

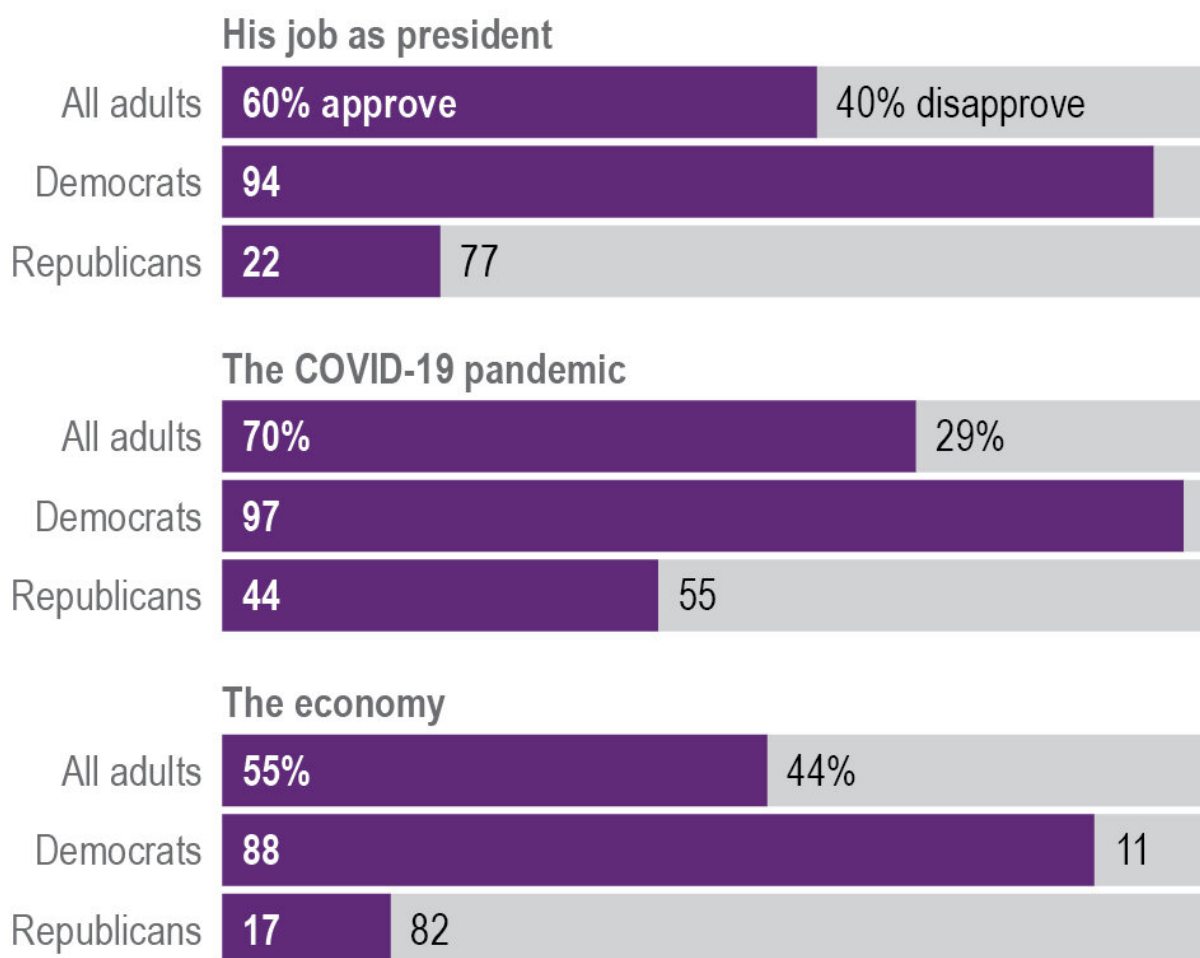
Poll: Americans largely back Biden's virus response

March 5 2021, by Julie Pace and Emily Swanson

Most approve of Biden on COVID-19, fewer on handling of the economy

A new AP-NORC poll finds that 6 in 10 Americans approve of President Joe Biden, bolstered by high ratings on COVID-19, including among many Republicans. Slightly fewer approve of Biden's handling of the economy.

Do you approve or disapprove of how President Biden is handling ____ ?



Results based on interviews with 1,434 U.S. adults conducted Feb. 25–March 1. The margin of error is ± 3.4 percentage points for the full sample.

