

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC'S PRIORITIES FOR THE \$1-TRILLION INFRASTRUCTURE AND \$3.5- TRILLION SPENDING BILLS

October 2021

POLITICO



HARVARD
T.H. CHAN
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC’S PRIORITIES FOR THE \$1-TRILLION INFRASTRUCTURE AND \$3.5-TRILLION SPENDING BILLS

This report, based on a new POLITICO-Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health poll, examines the American public’s priorities for the \$1-trillion infrastructure bill and the \$3.5-trillion spending bill currently being debated by the U.S. Congress.

PART I: THE PUBLIC’S PRIORITIES FOR THE \$1-TRILLION INFRASTRUCTURE AND \$3.5-TRILLION SPENDING BILLS

The U.S. Congress has been debating the enactment of a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill and a \$3.5 trillion federal government social spending plan for a number of expanded activities. The new POLITICO-Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health poll asked the public how closely they had been following this debate. Even though the congressional debate of these bills has received a great deal of media attention, only 48% of the public reports that they are following the debate closely (Table 1).

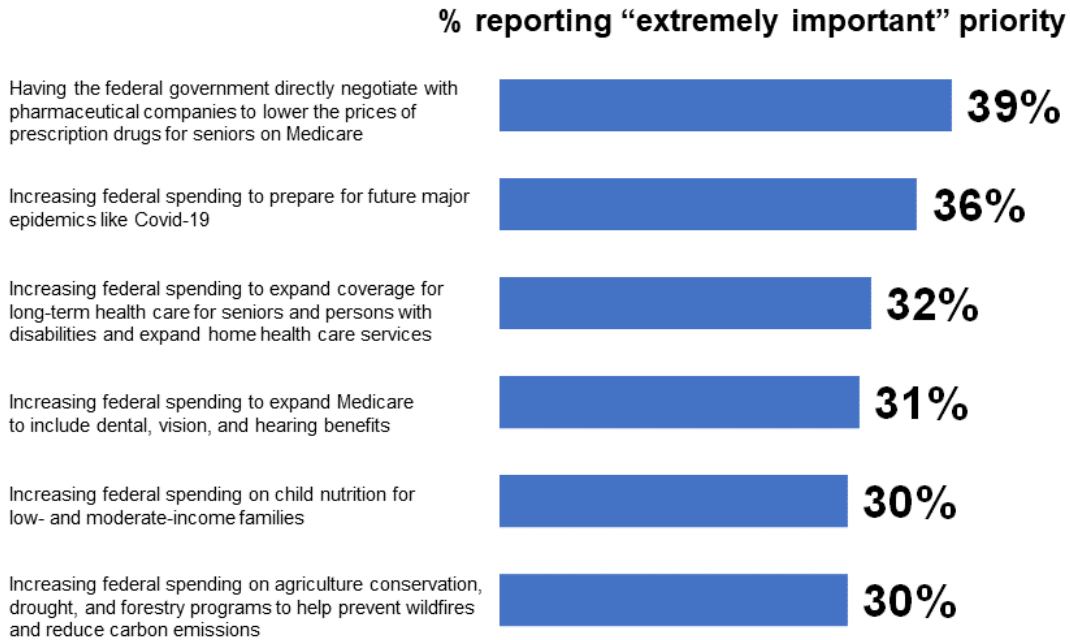
Of note, Republicans have been following news about the debate in Congress more closely than the general public or Democrats.

Table 1. How Closely the Public Has Been Following News About the Debate in Congress About the Enactment of a \$1 Trillion Infrastructure Bill and \$3.5 Trillion Federal Government Social Spending Plan, by Political Identification, in percent

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Very/Fairly closely (NET)	48	48	61	41
Very closely	16	14	26	12
Fairly closely	32	34	35	29
Not too/Not at all closely (NET)	51	52	38	57
Not too closely	27	34	22	26
Not at all closely	24	18	16	31
Don’t know/Refused	1	-	1	2

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, The American Public’s Priorities for the \$1-Trillion Infrastructure and \$3.5-Trillion Spending Bills. September 14 – 19, 2021. Base: U.S. adults.

Public's Top Priorities for the \$1-Trillion Infrastructure and \$3.5-Trillion Spending Bills



POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, “The American Public’s Priorities for the \$1-Trillion Infrastructure and \$3.5-Trillion Spending Bills.” September 14 – 19, 2021.

