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FOCUS GROUP REPORT

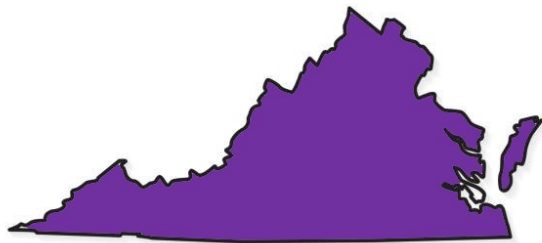
Update:
Thursday, November 18

Navigating The Economy
Amidst Political Divisions



Methodology

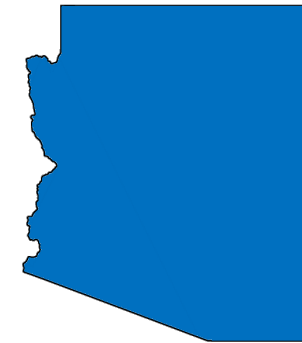
On November 9, 2021, GBAO conducted three focus groups online with respondents that varied across demographics—age, gender, and race/ethnicity.



Virginia mixed and soft partisans, not committed yet on the 2022 Congressional race, and less motivated to vote in 2022. Mix of gender and race/ethnicity.



Ohio Republicans, Trump voters, not committed yet on the 2022 Congressional race, and less motivated to vote in 2022. Mix of gender/ethnicity.



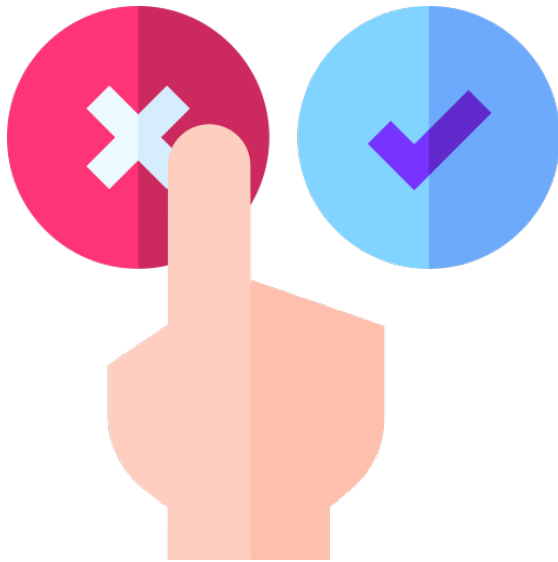
Arizona Democrats, Biden voters, not committed yet on the 2022 Congressional race, and less motivated to vote in 2022. Mix of gender and race/ethnicity.

Key Takeaways

- Pessimism pervades, even as many see jobs, wages, and COVID improving.
- Inflation and supply chain worries loom large.
- There is little awareness of Build Back Better, the infrastructure bill, and other Biden accomplishments.
- Critical Race Theory rarely comes up organically, nor is it just a Republican concern.
- Voters feel disappointed by both parties and see the divide as cultural rather than economic.

Pessimism Pervades, With Continued Worries About Our Divisions

"I think that the national discourse is to the point where even the building blocks of conversation we're disagreeing about, and it seems like, where can we even start to have a conversation if we're not agreeing on what's true, or we're not agreeing on what's fact, or we're not agreeing on what's right and wrong? And it just seems like, **where do we even go?**" – VA woman, Biden voter



[What is going well?] "That is a crazy question. I **can't think of anything.**" – VA woman, Biden voter

[What is going well?] "**Not a lot.**" – OH man, Trump voter
"I would agree. **Not a lot.**" – OH woman, Trump voter

Across Issues And Parties, Many See News And Social Media As Untrustworthy Filters

“It feels like there's a little tiny bit more togetherness than there was six months ago... **obviously, you're only seeing what you're watching like [on] Facebook, and Instagram, and different types of social media.** I feel like the people that I'm following are also able to speak out.” – AZ woman, Biden voter

“When I watch the news, there seems to be two types of Republicans. There's ones that follow their values, their Republican values, and there's those that are just extremists and conspiracy theorists. **And I feel those that are conspiracy theorists are louder for whatever reason, and we're hearing them mostly,** and those that are like true Republicans, they're trying to bring their party together. Because I'm almost positive their party is divided, and they're trying to do their best to bring themselves together, but those people that are really loud are telling them that they're wrong.” – AZ man, Biden voter

