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Voters Across the South Are Concerned About Climate Change, Support Robust Investments in Health Care and Community Services

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Introduction

In September 2021, Data for Progress, in collaboration with the Southern Economic Advancement Project and Groundwork Collaborative, surveyed 2,222 registered voters in the Southern states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. We find that voters in these 12 states broadly support investments in health care and community services, and are concerned by climate change. We also find that the pandemic-related economic crisis and climate change have had a negative impact on workers and families throughout the South, illustrating how crucial these investments are to helping people recover from the pandemic and build healthier, more resilient communities.

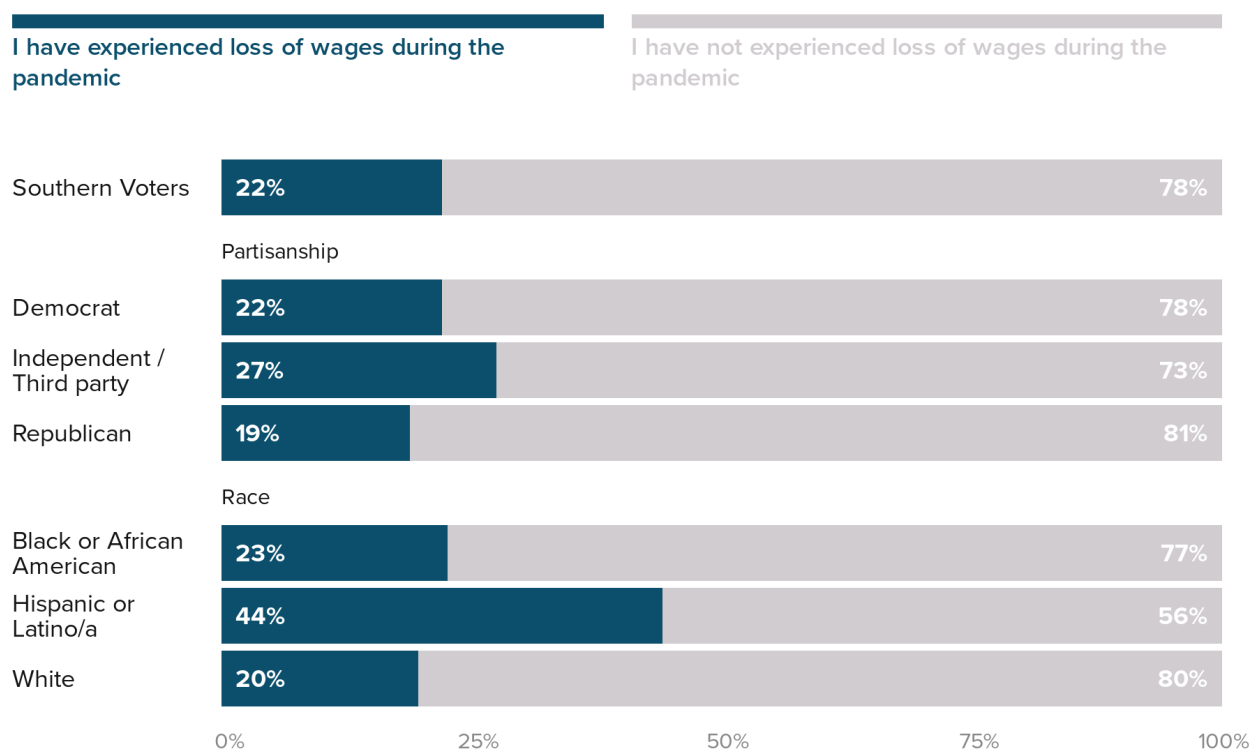
Coronavirus Negatively Impacted Southern Voters

To determine the effects of the pandemic, we asked Southerners whether or not they experienced a loss of wages or hours as a result of the pandemic. Overall, we find that 22 percent of voters in these states have lost either wages or hours due to the pandemic. Across partisan lines, 22 percent of self-identified Democrats said they have experienced a loss of wages or hours, while 27 percent of self-identified Independents and 19 percent of self-identified Republicans said the same. People of color were hit especially hard – 44 percent of Hispanic voters and nearly a quarter of Black voters lost wages or hours compared to 20 percent of white voters.

