

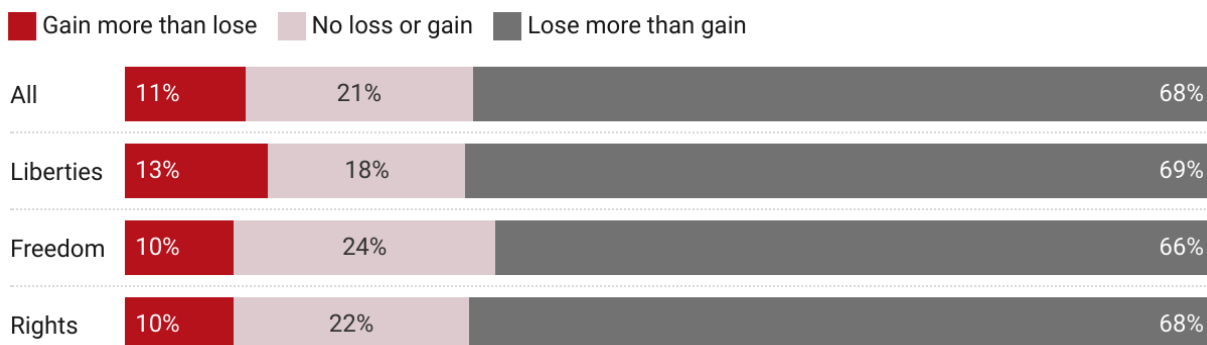
In their own words:

What Americans think about liberty

June 30, 2022

The majority of Americans believe they will lose liberties, freedom and rights over the next decade

"Looking ahead 10 years from now, which comes closest to your view of how the individual [liberties] [freedom] [rights] of Americans will have changed?"



**One-third of respondents were asked about liberties, 1/3 were asked about freedom and 1/3 were asked about rights.*

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 overall margin of error is ±3.6 percentage points, and is larger for subgroups.

Summary and key findings

The May 2022 Mood of the Nation Poll sought to explore Americans' view of liberty, freedom and rights.

When asked how individual liberties, freedom and rights will change in the next 10 years, 68% of Americans believe they will lose more than they will gain.

- Roughly one in 10 Americans believe they will gain more liberties, freedom and rights in the next decade. About one-fifth said there will be no loss or gain.
- About half of Generation Z believes they will lose more than they will gain, compared to about three-fourths of Generation X and Baby Boomers.
- Seventy-five percent of White Americans believe they will lose more than they will gain in contrast to 47% of Black Americans and 55% of Hispanic/Latino Americans.
- Only 7% of Republicans indicated they will gain more than they will lose, while over three-fourths believe they will lose more than gain.

When asked how individual liberties, freedom and rights have changed, 56% of Americans said they have fewer than they did 10 years ago.

- Just over one-quarter of Americans said they have the same individual liberties, freedom and rights as 10 years ago, while 17% said they have more.
- Forty-two percent of Generation Z indicated they have fewer rights than 10 years ago, as opposed to 63% of Baby Boomers and 65% of the Silent Generation.
- Sixty-four percent of White Americans believe they have fewer rights, compared to 46% of Black Americans and 37% of Hispanic/Latino Americans.
- Three-fourths of Republicans said they have fewer rights, while only 38% of Democrats agreed.

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.¹ The May 2022 Mood of the Nation Poll included several questions aimed at better understanding how individual liberties, freedom and rights have changed and will change. One-third of respondents were asked questions 1-3, one-third were asked 4-6, and one-third were asked 7-9:

1. Looking ahead ten years from now, which comes closest to your view of how the individual liberties of Americans will have changed?
 - a. On balance, Americans will probably lose more liberties than we will gain.
 - b. On balance Americans will probably gain more liberties than we will lose.
 - c. There won't really have been any net loss or gain in the amount of liberty compared with what we have today.

2. Looking back over the last ten years, which comes closest to your view of how the individual liberties of Americans have changed?
 - a. On balance, Americans have more liberties than we did ten years ago.
 - b. On balance, Americans have fewer liberties than we did ten years ago.
 - c. On balance, Americans have about the same liberties as we did ten years ago.