“**I feel like there's just more memes of the presidents than there is actual facts of them.** I mean, there was rap songs made about ‘F Donald Trump,’ and then there's memes that [are] all over Instagram of Joe Biden hanging out with the homies, and people dressing them up and just making a mockery, really, of the presidents. And no one's really talking about what they're doing. ” – OH woman, Trump voter

“I don't feel like it's [inflation] getting worse. I think that, because we have so much access to the news, besides just reading the newspaper, looking at the news, it's everywhere. It's on social media. It's on TV. And I feel like it seems like it's worse. But really what's happening isn't anything that hasn't happened in history before. **So, I don't think it's really worse. I just think now it's just more in our face.**” – VA woman, Trump voter



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When Pressed, Many Are Positive About COVID, Wages, And Jobs

"I feel like the economy is bouncing back slowly." – VA man, Biden voter

"Well, I really, really have to think about that [what's going well]. I was having a hard time. I'm glad everybody else said the wages and stuff like that. That made me more positive. And truthfully, I am glad that we are going to do the infrastructure on all these bridges and stuff. I'm glad that finally did get passed so the country doesn't physically fall apart. I do like that." – VA woman, Trump voter

"Well, just one of the things I think that I guess could be going well is, well, there are places that are opening, and people are interacting more than obviously what we have been for the last year and a half, almost two years. So I think that's a positive." – OH woman, Trump voter

"Economic progression... particularly with the stock market always reaching new all-time highs even after the large downturn from last year with COVID." – AZ man, Biden voter



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Worries About Inflation And The Supply Chain Loom Large

"I feel like everything is increasing, except my direct deposit. It's like, if it's not the electricity, then it's the gas. And it's like, every time you're trying to balance out, you're never breaking even because you're always robbing Peter to pay Paul. And then after awhile, Paul's not going to keep on getting robbed. He's just going to disappear... And I'm noticing it's increasing more and more." – VA woman, Trump voter

"When you go into Walmart and other stores and the shelves are empty, as when we had COVID hit, it's just amazing. Empty shelves and the truck didn't come again, and again, and again. It's just empty." – VA woman, Trump voter

"I'm ordering Christmas presents earlier." – VA woman, Biden voter

"Christmas—I'm not even. It's going to be hard to get gifts. I already told everybody, I'm just giving gift cards, and you can get whatever you need for yourself. I'm not going shopping and waiting, crossing my fingers to see if Amazon can deliver it on time." – VA woman, Biden voter

"I was looking for a car. The prices of used cars have went through the roof because of looking for new cars, there just aren't any available because of the chip shortage... I ended up paying an extra \$5,000 over what the asking [price] was." – OH man, Trump voter

"I invested in a Costco gift card to buy in bulk now, just to always be prepared. It was kind of a wake up call for me. I'm not a hoarder or anything, but I just buy, instead of just the little small rolls of toilet paper, now I buy in bulk, and Pop-Tarts, just random things." – OH woman, Trump voter

"I wanted to call my mom and say, for Thanksgiving meals, some of these items might actually be in short supply, walnuts or whatever, or cashews. And so, you might want to buy them a few weeks ahead of time." – OH man, Trump voter

"I know my brother, he also has a baby, and we talked about diapers, how diapers are going up and everything's getting more expensive partly because of probably inflation. Then also they're having some shipping issues on the west coast." – AZ man, Biden voter

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Many Cite “Corporate Greed” As An Explanation For Inflation



“And it's like the businesses, these corporations, **all they want to do is profit, and they don't care about us.** They don't care about paying us what we're worth. They don't care about jacking up the rent, jacking up the energy... it's corporation greed. It's just greed. And yeah, COVID happened. Things changed, the economy changed, but I just think it's just [that] they're greedy. **They're greedy, and they don't want to stop making mega bucks off of us.**” – VA woman, Biden voter

“A hundred years ago, when you had the Rockefellers and all these super mega rich people, they at least recognized, ‘Oh wow. The world's going to shit. Maybe I should donate some money back and give some of this back to people who need it.’ **And I don't feel like that's the way mega companies feel anymore. I feel like now, it's, ‘We made some money,’ and they're just going to keep making it.**” – OH woman, Trump voter