A Fifth of Southern Voters Say They Experienced Loss of Wages During the Pandemic

Did you experience any of the following during the pandemic?

— Loss of wages or hours



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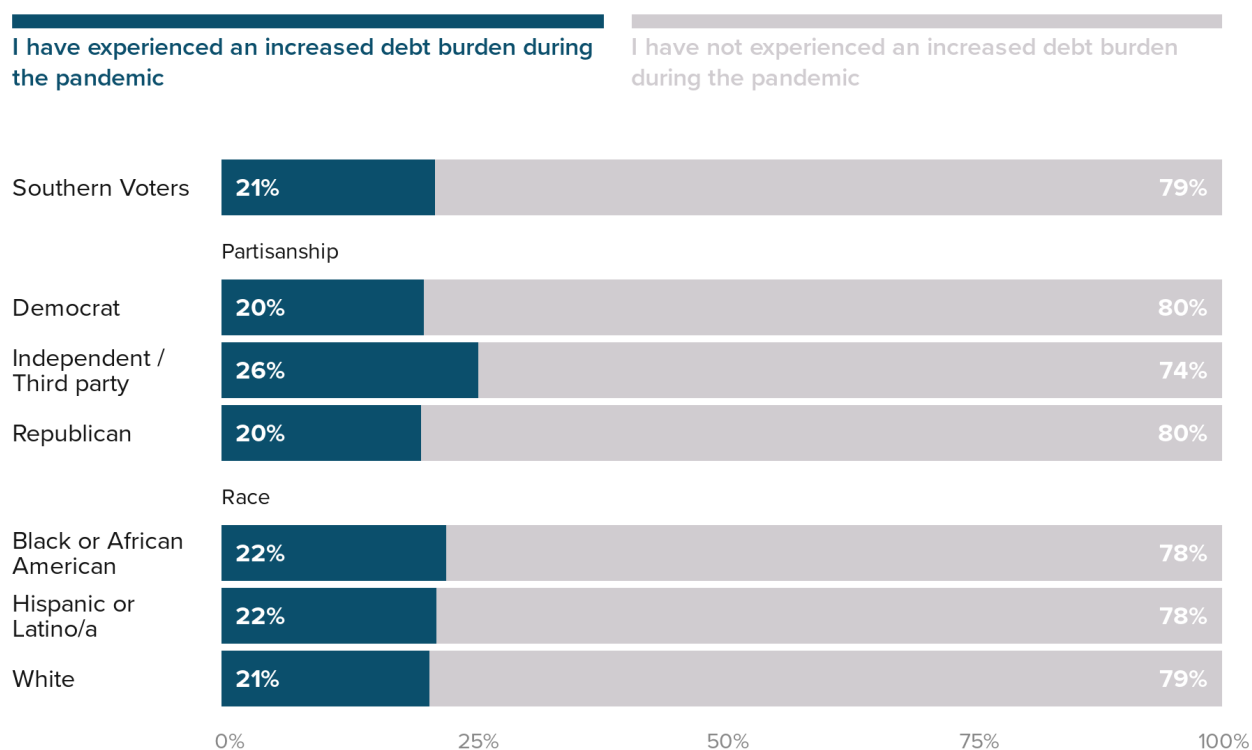
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We also asked Southern voters if they experienced an increased debt burden during the pandemic. Similar to wage or hours losses, one out of every five Southern voters said they experienced an increase in debt during the pandemic. Twenty percent of Democratic and Republican voters said they have faced increased debt, while 26 percent of Independents said the same. In addition, 22 percent of Black and Hispanic voters and 21 percent of white voters experienced an increase in debt.

A Fifth of Southern Voters Say That Their Debt Burden Increased During the Pandemic

Did you experience any of the following during the pandemic?