The poll asked the American public how important a priority each of 20 proposed items should be to include in these spending bills, mentioning that Congress may not be able to include them all. Because Congress has not yet determined how the larger of these two bills will be paid for, the question did not mention the cost of any of the items. When the cost is not mentioned, most of the proposed parts of the bill are popular, with six in ten or more saying they were important priorities. However, past polling has shown that support for policy proposals tends to drop once cost and increased taxes are mentioned.

For that reason, this analysis focuses only on the highest priorities, those that are thought of a “extremely important” priorities by the largest of the public. Of note, when the focus is on this highest level of perceived importance, none of the 20 proposals are seen by a majority of the public as “extremely important.” This includes federal spending on the nation’s infrastructure, the core of bipartisan legislation passed by the Senate.

As shown in the Figure, six proposals are deemed by the public as being “extremely important” by 30% or more of the U.S. public. These are the public’s six highest priorities for inclusion in the two spending bills.

Overall, the top priorities are: having the federal government directly negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to lower the prices of prescription drugs for seniors on Medicare (39% extremely important priority); increasing federal spending to prepare for future major epidemics like Covid-19 (36%); increasing federal spending to expand coverage for long-term health care for seniors and persons with disabilities and expand home health care services (32%); increasing federal spending to expand Medicare to include dental, vision, and hearing benefits (31%); increasing federal spending on child nutrition for low- and moderate-income families (30%); and increasing federal spending on agriculture conservation, drought, and forestry programs to help prevent wildfires and reduce carbon emissions (30%).

The “extremely important” results for all 20 priorities are shown in Table 2, for total U.S. adults and by party identification.

When it comes to the priorities of Democrats and Republicans, each party’s constituents name the same four proposals, which are the four proposals ranked highest by the public as a whole, only in a slightly different order. This finding is somewhat surprising, that in a politically polarized America, Democrats and Republicans name the same proposals as their highest priorities.

For both parties, and for the public as a whole, the top-ranked priority is having the federal government directly negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to lower the prices of prescription drugs for seniors on Medicare. This is one of the proposals that the public is likely to see as not involving an increase in federal spending.

Table 2. The Public’s Priorities for Inclusion in the \$1-Trillion and \$3.5-Trillion Social Spending Bill, % Saying Each Proposal Is an “Extremely Important” Priority, by Party Identification

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Six Top Priorities (30% or more extremely important)				
<i>Having the federal government directly negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to lower the prices of prescription drugs for seniors on Medicare^b</i>	39	45	38	37
<i>Increasing federal spending to prepare for future major epidemics like Covid-19^a</i>	36	41	35	33
<i>Increasing federal spending to expand coverage for long-term health care for seniors and persons with disabilities and expand home health care services^a</i>	32	38	36	26
<i>Increasing federal spending to expand Medicare to include dental, vision, and hearing benefits^b</i>	31	41	31	24
Increasing federal spending on child nutrition for low- and moderate-income families ^a	30	37	24	28
Increasing federal spending on agriculture conservation, drought, and forestry programs to help prevent wildfires and reduce carbon emissions ^a	30	36	29	27
Nine Medium Priorities (21%-29% extremely important)				
Providing federal funding to expand Medicaid to cover additional low-income people in states that did not expand Medicaid coverage ^a	26	36	26	19
<i>Increasing federal spending on roads, bridges, and airports^a</i>	23	24	28	18
Increasing federal spending to expand health insurance subsidies for people who previously did not qualify for financial assistance to buy insurance under the Affordable Care Act ^b	22	29	22	18
Increasing federal spending to lower the age of eligibility for Medicare from 65 to 60 ^b	22	29	24	16
Increasing federal spending on research to reduce the impact of climate change ^b	22	32	18	18
Having the federal government require employers to provide paid family and medical leave ^b	21	22	22	21
Increasing federal spending on subsidies to help homeowners make changes to their homes in order to reduce energy use and carbon emissions to fight climate change ^a	21	23	23	18
Increasing federal government spending to provide down-payment assistance, rental assistance, and other homeownership initiatives to help people who have traditionally had problems affording home purchases ^a	21	26	22	16
Increasing federal spending on subsidies for childcare for working families ^b	20	26	17	19
Five Lower Priorities (<20% extremely important)				
Providing federal funding to make community college tuition-free for two years ^b	19	30	14	17
Providing a legal path for certain immigrants who have not entered the U.S. legally to become permanent residents ^a	19	25	19	16
Providing federal funding to establish pre-kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds ^a	17	19	16	16
Increasing federal spending to subsidize high-speed internet for hard-to-reach rural communities and low-income people ^b	15	15	13	17
Increasing federal spending to encourage people to switch to electric-powered cars and trucks ^b	5	7	6	1