“I feel bad for mom-and-pop stores, or the local restaurants, local stores, because **they're really in a bad way. They can't really increase too much because the big guys will shut them down.** But at the same time, the bigger stores can afford to cushion their prices more to make up for what, really, they realized was less of a loss than the small stores. So, I do think that they're doing that. Maybe they're cushioning themselves in case it happens again. **But I feel like they're definitely pushing it back onto the consumer.**” – OH woman, Trump voter

Although Others Point To A Mix Of Inflation Drivers

“I could see **some impact from those stimulus payments**, particularly on an individual level. If somebody got a little bit of a financial cushion, then they might have felt the flexibility to not return to their crappy job that they hated or to stay home with their children or to not pick up the seasonal job that they would've normally had. And so, I see it on a small level, how there could have been an impact, [but] I don't think it's the full explanation.” – VA woman, Biden voter

“It was interesting to me that the majority of people and some, maybe me too, thought that money was going to come and woohoo, it's a gift from the government. But I mean, the reality is it's not, **and I don't know how they can ever make that up unless they take it back from us, which is basically what I think they're doing.**” – OH woman, Trump voter

“Obviously you could say supply and demand. **If we're all demanding things that we want or that we think we need and the supply's not there, then you're going to raise the cost of it** to meet it to where less demand is asked of it because you don't have it, so you're going to spend more for it. I don't know. I feel like, like they said with taxes, it's not necessarily taxes per se, but people, she said, living off the stimulus, not wanting to work, businesses can't get product, **they're trying to recoup money that they had to pay out for new employees with higher wages.**” – OH man, Trump voter

“Well, I know that we've been printing a lot more money recently and that giving a lot of benefits, like a lot of **the stimulus has been causing issues when you don't raise taxes and then you just print more money that they give as a stimulus...** I think that will cause inflation, that would reduce the value of each dollar.” – AZ man, Biden voter



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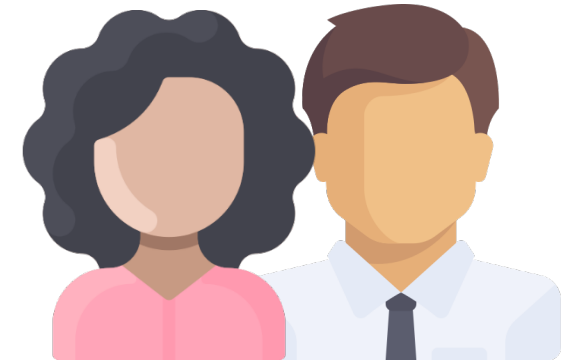
There Is Little Awareness Of BBB, BIF, Or Other Accomplishments Beyond Vaccines

"Build Back Better?" – VA woman, Trump voter
"Hint? Can we have a hint?" – VA woman, Trump voter
"I have no clue." – VA woman, Biden voter

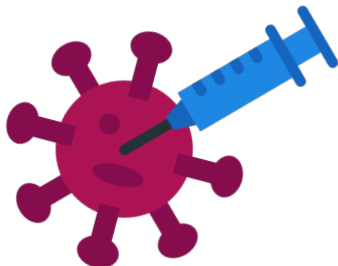
"I just kept seeing it in political cartoons in newspapers, and magazines, and whatnot. **But no, I didn't know what it [was]... I assume it was whatever Joe Biden was trying to pass, whatever the bill was, or the plan, or the policy.**" – OH man, Trump voter

"I've heard the term, but I'm not **100% sure how they're different, Build Back Better and infrastructure.**" – AZ man, Biden voter

"I had heard about the universal pre-K, but I'm not familiar with the other things that you mentioned." – AZ man, Biden voter



[What do you see out of elected officials in Washington?] "Mainly the vaccinations." – VA woman, Trump voter



"I know that there is recently that mandate for the vaccine that's trying to be rolled out for any government contractors and government contract employees, which is a lot of the engineering work in Arizona. I know that has been a big thing going on in Washington." – AZ woman, Biden voter

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After Briefly Discussing Both BBB And BIF, Trump Voters Show Some Openness On The Specifics



“Yes, there's a whole bunch of stuff that I would love in it.” – VA woman, Trump voter

“There's some things that may be in that bill that are great, but now might not be the time to do it when everyone's hurting. So it's always the mantra to tax the rich, tax the rich, whatever. And, fine. But I don't know.” – OH woman, Trump voter

“I'm for the things that you just mentioned. I didn't know all that there.” – OH man, Trump voter

Across Parties, Many Lament Protracted Negotiations Or That Seemingly Little Can Be Done

