

Summary and key findings

The May 2022 Mood of the Nation Poll, like the December 2021 poll, seeks to gain insight on Americans' approval and disapproval of President Joe Biden's job performance.¹ New to this iteration: open-ended questions asking those who disapprove or only approve somewhat, what the President could do to improve their assessment of his performance.

Overall, this poll finds that 42% of American adults approve of the job that Joe Biden is doing as president, while 58% disapprove.

- A majority of several groups of Americans disapprove of President Biden's job performance. Most notable are the groups where a large majority "strongly disapprove" including:
 - Political independents (56%),
 - Non-Hispanic White Americans (57%),
 - Those in the Silent Generation (60%), and
 - Republicans (87%).
- Groups with a majority approving of President Biden's job performance include:
 - Those with a bachelor's degree or more education (52%),
 - Those with annual family incomes of \$100,000 or more (53%),
 - Hispanic or Latino Americans (55%),
 - Non-Hispanic Black Americans (66%), and
 - Democrats (81%).

Those who strongly approve of President Biden's job performance were asked to name what the president is doing especially well. More than half emphasized his personal efforts and characteristics. Over one-third noted the policies and other actions that Biden has taken as president.

All respondents except those who strongly approve of President Biden's job performance were asked to comment on what he could do to improve their rating.

- Over one-quarter recommended that he improve or change policies, specifically noting drilling for oil, strengthening the border, and improving health care among other issues.
- The second most common recommendation had to do with improving the economy, with many specifically encouraging Biden to address inflation.
- The third most common recommendation overall, which was the most common response given by those who strongly disapprove of the president's job performance, is for Biden to leave office.

¹ For complete results of the December 2021 Mood of the Nation results regarding President Biden's job performance, including open-ended questions asking respondents for the reasoning behind their assessments, see <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/motn/what-americans-think-of-biden-dec-2021>.

Introduction

Penn State’s nonpartisan McCourtney Institute for Democracy regularly conducts the nationally representative Mood of the Nation Poll to gauge how Americans are feeling about various aspects of American politics and society.²

The May 2022 poll included a standard presidential approval question, and an open-ended follow-up to help us better understand the public’s assessment of President Joe Biden’s job performance:

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Joe Biden is doing as president?
 - Strongly approve
 - Approve somewhat
 - Disapprove somewhat
 - Strongly disapprove

- 2a. (If approve somewhat or disapprove) Realistically, what would President Biden have to do in order to increase your approval of his performance as President?

[Open-ended question: Verbatim answers recorded]

- 2b. (If strongly approve) What is President Biden doing especially well that makes you approve strongly?

[Open-ended question: Verbatim answers recorded]

To see whether Americans’ opinions on these topics vary according to demographic, social and economic characteristics, we analyzed the results of each question by gender (women, men), generation (Silent or Boomer; X; Millennial; Z), race and ethnicity (four groups are available in this survey: White, non-Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; Hispanic; Other), educational attainment and political affiliation (self-identified Republican, Independent, Democrat, as derived from self-placement or on a seven-category scale ranging from “Strong Democrat” to “Strong Republican”).

The number of respondents in each group are detailed in the methodology report that accompanies this brief.

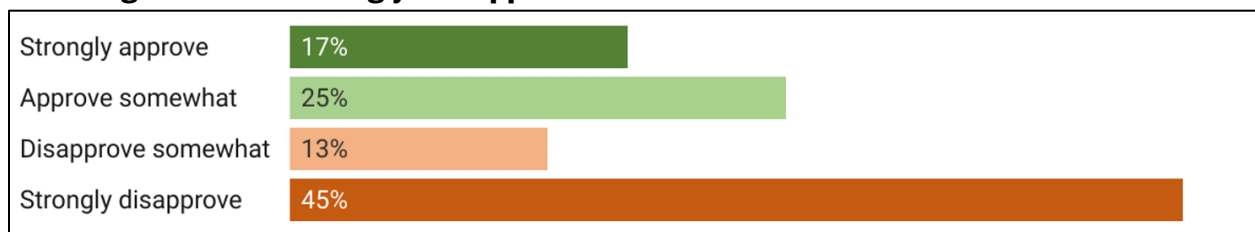
² For additional information about the Mood of the Nation Poll see the appendix to this brief. For additional details about this survey’s methodology, please see <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/surveys>

President Biden's job approval ratings

Overall, this poll finds that 42% of American adults approve of the job that Joe Biden is doing as president, while 58% disapprove. Seventeen percent strongly approve of President Biden's job performance while 45% strongly disapprove.