^a Asked of half-sample A; n=524

^b Asked of half-sample B; n=482

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, The American Public’s Priorities for the \$1-Trillion Infrastructure and \$3.5-Trillion Spending Bills. September 14 – 19, 2021. Base: U.S. adults.

METHODOLOGY

The results are based on polling conducted by *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Representatives of the two organizations worked closely to develop the survey questionnaires and analyze the results of the polls. *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health paid for the surveys and related expenses.

The project team was led by Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., Professor of Public Health and Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis Emeritus, at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Joanne Kenen, Executive Editor, Health Care at *Politico/Politico Pro*. The *Politico* research team also included Adriel Bettelheim and Dan Goldberg; the Harvard research team also included John M. Benson and Chelsea Whitton Pearsall.

Interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,006 randomly selected U.S. adults via telephone (including cell phones and landlines) by SSRS of Glen Mills, Pennsylvania. The interviewing period was September 14 – 19, 2021. The interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

When interpreting these findings, one should recognize that all surveys are subject to sampling error. The margin of error for the full sample is ± 4.1 percentage points. The margin of error for questions asked of half-samples is ± 5.7 percentage points.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases and for variations in probability of selection within and across households, sample data are weighted by household size, cell phone/landline use, party identification, and demographics (sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, and region) to reflect the true population. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

***Politico*/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Poll**

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC’S PRIORITIES FOR THE \$1-TRILLION INFRASTRUCTURE AND \$3.5-TRILLION SPENDING BILLS

This survey was conducted for *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health via telephone by SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone (cell phone and landline) **September 14 – 19, 2021**, among a nationally representative sample of **1,006 U.S. adults**. The margin of error for total respondents is ± 4.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. More information about SSRS can be obtained by visiting www.ssrs.com.

POLQ1. How closely have you been following news about the debate in the U.S. Congress about the enactment of a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill and \$3.5 trillion federal government social spending plan for a number of expanded activities?

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Very/Fairly closely (NET)	48	48	61	41
Very closely	16	14	26	12
Fairly closely	32	34	35	29
Not too/Not at all closely (NET)	51	52	38	57
Not too closely	27	34	22	26
Not at all closely	24	18	16	31
Don't know/Refused	1	-	1	2

POLQ2. The U.S. Congress is debating the enactment of a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill and a \$3.5 trillion federal government social spending plan for a number of expanded activities. There are many different policies and programs being considered by Congress for inclusion in these spending bills, but Congress may not be able to include all of them. For each of the following, please tell me how important a priority you think it should be to include it in these spending bills. How about... (READ ITEM)? Should that be an extremely important priority, a very important priority, not too important, or not a priority?

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

a. Increasing federal spending on agriculture conservation, drought, and forestry programs to help prevent wildfires and reduce carbon emissions

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	77	88	67	77
Extremely important priority	30	36	29	27
Very important priority	47	52	38	50
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	23	12	33	23
Not too important priority	14	9	20	12
Not a priority	9	3	13	11
Don't know/Refused	-	-	-	-

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

b. Increasing federal spending on child nutrition for low- and moderate-income families

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	80	90	75	77
Extremely important priority	30	37	24	28
Very important priority	50	53	51	49
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	19	10	25	21
Not too important priority	12	9	14	14
Not a priority	7	2	11	7
Don't know/Refused	1	-	*	2

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

c. Increasing federal spending on subsidies to help homeowners make changes to their homes in order to reduce energy use and carbon emissions to fight climate change

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	61	73	49	60
Extremely important priority	21	23	23	18
Very important priority	40	50	26	42
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	38	27	51	40
Not too important priority	22	24	24	21
Not a priority	16	3	27	19
Don't know/Refused	1	-	-	*