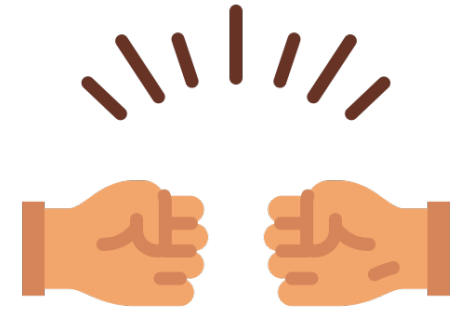
"It's so broad that it's hard to emphasize just one aspect of it. And then, you constantly have the progressive democratic people and then the conservatives or moderates fighting constantly." – VA man, Biden voter

"But putting in that much, it's not going to go anywhere." – VA woman, Trump voter

"I feel like if it's only passed in the House and it's going to the Senate, it's going to just become gridlocked, which means nothing's going to happen from it... they want to add in things that don't pertain to what they're having arguments about." – OH man, Trump voter

"Going back to the group of people I know, or it even sounds like most of the people on here, everybody seems to be more central. And the only thing that ever gets done is the extreme on one side or the other, and so nothing ever gets done. **Very, very few people I speak to are the crazy left or the crazy right. Everybody wants the same thing. Everybody wants to get along, work, have a good family, have a good life, but that breaks down somehow in DC.**" – OH woman, Trump voter

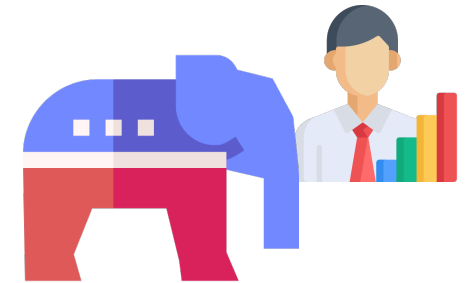
"'I won't give you this, unless you give me that.' Well, many politicians in the Senate and the House are attorneys, which that's a great profession, but when you're an attorney, you're basically taught how to argue, not how to resolve things. **So you've got all these people, even in the same party, that are just bickering back and forth.** I'm just going to do me. Let them argue because it doesn't seem like things get accomplished." – OH woman, Trump voter



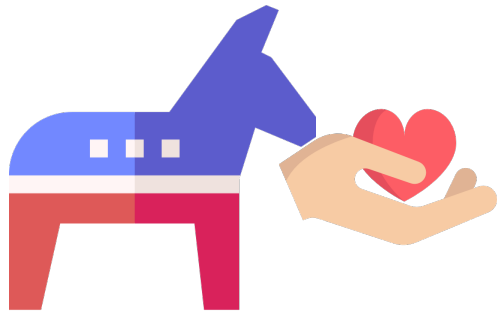
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When Discussing The Parties, Participants See Differentiation Around Cultural Lines: "Inclusive" Vs. "Rigid"

"They're just like what you would think is like American business face with a little hint of racist in there... It's tailored to a particular person or a particular group, not where like the Democrats' very fluffy, they try to fit as many groups as they can into this one thing, try to make it kumbaya, happy-go-lucky. Republicans, they'll tell you, 'This is who it's going to affect. This is the numbers. This is what we're trying to do.' I feel like they're more direct and straight to the point. But I personally feel with Trump, and the immigration issue, and his comments, sometimes show that Republicans tend to favor more white." – OH woman, Trump voter



"So [Republicans are] rigid [as a positive] from the fact that traditional business values, but negative from the fact that the culture changes. Thinking that you should be legislating about someone's personal life, their sexual orientation, those type of things, that is not something that needs to be government-regulated. And to have them trying to dictate every aspect of a person's identity, business, work, home, family. They need to step out of some of those. That's not the way things are done anymore. And they don't understand that some things, it's okay to change." – OH man, Trump voter



"Equality." – AZ man, Biden voter

"Care." – AZ woman, Biden voter

"I feel like this administration feels more transparent... I mean I **definitely feel included. I feel seen.**" – AZ woman, Biden voter

"People pleasers." – OH woman, Trump voter

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Respondents Use Cultural Descriptions To Explain Partisan Differences On The Economy

“Yeah, the Democrats want to **give, give, give**. They want to give people, let's give them that, give the last election, the governor running for governor said that he wants to make [things] equal, that if people have homes, that everyone should have a home. It's like, wait a minute. They just want to give, give, give, and it's coming from somewhere, and it's usually coming from us middle-class people that don't have all the extra money.” – VA woman, Trump voter