3. In answering the last two questions, what kinds of liberties did you have in mind?
[Open-ended question: Verbatim answers recorded]

4. Looking ahead 10 years from now, which comes closest to your view of how the individual freedom of Americans have will have changed?
 - a. On balance, Americans will probably lose more freedom than we will gain.
 - b. On balance, Americans will probably gain more freedom than we will lose.
 - c. There won't really have been any net loss or gain in the amount of freedom compared with what we have today.

¹ 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>

5. Looking back over the last ten years, which comes closest to your view of how the individual freedom of Americans have changed?
 - a. On balance, Americans have more freedom than we did ten years ago.
 - b. On balance, Americans have less freedom than we did ten years ago.
 - c. On balance, Americans have about the same freedom as we did ten years ago.

6. In answering the last two questions, what kinds of freedoms did you have in mind?

[Open-ended question: Verbatim answers recorded]

7. Looking ahead 10 years from now, which comes closest to your view of how the individual rights of Americans have will have changed?
 - a. On balance, Americans will probably lose more rights than we will gain.
 - b. On balance, Americans will probably gain more rights than we will lose.
 - c. There won't really have been any net loss or gain in the amount of rights compared with what we have today.

8. Looking back over the last ten years, which comes closest to your view of how the individual rights of Americans have changed?

- a. On balance, Americans have more rights than we did ten years ago.
- b. On balance, Americans have fewer rights than we did ten years ago.
- c. On balance, Americans have about the same rights as we did ten years ago.

9. In answering the last two questions, what kinds of individual rights did you have in mind?

[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 on a seven-category scale ranging from "Strong Democrat" to "Strong Republican").

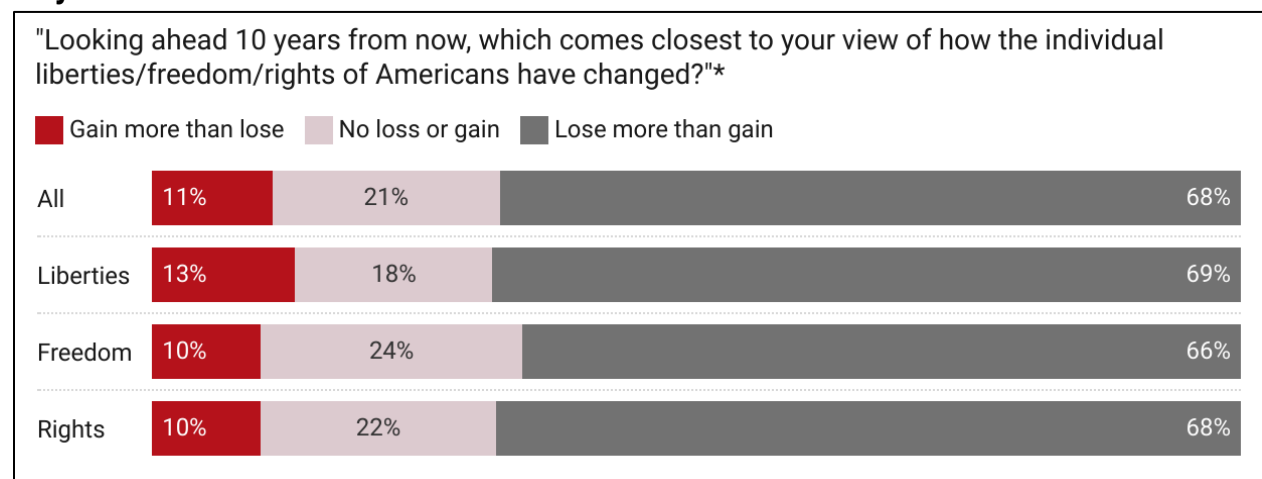
The number of respondents in each group are detailed in the methodology report that accompanies this brief.

How liberties, freedom and rights will change

When we asked Americans about the future of their individual right to self-determination two-thirds believe they will lose more than they have right now over the next 10 years. This is true regardless of whether that personal sovereignty is framed as “liberties,” “freedom” or “rights.”