Source: AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

AP

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Joe Biden is enjoying an early presidential honeymoon, with 60% of Americans approving of his job performance thus far and even more backing his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

At a moment of deep political polarization in America, support for Biden's [pandemic](#) response extends across party lines. Overall, 70% of Americans back the Democratic president's handling of the virus response, including 44% of Republicans.

Still, Biden faces more skepticism from Americans on the [economy](#), which has been battered by the pandemic. Fifty-five percent of Americans approve of Biden's approach to the economy thus far, and 63% say the U.S. economy is in poor shape, the AP-NORC survey shows. Republicans are also less likely to back Biden on the economy than they are on the pandemic, with just 17% supporting his fiscal stewardship.

Less than two months into his presidency, Biden has made the pandemic his central focus, urging Americans to follow stringent social distancing and mask guidelines and vowing to speed up distribution of critical vaccines. He's also argued that until the spread of the virus is under control, the economy won't fully recover.

To address financial shortfalls in the meantime, he's asking Congress to pass a \$1.9 trillion pandemic rescue plan that would provide direct

payments to millions of Americans and surge funds into state and local governments.

The measure has already passed the House. But Biden is having to make compromises to keep all Democratic senators in support of the measure, including agreeing this week to narrow eligibility for \$1,400 stimulus checks. In a concession to moderate Democratic senators, Biden agreed that individuals making more than \$80,000 annually and couples making more than \$160,000 won't receive any benefits. Biden's original proposal extended the stimulus funds to Americans with higher annual wages.

The administration estimates that 158.5 million households will still receive checks under the Senate compromise.



President Joe Biden congratulates NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory Mars 2020 Perseverance team for successfully landing on Mars during a virtual call in the Roosevelt Room at the White House, Thursday, March 4, 2021. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

The prospect of a pandemic relief bill is welcome news to John Villegas, 58, an Illinois Democrat who supports Biden's handling of both the virus response and the economy.

"With the closure of so many businesses, there are a lot of people suffering," said Villegas, who called Biden's approach a "180 degree shift" from his predecessor, Donald Trump.

Trump argued that the U.S. economy couldn't afford the hit that came from enacting restrictions on business and travel. The worst fears of economists were averted as Republican-led states followed Trump's lead and resisted restrictions, but COVID-19 cases skyrocketed. [More than 520,000 people have died](#) in the United States from the virus over the past year.

Despite their differing approaches to managing the economy during the pandemic, Biden's approval ratings on the economy are similar to Trump's, whose handling of the economy since the virus took hold was consistently backed by about half of Americans. The key difference: That level of support made the economy Trump's strongest issue, while it's a relative weakness for Biden compared with Americans' views of his handling of the pandemic and other issues.

In a reflection of the partisanship that continues to rage in the U.S., many Americans' views of the economy have flipped since the new president was inaugurated. In December, 67% of Republicans and just

15% of Democrats described the economy as good. Now, 35% of Republicans and 41% of Democrats describe the economy positively. There's been little change in overall growth or unemployment over that time.

Biden's handling of the pandemic may well determine the course of his presidency and the political capital he has to pursue significant legislation on other matters. Democrats are working urgently to tee up bills addressing infrastructure investment, policing reforms and voting rights. Biden has also vowed to tackle [climate change](#) and build on the sprawling [health insurance](#) measure signed into law when he served as Barack Obama's vice president.

His promises of action have garnered him solid approval ratings on some of those fronts. For example, about 6 in 10 Americans say they approve of Biden's handling of health care and race relations.



President Joe Biden congratulates NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory Mars 2020 Perseverance team for successfully landing on Mars during a virtual call in the Roosevelt Room at the White House, Thursday, March 4, 2021. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

Overall, 48% of Americans say the country is headed in the right direction, compared with 37% who said that in December. The poll also shows that 43% of Americans expect things in the country overall to get better in the next year, while 34% think things will get worse and 23% think they will remain about the same.

Biden himself has been purposefully cautious in predicting when life in the U.S. will return to a pre-pandemic normal. Even as he promises that the U.S. will have [enough vaccine supply](#) for all Americans by the end of

May, he's said it could be the end of the year or early 2022 before Americans can stop wearing masks or fully return to normal activities.

His team's goal in setting expectations? Underpromise, then overdeliver.

The AP-NORC poll of 1,434 adults was conducted Feb. 23-March 1 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.4 percentage points.

More information: AP-NORC Center: <http://www.apnorc.org/>.

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