Despite the several major national and international events that have happened in the past five months—including a major spike and then decline in U.S. COVID-19 cases, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the confirmation of Ketanji Brown Jackson as a Supreme Court Justice, steeply rising inflation, steadily improving employment numbers, a leaked Supreme Court opinion that would overturn *Roe vs. Wade*, and a racially motivated mass shooting in Buffalo toward the end of the survey period—this survey's result is statistically tied with the Mood of the Nation Poll finding in December 2021 (44% approved and 57% disapproved, with 43% strongly disapproving).³

Nearly three in five Americans disapprove of the job that Joe Biden is doing as president, including 45% who "strongly" disapprove



Question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the job Joe Biden is doing as president?"

Source: APM Research Lab analysis of McCourtney Institute's Mood of the Nation Poll, May 11-19, 2022. *N* = 1,000 U.S. adults age 18 or older; the maximum overall margin of error is ± 3.6 percentage points, and is larger for subgroups.

The presidential approval rating in this most recent Mood of the Nation Poll is very similar to those reflected in other recent national polls. For example, FiveThirtyEight's aggregation shows that on the midpoint of this survey, May 15, 53% disapprove of President Biden, while 41% approve.⁴

For further context, FiveThirtyEight's aggregated approval rating for Donald Trump at the same time in his presidency was a virtually identical 42%. Biden's approval rating is similar to those of one-term presidents Carter and Ford at this stage of their presidency. Biden trails all other prior two-term presidents dating back to Harry Truman on day 481 of their terms, with the exception of Ronald Reagan, whose approval rating stood at 43%.⁵

³ For complete results of the December 2021 Mood of the Nation results regarding President Biden's job performance see <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/motn/what-americans-think-of-biden-dec-2021>.

⁴ See <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/biden-approval-rating/> (accessed 6/1/2022).

⁵ Ibid.

As shown in the graph on the following page, a majority of several groups of Americans disapprove of President Biden’s job performance. Most notable are the groups where a majority “strongly disapprove” including:

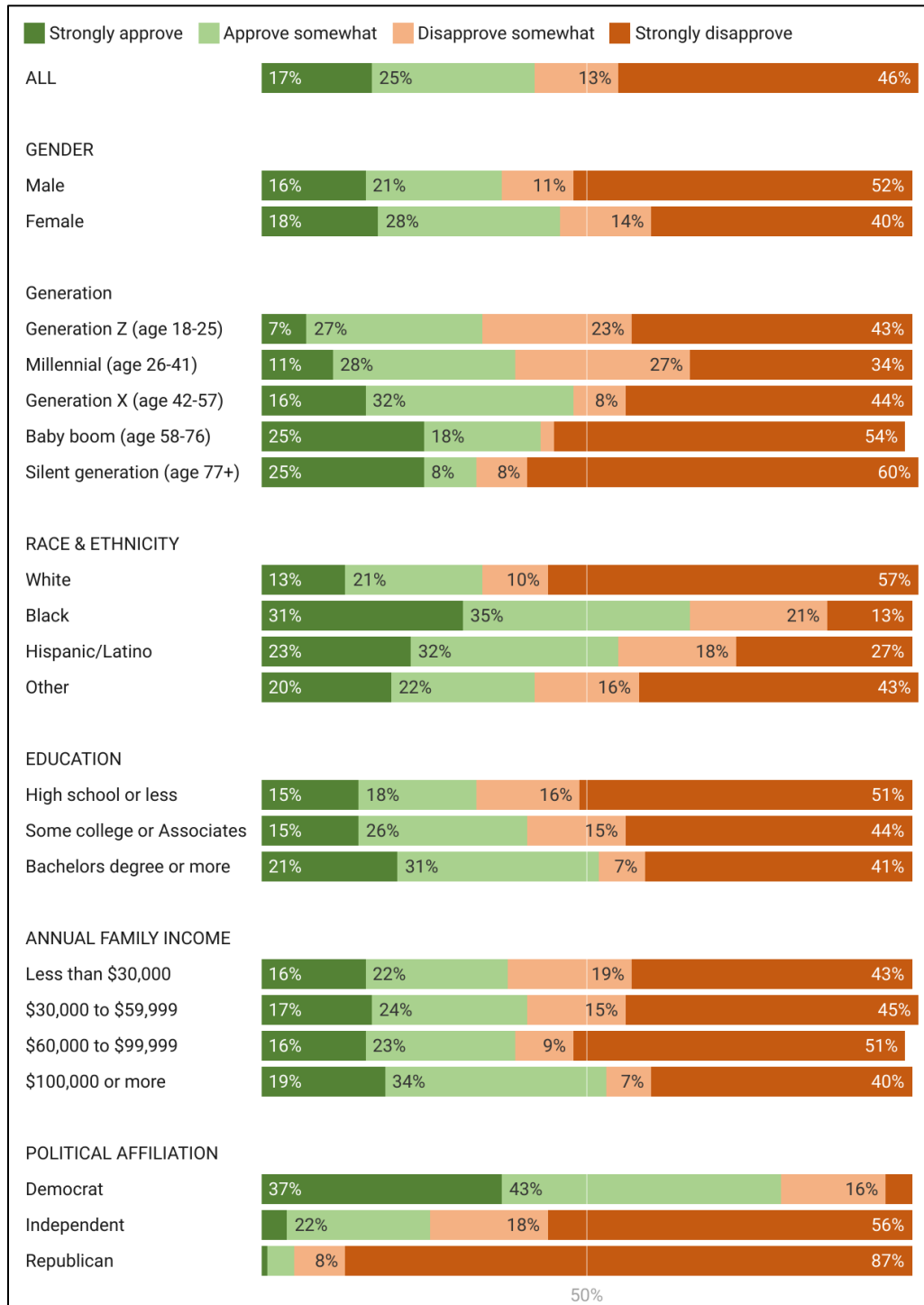
- Those whose highest level of educational attainment is high school diploma or less (51%),
- Those with annual family incomes ranging from \$60,000 to \$99,999 (51%)
- Men (52%),
- Baby boomers (54%),
- Political independents (56%),
- Non-Hispanic White Americans (57%),
- Those in the Silent Generation (60%), and
- Republicans (87%).

Note that while Millennials have the lowest “strongly disapprove” rate (34%) among the generations, over one-quarter “disapprove somewhat,” leaving an overall approval rating of only 39% for President Biden from that group.

Groups with a majority approving of President Biden’s job performance include:

- Those with a bachelor’s degree or more education (52%),
- Those with annual family incomes of \$100,000 or more (53%),
- Hispanic or Latino Americans (55%),
- Non-Hispanic Black Americans (66%), and
- Democrats (81%).

Notable majorities of older generations, non-Hispanic Whites, political independents, and especially Republicans strongly disapprove of President Biden’s job performance



Question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the job Joe Biden is doing as president?"

Source: APM Research Lab analysis of McCourtney Institute’s Mood of the Nation Poll, May 11-19, 2022.

N = 1,000 U.S. adults age 18 or older; the maximum overall margin of error is ±3.6 percentage points, and is larger for subgroups.

In their own words: Reasons for assessments of President Biden’s job performance

To better understand why some Americans strongly approve of the job Joe Biden is doing as president, as well as why others are less enthusiastic about the president’s performance, survey respondents were asked one of two open-ended questions:

For those who indicated that they strongly approve: “What is President Biden doing especially well that makes you approve strongly?”

For all others: “Realistically, what would President Biden have to do in order to increase your approval of his performance as President?”

Respondents entered their own narrative responses, which we then analyzed for themes. Several examples of verbatim responses are provided at the end of this report, in addition to those noted in the analysis below.