About 1 in 10 people said they will gain more liberties, freedom or rights than lose over the next 10 years, while 1 in 5 said there will be no change.

Americans believe they will lose more liberties, freedom and rights than gain in the next 10 years



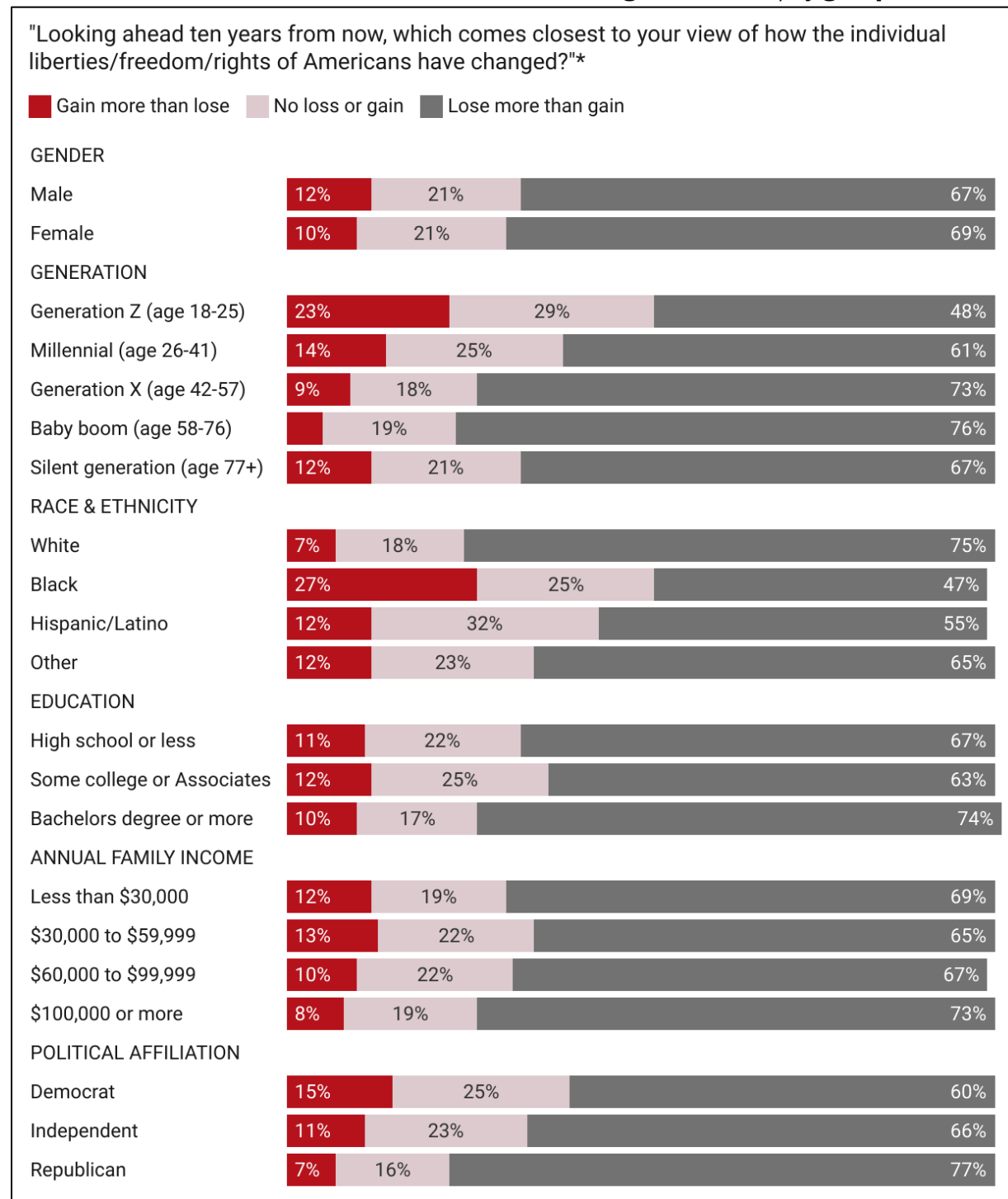
*One-third of respondents were asked about liberties, 1/3 were asked about freedom and 1/3 were asked about rights.