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

d. Increasing federal spending to expand coverage for long-term health care for seniors and persons with disabilities and expand home health care services

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	83	88	82	84
Extremely important priority	32	38	36	26
Very important priority	51	48	46	58
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	16	12	17	16
Not too important priority	10	11	8	8
Not a priority	6	1	9	8
Don't know/Refused	1	-	1	-

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

e. Providing federal funding to establish pre-kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	60	68	50	61
Extremely important priority	17	19	16	16
Very important priority	43	49	34	45
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	40	32	49	39
Not too important priority	23	23	24	22
Not a priority	17	9	25	17
Don't know/Refused	*	-	1	-

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

f. Increasing federal government spending to provide down-payment assistance, rental assistance, and other homeownership initiatives to help people who have traditionally had problems affording home purchases

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	60	74	53	53
Extremely important priority	21	26	22	16
Very important priority	39	48	31	37
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	40	25	46	47
Not too important priority	24	20	25	25
Not a priority	16	5	21	22
Don't know/Refused	*	1	1	*

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

g. Providing a legal path for certain immigrants who have not entered the U.S legally to become permanent residents

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	57	68	48	55
Extremely important priority	19	25	19	16
Very important priority	38	43	29	39
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	42	31	52	42
Not too important priority	23	21	24	21
Not a priority	19	10	28	21
Don't know/Refused	1	1	-	3

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

h. Increasing federal spending on roads, bridges, and airports

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	72	74	77	68
Extremely important priority	23	24	28	18
Very important priority	49	50	49	50
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	28	26	23	32
Not too important priority	19	17	17	22
Not a priority	9	9	6	10
Don't know/Refused	-	-	-	-

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

i. Increasing federal spending to prepare for future major epidemics like Covid-19

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	77	84	68	78
Extremely important priority	36	41	35	33
Very important priority	41	43	33	45
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	23	16	32	22
Not too important priority	15	14	17	14
Not a priority	8	2	15	8
Don't know/Refused	*	-	*	*

(Asked of half-sample A; n=524)

j. Providing federal funding to expand Medicaid to cover additional low-income people in states that did not expand Medicaid coverage

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	75	88	67	70
Extremely important priority	26	36	26	19
Very important priority	49	52	41	51
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	24	12	31	28
Not too important priority	15	8	15	19
Not a priority	9	3	16	9
Don't know/Refused	1	*	2	2

(Asked of half-sample B; n=482)

k. Providing federal funding to make community college tuition-free for two years

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	60	79	49	56
Extremely important priority	19	30	14	17
Very important priority	41	49	35	39
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	39	21	48	44
Not too important priority	19	14	21	19
Not a priority	20	7	27	25
Don't know/Refused	1	-	3	-

(Asked of half-sample B; n=482)

l. Increasing federal spending on research to reduce the impact of climate change

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	62	83	47	58
Extremely important priority	22	32	18	18
Very important priority	40	51	29	40
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	37	17	50	42
Not too important priority	17	11	17	19
Not a priority	20	6	33	23
Don't know/Refused	1	-	3	-

(Asked of half-sample B; n=482)

m. Increasing federal spending to subsidize high-speed internet for hard-to-reach rural communities and low-income people

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	62	77	49	58
Extremely important priority	15	15	13	17
Very important priority	47	62	36	41
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	38	22	51	42
Not too important priority	19	14	17	23
Not a priority	19	8	34	19
Don't know/Refused	*	1	-	-

(Asked of half-sample B; n=482)

n. Increasing federal spending to encourage people to switch to electric-powered cars and trucks

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	30	45	24	25
Extremely important priority	5	7	6	1
Very important priority	25	38	18	24
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	69	54	75	75
Not too important priority	24	26	19	24
Not a priority	45	28	56	51
Don't know/Refused	1	1	1	-

(Asked of half-sample B; n=482)

o. Having the federal government require employers to provide paid family and medical leave

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	70	81	61	66
Extremely important priority	21	22	22	21
Very important priority	49	59	39	45
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	29	17	39	34
Not too important priority	18	15	22	19
Not a priority	11	2	17	15
Don't know/Refused	1	2	-	*

(Asked of half-sample B; n=482)

p. Increasing federal spending to expand Medicare to include dental, vision, and hearing benefits