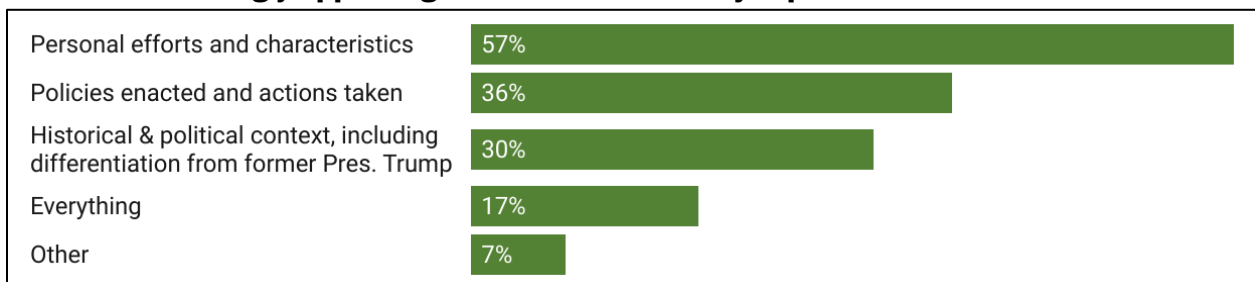
Explanations given for strongly approving

A majority of those who strongly approve of President Biden pointed to his efforts and character, with frequent use of phrases like “he is trying” and “he cares,” as well as words such as “good,” “honest” and “experience.” For example:

“His empathy with people who are struggling; his respect for the common man; his sincerity and depth of character and his genuine care about us.” – 78-year-old White woman from New Mexico, Democrat.

“He’s empathetic.” – 56-year-old Black woman from New York, Democrat.

Reasons for strongly approving of President Biden’s job performance



Question: (Asked of the 170 respondents who indicated strong approval for the president’s job performance) “What is President Biden doing especially well that makes you approve strongly?” Graph shows main themes coded from open-ended comments. Note: Respondent’s answers can be coded in more than one of the categories.

Source: APM Research Lab analysis of McCourtney Institute’s Mood of the Nation Poll, May 11-19, 2022.

Over one-third of those who strongly approve of Biden’s job performance mention specific actions or policies that he has taken as president. The war in Ukraine was the most commonly mentioned item in this category, followed by the pandemic and the economy, including job creation. Examples include:

“Handling the Russian invasion in Ukraine.” – 44-year-old Black woman from Pennsylvania, Democrat.

“Stopping the spread of COVID-19” – 30-year-old Hispanic man from Texas, Democrat.

Thirty percent of those strongly approving of the President’s job performance mentioned the historical context that Biden is confronting, most typically noting that “he is not Trump.” A specific example of this sort of comment:

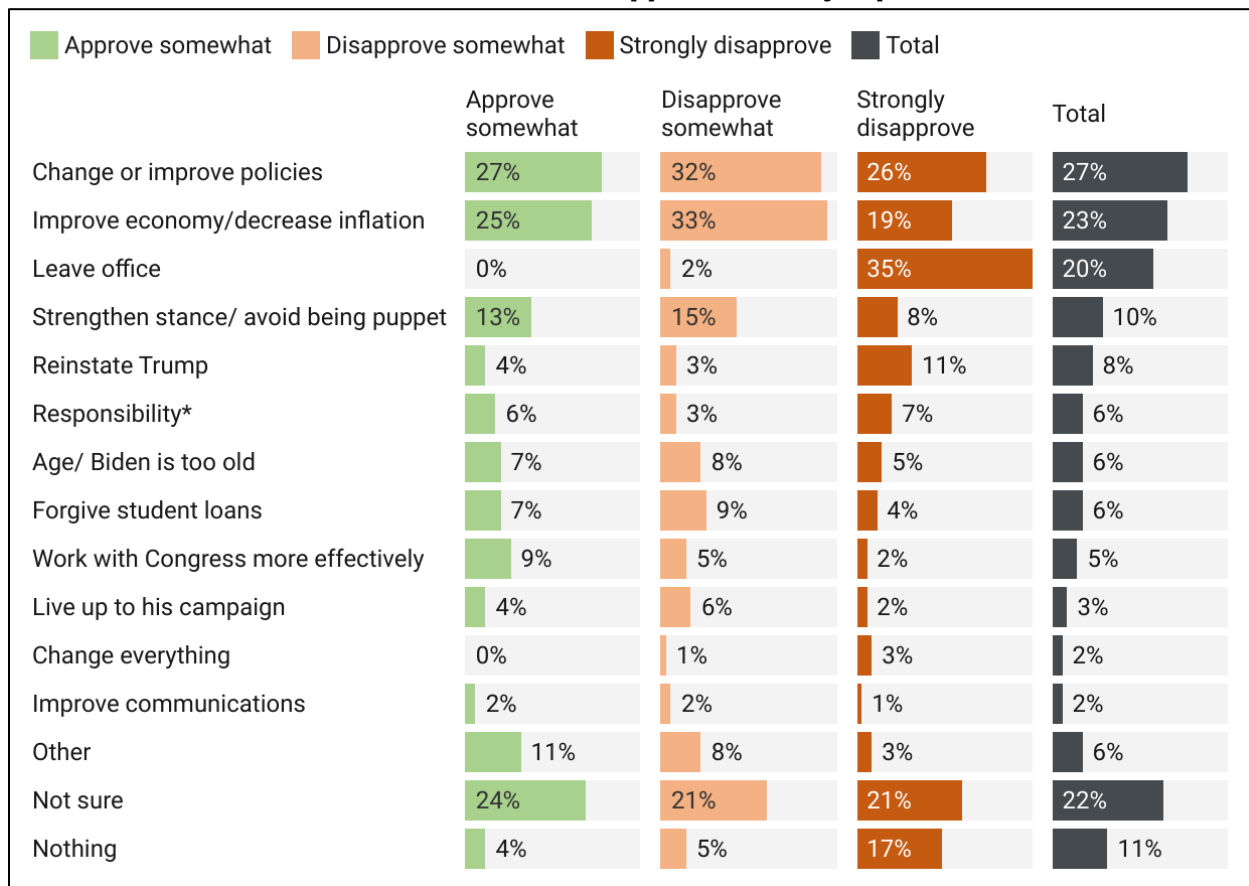
“He is doing what he can to fix the crap that landed in his lap from the former president.” – 65-year-old White woman from Minnesota, Democrat.

One in six of those who strongly approve of Biden’s performance as president indicated that they like everything about what he is doing. Several people responded with words like, “everything” and “all.”

Recommendations for improvement

Many respondents signaled that Biden’s presidency could be improved by rating his job performance anywhere from *approve somewhat* to *strongly disapprove*. When asked what Biden could do to improve their assessment reasons varied; twelve different substantive themes emerged from respondents’ open-ended recommendations.

What President Biden could do to increase approval of his job performance



*Includes holding Trump accountable as well as don't blame Trump.

Question: (Asked of all 830 respondents who did not strongly approve of President Biden's job performance) "Realistically, what would President Biden have to do in order to increase your approval of his performance as President?" Graph shows main themes coded from open-ended comments. Note: Respondent's answers can be coded in more than one of the categories.

Source: APM Research Lab analysis of McCourtney Institute’s Mood of the Nation Poll, May 11-19, 2022. N = 1,000 U.S. adults age 18 or older; the maximum overall margin of error is ±3.6 percentage points, and is larger for subgroups.

Overall, the most common response was that President Biden’s job performance would improve if he embraced different policies. Respondents recommended a variety of policy changes, but the most common had to do with drilling for oil, strengthening the border, improving health care, protecting the rights of Americans and decreasing taxes. Some examples include:

“Subsidize more housing, get more racists off the streets, get the border problem taken care of along with the children and their parents, somehow get the inflation go down.” – 67-year-old White woman from Oregon, Democrat who approves somewhat of President Biden.

“Expand the Supreme Court and protect a woman's right to choose.” – 39-year-old Black woman from New York, Democrat who disapproves somewhat of President Biden.

“Reinstate all of President Trump's policies regarding national security and sovereignty, open up our fossil fuel energy, secure the southern border, stop the illegal alien invasion, send jets to Ukraine and stop the attack on our military” – 76-year-old White female from Delaware, Republican who strongly disapproves of President Biden.