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 overall margin of error is ±3.6 percentage points, and is larger for subgroups.

Across most groups, at least 60% indicate that there will be a net loss of liberties, freedom and rights over the next decade. The only exceptions are Generation Z, Black Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans. On the other hand, three-quarters or more of Baby Boomers (76%), White Americans (75%) and Republicans (77%) indicate that Americans are likely to lose more individual self-determination than they will gain.

The two groups standing with the largest proportions believing that rights will, on net, expand over the next decade: Black Americans at 27% and Generation Z at 23%. No other groups in our analysis exceeded 15%.

Beliefs in how individual self-determination will change in the U.S., by group



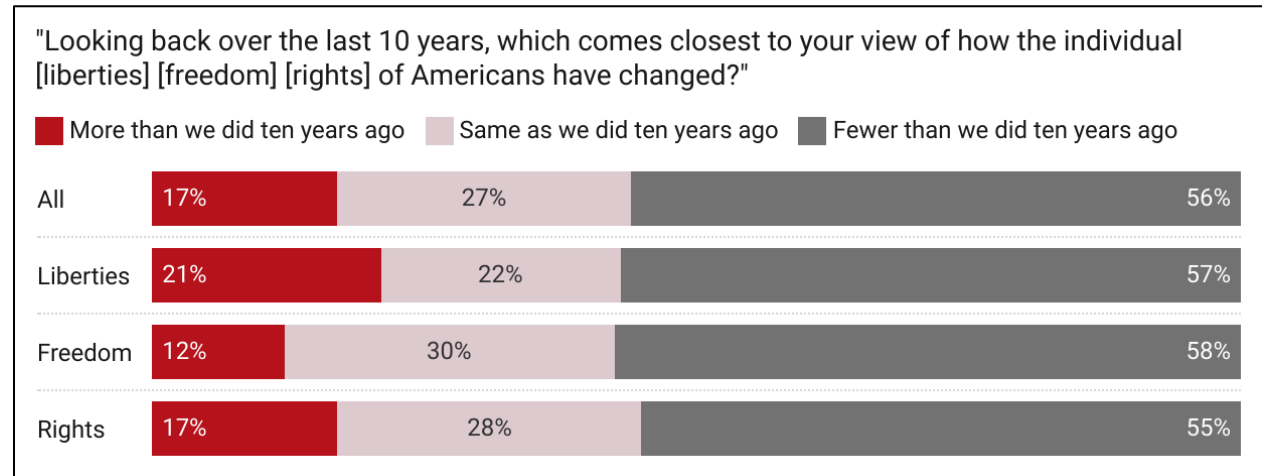
*One-third of respondents were asked about liberties, 1/3 were asked about freedom and 1/3 were asked about rights.

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How liberties, freedom and rights have changed

Over half of Americans believe that the nation has lost ground on individual self-determination over the past decade. Answer patterns are very similar whether individual self-determination is framed as “liberties,” “freedom” or “rights.” The only difference in the pattern of answers that approaches a statistically significant difference is that 21% of those asked about “liberties” indicate that there has been a net gain, compared to only 12% of those asked about “freedom.”

Americans believe they have fewer liberties, freedom and rights now than they did 10 years ago



