to more than 100 publications in *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Health Affairs*, *JAMA*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, *Public Health Reports*, *Milbank Quarterly*, *Social Science Research*, and other domestic policy and polling journals. He is also co-author of *American Public Opinion* and *Health Care* (CQ Press).

Part I: The Public’s Views on the Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today

The public was asked to choose which of 13 issues they believed was the most important issue facing the country today. Then they were asked to choose a second and a third most important issue. This is a way to evaluate the underlying set of public concerns without putting them in an explicitly electoral context before the issues become more focused during the political season.

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The single most important issue among the public is inflation and the cost of living, cited by 34% as the most important issue facing the country. Looking at the top three issues named by the public combined, inflation is also the top issue, cited by 63% (Table 1).

Table 1. The Public’s Views of the Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today

Table ranked by combined top three choices.

	FIRST CHOICE	COMBINED TOP 3 CHOICES
Inflation and the Cost of Living	34	63
Threats to Democracy	14	31
Gun Policies	11	31
Crime	8	28
Immigration	7	26
Jobs and the Economy, other than Inflation/Cost of Living	5	26
Climate Change and the Environment	6	22
National Security	4	17
Inequality	4	15
Taxes	1	13
Abortion	3	12
Health Care other than COVID-19	2	12
COVID-19	1	3

SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus Poll, “The Public’s Views on the Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today, Threats to Democracy, and Abortion,” July 7 – 11, 2023. Base: National adults.

Overall, six issues are named by at least one-fourth of the public as one of the three most important issues facing the country: inflation (63%), threats to democracy (31%), gun policies (31%), crime (28%), immigration (26%), and jobs and the economy, other than inflation/cost of living (26%).

Republicans and Democrats differ widely in their views about which issues are the most important

(Table 2). Among Republicans, inflation/cost of living is the top issue (cited by 67% as one of the top three issues), followed by immigration (50%), crime (32%), threats to democracy (31%), and jobs and the economy, other than inflation (31%).

Among Democrats, the top issues are gun policies (named by 52% as one of the top three issues facing the country), followed by inflation/cost of living (49%), threats to democracy (40%), climate change and the environment (38%), and inequality (27%).

Table 2. The Public’s Views of the Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today, by Party Identification

Top Five Issues Based on Combined Top Three Choices

TOTAL			REPUBLICANS			DEMOCRATS		
Rank	Issue	%	Rank	Issue	%	Rank	Issue	%
1	Inflation/ Cost of Living	63	1	Inflation/ Cost of Living	67	1	Gun Policies	52
2t	Threats to Democracy	31	2	Immigration	50	2	Inflation/ Cost of living	49
2t	Gun Policies	31	3	Crime	32	3	Threats to Democracy	40
4	Crime	28	4t	Threats to Democracy	31	4	Climate change/ environment	38
5t	Immigration	26	4t	Jobs/Economy, other than Inflation	31	5	Inequality	27
5t	Jobs/Economy, other than Inflation	26						

SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus Poll, “The Public’s Views on the Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today, Threats to Democracy, and Abortion,” July 7 – 11, 2023. Base: National adults.

Abortion, which played a large role as an issue in the 2022 congressional elections,¹ rates tied for eleventh in the SSRS poll, cited by 12% as one of the three most important issues facing the country. The reason for this is uncertain. The abortion issue may be less salient than it was last year, or it may be that issues where candidates and parties strongly disagree with each other tend to rank more highly when considered in an explicitly election context than when asked more generally.²

Part II: What Do People Mean When They Cite “Threats to Democracy” as One of the Most Important Problems Facing the Country?

Overall, Democrats (40%) are more likely than Republicans (31%) to consider “threats to democracy” one of the top three most important issues facing the country, but even among Republicans the issue rates tied for fourth.

An NBC News poll shortly before the 2022 congressional elections asked registered voters what they thought were the most important and second most important issues facing the country. “Threats to democracy” rated third on the list. An open-ended question in that same poll probed what this group of registered voters meant by threats to democracy.³

Overall, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to consider “threats to democracy” one of the top three most important issues facing the country...

The new SSRS poll uses those open-ended responses to create a list of possible threats and asks those who cite threats to democracy as one of the three most important issues facing the country how serious they believe each item on the list is as threat.