“I would say that the Republicans trust the free market to do its own thing, and **just let business owners pursue profit**, and allow consumers to make choices based off of how they want to spend their money, and just let things go on its own.” – VA woman, Biden voter

“Unregulated everything, like when we had **children working in mines, and slavery**, and all that.” – VA man, Biden voter

“It's like they're **trying to be equal**, so in my head, it's like they're trying to be equal but equal to each level of each person's wealth, I guess. They're trying to bring everybody up together.” – AZ man, Biden voter

[What is the Democratic Party's vision of the economy?] “I just feel like while there might be more jobs, there's definitely going to be **more clean energy jobs, which I agree with that**. I think that's a good thing. But I think that there's going to be higher taxes. I think there's going to be **things that are going to be required of us through those taxes**, or through stipulations, like a universal health care, or a universal basic income level, where they're going to take that, raise our taxes, and give everybody a small stipend every month.” – OH man, Trump voter

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There Is Little Organic CRT Discussion, And A Discussion Reveals A Variety Of Perspectives



"Well, I haven't heard about what it means. I mean I've heard the term." – VA woman, Biden voter

"I have children in public school, and I can't pinpoint one thing because there's so much. The curriculum, the police in schools, the kids are different. It's a lot. It's a lot, but **the schools, they don't teach my kids, my African American kids, in my opinion, they don't teach a full spectrum of American history.**" – VA woman, Biden voter

"So you can teach about history because you don't want to repeat it. I totally agree with that. But at the same time, you should not put a negative tone on it to make a certain person, a certain gender, a certain race, feel bad about themselves as they are now." – VA man, Biden voter

"It's great to tell our kids where we started, coming over even from England and coming over here and the colonies and this and that. But I feel like people just elaborate too much on the race issue when there's so many other factors that were not taught in school that are life learning lessons." – OH woman, Trump voter

"Maybe equality would be taught a little bit more, acceptance would be taught, respecting other people and other people's cultures and differences. And I definitely think the truth about history should be out there, but I don't know how I feel about forcing it on people." – AZ woman, Biden voter

"I mean, me personally, I'm a minority so I'm always going to say yes, you should always talk about it because I've dealt with it. So I've never been the majority. But just for me personally, I think that's something that should always be talked about. But I mean, if you don't feel comfortable or you feel uncomfortable about it, then leave the room. It's just how I felt, but I grew up differently, so I don't know." – AZ man, Biden voter

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While Many Prioritize Policies When They Vote, Others Admit Needing To Connect To Candidates Personally

"I would go with the policies, but it's just like with anyone, an employee or something, if there's something about it that rubs you the wrong way, or just seems sticky, doesn't matter what they're saying, their personality will take over and go, 'I don't believe them or whatever.'" – VA woman, Trump voter

"I would look for somebody willing to say, 'I'll listen to both sides and come up with the middle ground that makes sense.' That they're not going to be locked rigid like, 'I have to feel this way today and the next 80 years. Okay, I feel this today, but if facts change tomorrow, I'm willing to look at the new facts and work with the other side of the aisle.' It's not a hard and fast. I'm not the same person I was 10 years ago. Why should my politician be?" – OH woman, Trump voter

"I feel like a candidate's COVID response kind of reflects what kind of stances they would take on other similar topics in the future." – AZ man, Biden voter

"I would love to completely agree that policy is number one. But under the Trump administration, I felt a little bit differently because I felt like we were going to crash and burn just based on the bad values that are being preached. So that kind of changed me a little bit." – AZ woman, Biden voter

"I think it's the person who's running. I don't really care if it's Republican or Democrat, I care more about if it's an idiot or not." – AZ man, Biden voter

"I think how strongly people are feeling towards particular candidates encourages me to vote more because all the people around me are very involved in it. It kind of signals to myself that there's important things to be decided." – AZ man, Biden voter

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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Andrea Purse, progressive strategist; Arkadi Gerney, The Hub Project; Joel Payne, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Delvone Michael, Working Families; Felicia Wong, Roosevelt Institute; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

About the Study

GBAO conducted online focus groups on November 9, 2021, with voters in three states, all with voters less engaged in voting in 2022 and not yet committed to a Congressional candidate for the midterms: Virginia (mixed partisans), Ohio (Trump voters), and Arizona (Biden voters). Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

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