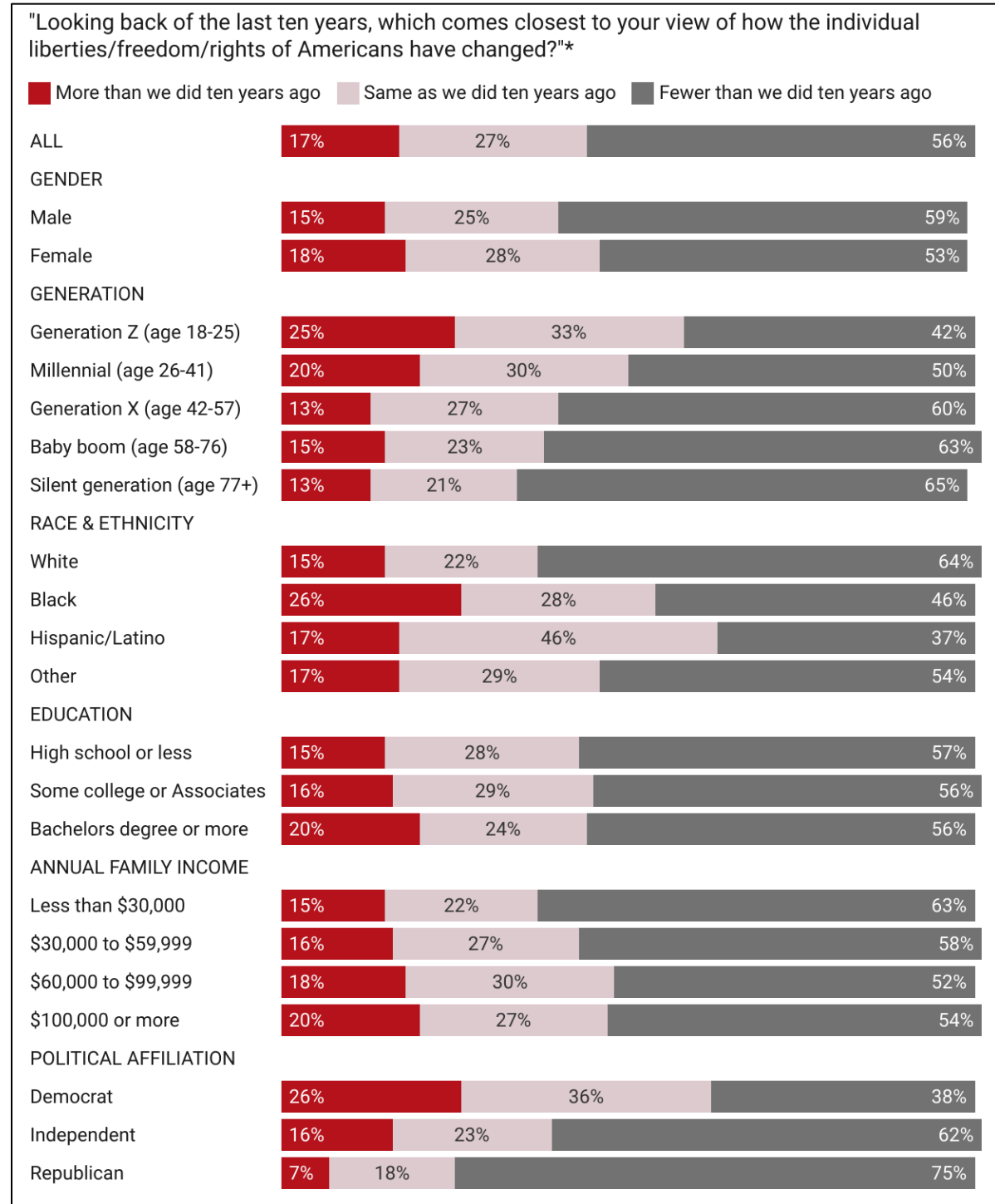
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Across most groups, at least half believe that they have fewer rights than they did 10 years before. However, there are four groups that fall below that threshold: Generation Z (42%), Black Americans (46%), Hispanic/Latino Americans (37%) and Democrats (38%). The groups with the highest percentage believing that individuals have lost rights to self-determination are the Silent Generation (65%), White Americans (64%) and Republicans (75%).

The groups with the highest proportion perceiving gains in individual sovereignty are Black Americans (26%), Democrats (26%) and members of Generation Z (25%). Twenty percent or fewer of all other groups, including only 7% of Republicans, believe that America has recently gained ground on individual rights and freedoms.

Perceptions of how individual sovereignty has changed over the past decade, by group



*One-third of respondents were asked about liberties, 1/3 were asked about freedom and 1/3 were asked about rights.

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 overall margin of error is ±3.6 percentage points, and is larger for subgroups.