¹ R.J. Blendon and J.M. Benson, “The Implications of the 2022 Election Outcome for Health Policy,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2023; 388:470-475. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMSr2214949.

² For instance, in a July 2023 Reuters/Ipsos poll, the public ranked abortion ninth most important among 12 problems facing the country (<https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/reuters-ipsos-core-political-survey-presidential-approval-tracker-july-2023>). But in two June 2023 polls by *USA Today*/Suffolk University (https://www.suffolk.edu/-/media/suffolk/documents/academics/research-at-suffolk/suprc/polls/national/2023/6_18_2023_embargoed_marginals_part_3.pdf) and Quinnipiac University (<https://poll.qu.edu/poll-release?releaseid=3873>), registered voters ranked abortion tied for fifth (among 13 issues) and third (among eight issues), respectively, as the most important issue in their 2024 presidential vote choice.

³ NBC News Survey, September 9-13, 2022, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/22418198-220562-nbc-news-september-poll-v2>.

Table 3. What People Mean When They Cite “Threats to Democracy” as One of the Three Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today

Based on those who cite “threats to democracy” as one of the three most important issues facing the country today. Percent saying that each item is a “very serious” threat to democracy.

Money corrupting politics	86
Ignoring the Constitution	81
Extremists	76
Attempts to overturn elections	76
Voter suppression/limiting people’s ability to vote	73
Gerrymandering of election districts	67
Censorship	59
Interference in U.S. elections by other countries	59
Government control over people’s lives	59
Election fraud	56
Unsecured border	41
Prosecution of government officials and candidates for office	29

SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus Poll, “The Public’s Views on the Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today, Threats to Democracy, and Abortion,” July 7 – 11, 2023. Base: Those who cite “threats to democracy” as one of the three most important issues facing the country today (n=359).

The SSRS poll finds that the top five threats, based on the proportion who said they are “very serious” threats to democracy, are money corrupting politics (86%), ignoring the Constitution (81%), extremists (76%), attempts to overthrow elections (76%), and voter suppression/limiting people’s ability to vote (73%) (Table 3).

Among those who consider threats to democracy a major issue, Republicans and Democrats differ widely in their views of what constitutes the threat.

For Republicans, the top five perceived threats to democracy are money corrupting politics (90% very serious threat), ignoring the Constitution (90%), unsecured border (83%), government control over people’s lives (79%), and election fraud (78%) (Table 4).

For Democrats who see threats to democracy as one of the most important issues facing the country, the top five perceived threats are attempts to overthrow elections (92%), voter suppression (87%), extremists (85%), money corrupting politics (84%), and gerrymandering of election districts (82%).

Table 4. What Republicans and Democrats Mean When They Say “Threats to Democracy” Is One of the Three Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today

Top Five Threats According to Each Group Based on those who cite “threats to democracy” as one of the three most important issues facing the country today. Percent saying that each item is a “very serious” threat to democracy.

TOTAL			REPUBLICANS			DEMOCRATS		
Rank	Issue	%	Rank	Issue	%	Rank	Issue	%
1	Money corrupting politics	86	1t	Money corrupting politics	90	1	Attempts to overturn elections	92
2	Ignoring the Constitution	81	1t	Ignoring the Constitution	90	2	Voter suppression/ limiting people’s ability to vote	87
3t	Extremists	76	3	Unsecured border	83	3	Extremists	85
3t	Attempts to overturn elections	76	4	Government control over people’s lives	79	4	Money corrupting politics	84
5	Voter suppression/ limiting people’s ability to vote	73	5	Election fraud	78	5	Gerrymandering of election districts	82

SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus Poll, “The Public’s Views on the Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today, Threats to Democracy, and Abortion,” July 7 – 11, 2023. Base: Those who cite “threats to democracy” as one of the three most important issues facing the country today (n=359).

Part III: Public Attitudes About *Dobbs* a Year Later

On June 24, 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. In that ruling, which overturned the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, the Court found that the U.S. Constitution does not guarantee a right to abortion and that abortion laws can be set by each state. The new SSRS poll looks at the current status of public attitudes about *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* a year after the Supreme Court’s ruling.