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	77	87	71	72
Extremely important priority	31	41	31	24
Very important priority	46	46	40	48
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	22	13	26	27
Not too important priority	14	11	11	19
Not a priority	8	2	15	8
Don't know/Refused	1	-	3	1

(Asked of half-sample B s; n=482)

q. Increasing federal spending on subsidies for childcare for working families

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	73	83	62	75
Extremely important priority	20	26	17	19
Very important priority	53	57	45	56
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	27	17	38	25
Not too important priority	19	15	24	16
Not a priority	8	2	14	9
Don't know/Refused	*	-	-	*

(Asked of half-sample B; n=482)

r. Increasing federal spending to expand health insurance subsidies for people who previously did not qualify for financial assistance to buy insurance under the Affordable Care Act

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	69	87	58	62
Extremely important priority	22	29	22	18
Very important priority	47	58	36	44
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	30	11	42	36
Not too important priority	17	9	21	21
Not a priority	13	2	21	15
Don't know/Refused	1	2	-	2

(Asked of half-sample B; n=482)

s. Increasing federal spending to lower the age of eligibility for Medicare from 65 to 60

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	64	78	58	57
Extremely important priority	22	29	24	16
Very important priority	42	49	34	41
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	36	22	42	43
Not too important priority	20	16	11	30
Not a priority	16	6	31	13
Don't know/Refused	*	-	-	*

(Asked of half-sample B; n=482)

t. Having the federal government directly negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to lower the prices of prescription drugs for seniors on Medicare

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Extremely/Very important priority (NET)	89	92	85	89
Extremely important priority	39	45	38	37
Very important priority	50	47	47	52
Not too important/Not a priority (NET)	11	8	15	11
Not too important priority	7	7	10	5
Not a priority	4	1	5	6
Don't know/Refused	*	-	*	-

POLQ2 Extremely Important Priority Summary Table

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Six Top Priorities (30% or more extremely important)				
Having the federal government directly negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to lower the prices of prescription drugs for seniors on Medicare ^b	39	45	38	37
Increasing federal spending to prepare for future major epidemics like Covid-19 ^a	36	41	35	33
Increasing federal spending to expand coverage for long-term health care for seniors and persons with disabilities and expand home health care services ^a	32	38	36	26
Increasing federal spending to expand Medicare to include dental, vision, and hearing benefits ^b	31	41	31	24
Increasing federal spending on child nutrition for low- and moderate-income families ^a	30	37	24	28
Increasing federal spending on agriculture conservation, drought, and forestry programs to help prevent wildfires and reduce carbon emissions ^a	30	36	29	27
Nine Medium Priorities (21%-29% extremely important)				
Providing federal funding to expand Medicaid to cover additional low-income people in states that did not expand Medicaid coverage ^a	26	36	26	19
Increasing federal spending on roads, bridges, and airports ^a	23	24	28	18
Increasing federal spending to expand health insurance subsidies for people who previously did not qualify for financial assistance to buy insurance under the Affordable Care Act ^b	22	29	22	18
Increasing federal spending to lower the age of eligibility for Medicare from 65 to 60 ^b	22	29	24	16
Increasing federal spending on research to reduce the impact of climate change ^b	22	32	18	18
Having the federal government require employers to provide paid family and medical leave ^b	21	22	22	21
Increasing federal spending on subsidies to help homeowners make changes to their homes in order to reduce energy use and carbon emissions to fight climate change ^a	21	23	23	18
Increasing federal government spending to provide down-payment assistance, rental assistance, and other homeownership initiatives to help people who have traditionally had problems affording home purchases ^a	21	26	22	16
Increasing federal spending on subsidies for childcare for working families ^b	20	26	17	19
Five Lower Priorities (<20% extremely important)				
Providing federal funding to make community college tuition-free for two years ^b	19	30	14	17
Providing a legal path for certain immigrants who have not entered the U.S legally to become permanent residents ^a	19	25	19	16
Providing federal funding to establish pre-kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds ^a	17	19	16	16
Increasing federal spending to subsidize high-speed internet for hard-to-reach rural communities and low-income people ^b	15	15	13	17
Increasing federal spending to encourage people to switch to electric-powered cars and trucks ^b	5	7	6	1

^a Asked of half-sample A; n=524

^b Asked of half-sample B; n=482