In their own words: What individual liberties, freedom and rights will change in the future and which ones changed in the past

To better understand what liberties, freedom and rights they thought about when answering how they have changed in the past and will in the future, the May Mood of the Nation survey included the following open-ended questions:

“In answering the last two questions, what kinds of [liberties] [freedom] [rights] did you have in mind?”

As with the closed-ended questions, one-third of the respondents were asked about either liberties, freedom or rights. Regardless of which term was asked, common themes emerged from the unstructured responses.

The most common theme to emerge from respondents’ verbatim had to do with “speech.” Nearly one-third of respondents mentioned something related to freedom of speech, using one’s voice openly, censorship or to say an opinion without consequence.

For example:

“Limiting of free speech. The ability to think differently than the crowd on social media. The coming of group think. Only one way is acceptable.” – 75-year-old White male from Ohio, Republican.

“Freedom of speech, expression. Society generally more accepting.” – 28-year-old Asian female from California, Democrat.

“Freedom of speech has been reduced by social media platforms.” – 69-year-old White male from Kansas, Republican.

About one-fifth of respondents mentioned abortion or reproductive rights. These answers contained ideas related to a women’s right to choose, women’s health and bodily autonomy.

For example:

“A woman should be able to decide if she wants an abortion not some political parties dictate what she can do.” – 63-year-old Hispanic male from Texas, Independent.

“A woman’s right to health care choices are being stolen right now, this will stretch out to fertility issues, with IVF and frozen embryos, not just abortion.” – 65-year-old White female from Massachusetts, Democrat.

The third most common responses were focused equally on Civil Rights and property, the economy or jobs. The Civil Rights responses were very direct, naming rights for people of color, racism and police. The economy-related responses focused on owning property, living wherever one wants, minimum wage and job security.

“Women's rights, gay marriage rights, Trans rights, voting rights.” – 33-year-old Hispanic female from Wisconsin, Democrat.

“Civil rights in the face of the racist police state.” – 70-year-old multi-racial male from California, Democrat.

“The right to freedom of expression and access to an adequate number of jobs Without discrimination.” – 23-year-old White male from New York, Republican.

“Expression of opinion and the right to a job opportunity.” – 37-year-old White female from Florida, Democrat.

One in 10 respondents mentioned something about guns, citing the right to bear arms or the Second Amendment. Several mentioned increasing government control of guns or Democrats taking away guns.

For several additional examples of the verbatim responses please see the appendix to this report.

Appendix: Verbatim responses to open-ended questions

The table below provides several verbatim responses, chosen at random, to the questions regarding individual liberties, freedom and rights.

Examples of individual liberties, freedom and rights that have changed or will change

Comment	Age	Race/ethnicity	Gender	State	Political affiliation
Freedom of speech, assembly, religion, have all been curtailed by fear-mongering media and government overreach.	65	White	Female	TX	Republican
liberty to be vaccinated or not; have an abortion or not; voter rights; educators teaching over race, slavery, etc.	37	Black	Female	OK	Democrat
Free speech at schools and universities; free speech on social media; more restrictions on gun ownership; rights to determine what vaccines I receive without losing jobs, etc.; the government shutdowns of selected businesses, lockdowns & masking	74	White	Male	AZ	Republican
Our privacy, losing women's right to an abortion, the gender pay gap. Congress being so divisive they can only agree on their pay raises.	59	White	Female	AK	Ind.
Right to vote and abortion	53	Asian	Male	CA	Democrat
The right to privacy and bodily autonomy have been consistently eroded since 9/11/2001	40	Native American	Female	OR	Ind.
Freedom to vote, private property rights, freedom of speech (disinformation board and censorship agendas seem to run counter to this freedom)	28	Hispanic	Male	IL	Republican
The ability to have a home, healthy food, clean water, being able to go to the doctor for anything, the ability to just live without struggling constantly	28	White	Female	MI	Democrat
Freedom of speech, right to bear arms, freedom of religion, right to a fair election, right to a fair trial.	40	White	Male	MT	Republican
Liberties to come and go in cases of police brutality.	70	Black	Female	CA	Democrat

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 Emily Schmidt, 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 who also provided input on the reporting.

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