The second most common recommendation for President Biden is to improve the economy, with inflation or high prices being top of mind for most economic concerns.

“Figure out how to curb the rise in prices. Punish the oil companies for gouging.” – 61-year-old White woman from Florida, Democrat who approves somewhat of President Biden.

“The economy would have to be a lot better, and taxes would have to decrease.” – 21-year-old White male from Massachusetts, Independent who disapproves somewhat of President Biden.

“Change his opinion on abortion. Open the pipeline back up. Get the nation back in order. Change the inflation. Help with gas prices.” – 48-year-old woman, other race, from Virginia, Republican who strongly disapproves of President Biden.

The third most common recommendation was for President Biden to leave office. Note that this did not register as a recommendation among those who approve somewhat of President Biden’s job performance, and barely registered among those who disapprove somewhat. It was, however, explicitly mentioned by over one-third of those who strongly disapprove of the President’s job performance, some of whom wished harm on Biden, and others who (erroneously) indicated that they think Biden stole the election. Examples of the “leave office”-themed comments include:

“Resign and admit he stole the 2020 election.” – 51-year-old White man from Indiana, Republican who strongly disapproves of President Biden.

“Get rid of Harris. Choose Rand Paul as his new Vice President, and then resign.” – 36-year-old man, other race, from Idaho. Republican who strongly disapproves of President Biden.

Beyond the three top themes, other opinions included strengthening his stance. Most of those answers came from respondents who somewhat approve of the President encouraged him to be more assertive and especially more progressive. On the other hand, many of those who disapprove want Biden to be stronger, believing that he is a puppet for others, out of touch or that he needs to “be a man.”

Other, less frequent themes to emerge included explicitly mentioning that former President Trump should be reinstated, that Biden should take more responsibility (including some who recommended holding former President Trump accountable for crimes), opinions relating to Biden’s age, recommendations to forgive student debt, pleas for Biden to work better with Congress, blanket statements that Biden should change everything and some recommendations related to improving the way the President communicates.

About one-third of all respondents opted out of making specific recommendations by either stating that they were not sure what the President could do to improve his job performance, or by indicating there is nothing he could do.

Appendix

Examples of reasons for strongly approving of President Biden’s job performance

Comment	Age	Race/ ethnicity	Gender	State	Political affiliation
He is more concerned with the American people than the opposition.	67	White	Male	VA	Democrat
He tells the truth. He doesn’t tell lies every single day like Trump and scream it’s a hoax it’s a hoax	53	Hispanic	Male	AZ	Democrat
He’s handling the Russia Ukraine thing.	57	Black	Female	PA	Democrat
I’m not politically savvy but under the circumstances, he’s doing the best he knows how to do.	55	Black	Female	PA	Democrat
He is calm, rational and not likely to incite a coup. He is boring but after the last one, I will take it.	66	White	Female	CA	Democrat
His sensibility and smarts.	53	Asian	Male	CA	Democrat
Being a democrat.	25	Asian	Female	MA	Democrat
The President goes to bat for all Americans every day, regardless of the lying, sneaky right wing attempts to sabotage his Presidency so far, through disinformation. He has true guts, and courage that is not found in most people.	66	White	Male	CA	Democrat
Trying to address the needs of middle and lower class Americans.	36	White	Male	WI	Democrat
He is doing the best he can in a situation where it’s not easy to decide what to do when there is so much going on at once.	36	Hispanic	Male	CA	Not sure
His actions taken to combat and prevent COVID deaths, is exactly what a good president should have done.	58	Black	Male	MD	Democrat
He is working hard for us and is a good person unlike the moron before him.	65	White	Female	CA	Democrat
Joe Biden can ease the soul of the people, he can bring us all back together. He is fixing things.	65	White	Female	MA	Democrat
He is fixing all that Trump mess up.	40	Black	Male	IL	Democrat

Question: (Asked of the 170 respondents who indicated strong approval for the president's job performance) "What is President Biden doing especially well that makes you approve strongly?"