In the SSRS poll, conducted July 7 – 11, 2023, 60% of adults nationwide say they disapprove of the *Dobbs* decision, while 40% say they approve (Table 5). This response is nearly identical to that found in a Pew Research Center poll conducted the week after the 2022 ruling, when 57% of the public said they disapproved and 41% expressed approval.⁴

Table 5. The Public’s Views About the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* Decision, by Party Identification, Religiosity, and Religious Groups

	STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT APPROVE	STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT DISAPPROVE
Total	40	60
By Party Identification		
Republican	67	33
Democrat	14	86
By Importance of Religion/Spiritually in Your Life		
The most important thing/Very important	52	48
Somewhat important	39	61
Not too/Not at all important	22	78
By Religious Groups		
No religion/atheist/agnostic	24	76
Catholic (total)	42	58
<i>White Catholic</i>	41	59
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	45	55
Black Protestant/other Christian	34	66
Evangelical Protestant/other Christian	58	42
<i>White Evangelical Protestant/ other Christian</i>	72	28
Consider abortion one of the three most important issues facing the country	25	75

SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus Poll, “The Public’s Views on the Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today, Threats to Democracy, and Abortion,” July 7 – 11, 2023. Base: National adults.

⁴ Pew Research Center, “Majority of Public Disapproves of Supreme Court’s Decision To Overturn *Roe v. Wade*,” July 6, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/07/06/majority-of-public-disapproves-of-supreme-courts-decision-to-overturn-roe-v-wade/>.

Views about *Dobbs* vary widely by party identification, religiosity, and religious groups. While two-thirds of Republicans (67%) approve of the *Dobbs* decision, 86% of Democrats disapprove.

Religiosity, measured by asking people how important religion or spirituality is in their own life, is also an important dividing factor. Fifty-two percent (52%) of those who say religion or spirituality is the most important thing or very important in their lives approve of *Dobbs*, while more than three-fourths (78%) of those who describe religion or spirituality as not too or not at all important disapprove.

Approval of the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision is highest (72%) among white Protestants and other Christians who describe themselves as born-again or evangelical. In contrast, three-fourths (75%) of atheists, agnostics, and those who say they have no religion disapprove of *Dobbs*.

Of note, three-fourths (75%) of those who cite abortion as one of the three most important issues facing the country disapprove of *Dobbs*.

Part IV: Public Perceptions of Their Own Financial Situation

Asked to rate their own financial situation today, the public is about equally divided: 48% rate their financial situation as excellent or good, 52% as only fair or poor. This is virtually unchanged since Gallup asked the same question in the Spring of 2023. At that time, 45% said their financial situation was excellent or good, 55% that it was only fair or poor.⁵

Interestingly, the SSRS poll finds that the top issue facing the country is seen as inflation/cost of living by both those who describe their financial situation as excellent/good (59% of whom cite the issue as one of the three most important facing the country) and those who assess their own finances as only fair/poor (66%).

⁵ L. Saad, "Americans Remain Discouraged About Personal Finances," May 18, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/506012/americans-remain-discouraged-personal-finances.aspx>.

Methodology

This survey was conducted by SSRS on its Opinion Panel Omnibus platform. The SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus is a national, twice-per-month, probability-based survey. Data collection was conducted from July 7 – 11, 2023, among a sample of 1,031 adults. The survey was conducted via web (n=1001) and telephone (n=30) and administered in English (n=1006) and Spanish (n=25). The margin of error for total respondents is +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus data are weighted to represent the target population of U.S. adults ages 18 or older.

The SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus is conducted on the SSRS Opinion Panel. SSRS Opinion Panel members are recruited randomly based on a nationally representative ABS (Address Based Sample) design (including Hawaii and Alaska). ABS respondents are randomly sampled by Marketing Systems Group (MSG) through the U.S. Postal Service's Computerized Delivery Sequence File (CDS), a regularly updated listing of all known addresses in the U.S. For the SSRS Opinion Panel, known business addresses are excluded from the sample frame.

The SSRS Opinion Panel is a multi-mode panel. Internet households participate via web, while all non-internet households (including those who have internet but are unwilling to take surveys online) participate via phone.

All sample drawn for this study were SSRS Opinion Panelists who are U.S. adults ages 18 or older. Sample was selected to ensure representation by age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, Census region, party identification, and preferred survey language. Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects.



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