Note: Examples chosen at random.

Source: McCourtney Institute’s Mood of the Nation Poll, May 11-19, 2022.

What President Biden could do to increase approval: Examples from those who *approve somewhat*

Comment	Age	Race/ ethnicity	Gender	State	Political affiliation
More executive orders and stop working Republicans.	60	White	Female	NY	Democrat
The inflation, the border of the United States.	37	Hispanic	Female	FL	Ind.
Don't let Trump back in office. Find a way to put Trump behind bars, where his criminal self belongs. Other than that, I don't know what else he could do. He doesn't have as much power as most people think. He's ruled by his money donors, as all government	50	White	Male	WA	Ind.
Not sure. There are so many things working against him.	70	White	Female	Iowa	Ind.
Nothing. I think he is doing his best, but he can't really do much with Ukraine or personally stop inflation so there's nothing he could really do right now.	27	White	Male	UT	Ind.
Become a better leader.	31	Black	Female	SC	Democrat
Do something about inflation.	33	White	Female	FL	Ind.
I don't think there is anything he can do. I just feel he is old and not very clear thinking. I appreciate that he is a good man, in my opinion, but a bit weak appearing.	69	White	Female	CA	Republican
Gas prices and inflation.	49	White	Female	NY	Ind.
I approve of his job I think he can do more and challenge Congress and Senate. I want him to be more aggressive with the voting rights	52	Black	Female	NY	Democrat
Be a stronger leader.	56	White	Female	OR	Ind.
Actually listen to the people that elected him.	20	Asian	Female	MI	Ind.
Forgive student loans, champion for women's rights, etc.	26	White	Male	TX	Ind.
Power, food and gas prices.	36	Black	Female	MS	Ind.

Question: (Asked of the 830 respondents who did not indicate strong approval for the president's job performance) "Realistically, what would President Biden have to do in order to increase your approval of his performance as President?"

Note: Examples chosen at random.

Source: McCourtney Institute's Mood of the Nation Poll, May 11-19, 2022.

**What President Biden could do to increase approval:
Examples from those who *disapprove somewhat***

Comment	Age	Race/ ethnicity	Gender	State	Political affiliation
More assertive.	38	White	Male	MA	Democrat
To protect the rights of women, minorities, and the LGBT community, to reduce police funding and fund people's access to healthcare and housing so we can actually reduce crime.	22	Hispanic	Female	VA	Other
To gain the trust of the people and stop the high prices.	23	White	Male	NY	Republican
Improve the economy and deal with inflation.	37	Black	Male	TX	Democrat
The housing crisis needs to be improved. Student loans need to be forgiven. He is doing nothing useful, nor is he harming anything.	29	Other	Female	VT	Ind.
Tell the masses the truth, but I know that he does not know.	55	Other	Female	PA	Democrat
Fight against inflation, against rising prices of foods gas and housing, which put more pressure to our lives.	34	Hispanic	Male	CA	Democrat
Healthcare reform, legalize weed, eliminate money in politics, and term limits.	32	Native American	Male	OK	Democrat
He should have given more stimulus money to the American people.	47	Black	Female	OH	Democrat
Give women equal rights and keep autonomy over ourselves. Lower oil and gas prices. There's a lot he would have to do.	36	White	Female	FL	Ind.
listen to American people who pay for his salary!	75	White	Female	SD	Ind.
Help the American people.	54	Hispanic	Female	TX	Democrat
Remove student dent and provide free healthcare to all citizens.	25	Two+ races	Male	IN	Other
Improve people's standard of living, fight inflation, and focus more on domestic issues rather than foreign countries' issues.	27	Other	Male	MA	Ind.

Question: (Asked of the 830 respondents who did not indicate strong approval for the president's job performance) "Realistically, what would President Biden have to do in order to increase your approval of his performance as President?"

Note: Examples chosen at random.

Source: McCourtney Institute's Mood of the Nation Poll, May 11-19, 2022.

What President Biden could do to increase approval: Examples from those who *strongly disapprove*

Comment	Age	Race/ ethnicity	Gender	State	Political affiliation
Replace Kamala with somebody competent and then resign.	28	White	Male	PA	Republican
Biden is an idiot and you know it, he should resign. There is nothing he can do, the USA is in the dumps until the 2024 election.	77	Other	Male	VA	Ind.
Actually follow through with the things he said he would do, like cancel student loan debt.	24	White	Female	OR	Other
Resign.	70	White	Male	TN	Ind.
Quit.	75	White	Male	WI	Other
He is too old to run this country.	71	White	Female	PA	Republican
Resign.	69	White	Male	SC	Republican
Resign.	57	White	Female	WA	Republican
Fix the economy without raising prices.	54	White	Female	TN	Ind.
Relieve himself of his duty.	25	Other	Female	IN	Other
Be a better president.	35	Hispanic	Female	CA	Republican
Stop printing money, stop handing out freebies, stop the border crisis, stop abortion, stop excessive spending by government.	39	Native American	Female	AK	Republican
Revert to Trump's policies that were working. Stop the war against oil and natural gas and take us back to energy independence. Finish the wall. Stop the social activism.	54	White	Female	KY	Ind.
Be more powerful.	42	Black	Female	CA	Democrat
Present himself as well informed and decide that he is the person everyone looks to and stop blaming everyone else for his problems.	63	White	Male	TN	Republican
Step down as President.	73	White	Female	PA	Ind.
Cancel student loan debt. Legalize weed. Let Putin have Ukraine and leave NATO.	37	White	Male	OR	Ind.

Question: (Asked of the 830 respondents who did not indicate strong approval for the president's job performance) "Realistically, what would President Biden have to do in order to increase your approval of his performance as President?"

Note: Examples chosen at random (with the exception of excluding examples that recommended death).

Source: McCourtney Institute's Mood of the Nation Poll, May 11-19, 2022.

About the APM Research Lab

The APM Research Lab is a department within the American Public Media Group that informs the public about challenges and opportunities facing families, communities and organizations throughout the nation. Our mission is to foster an engaged democracy by inspiring curiosity, inquiry and discussion through fact-driven, credible research and analysis. Our Values: Independent, Useful, Informative, Non-partisan. Our tagline is *bringing facts into focus*.

The Lab is a member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's Transparency Initiative and abides by its standards. See <https://www.aapor.org/Standards-Ethics/Transparency-Initiative/>.

Contact: info@apmresearchlab.org | apmresearchlab.org

About the McCourtney Institute for Democracy

The McCourtney Institute for Democracy at Penn State promotes scholarship and practical innovations that defend and advance democracy in the United States and abroad. Through teaching, research and public outreach, the Institute leverages the resources of Penn State and partners around the world to foster a model of deliberation, policymaking and responsiveness that is passionate, informed and civil.

The Mood of the Nation Poll offers a unique approach to public opinion polling. It allows Americans to speak in their own words through open-ended questions that focus on emotions like anger and hope, as well as commitment to constitutional principles.

Contact: democracyinst@psu.edu | democracy.psu.edu

About the survey

Data collection for this Mood of the Nation Poll was conducted online by YouGov (<https://today.yougov.com/>). The YouGov panel includes over 1.8 million individuals who agree to complete occasional surveys. The 1,000 individuals who completed the May 2022 Mood of the Nation Poll were matched to the joint distribution from the Census's American Community Survey in terms of age, sex, race and ethnicity, and years of education. The frame was augmented by matching to the November 2010 Current Population Survey and the Pew Religious Life Survey in order to include voter registration, political interest and party identification in the selection model.

For additional details about the sample and survey methodology, as well as transparency disclosures relevant to the American Association of Public Opinion, the Roper Center and CNN, please see:

<https://www.apmresearchlab.org/surveys>.

Acknowledgments

This report was authored by Craig Helmstetter and Benjamin Clary of the APM Research Lab. The survey questions were designed by the McCourtney Institute, particularly Mood of the Nation Poll Director, Eric Plutzer.

Media contacts

APM Research Lab: Craig Helmstetter (chelmstetter@apmresearchlab.org; 651-290-1219)

McCourtney Institute for Democracy: Jenna Spinelle (jenna@psu.edu; 570-617-5667)