— Increased debt burden



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Pandemic Relief Positively Impacted Southern Voters

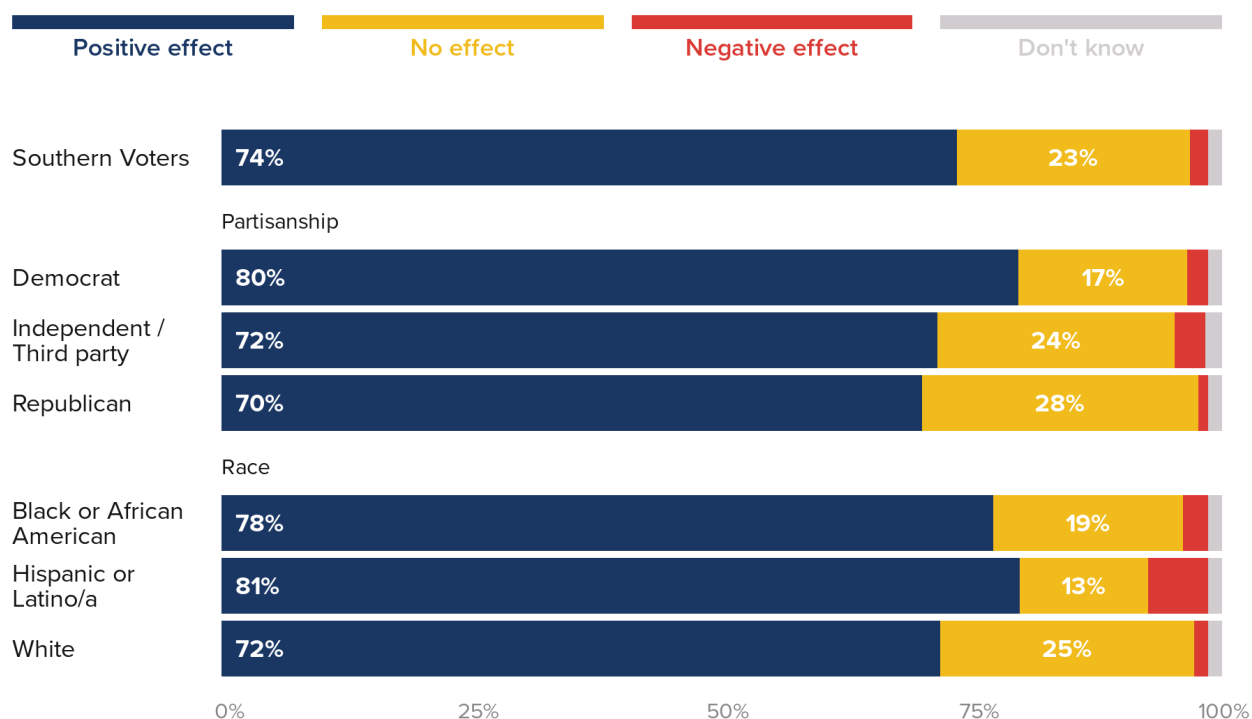
As a key feature of the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan's pandemic relief, many Americans received multiple stimulus payments. To measure the impact of these payments on voters, we first asked respondents across the 12 states whether they had or had not received a stimulus payment. We then asked those who received a stimulus payment whether it had a positive impact, negative impact, or no impact at all.

We find that stimulus payments had a positive impact on 74 percent of Southern voters. Eighty percent of Democrats, 72 percent of Independents, and 70 percent of Republicans reported that stimulus payments had a positive impact on their personal finances. This was particularly true for Black and Hispanic voters; stimulus payments had positive effects for 78 percent of Black voters and 81 percent of Hispanic voters. In comparison, 72 percent of white voters reported positive effects.

We also measured voter attitudes around a number of progressive issues, specifically around health care, climate, and investing pandemic relief funds into economic recovery programs and community services.

A Vast Majority of Southern Voters That Have Received a Stimulus Check Say It Impacted Them Positively

Did receiving this stimulus payment have a positive effect, negative effect, or no effect on your personal finances?



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Southern Voters Support Investing Federal Aid Into Relief and Community Programs

When asked about how their state should spend federal relief funds from the American Rescue Plan, 71 percent of Southern voters said they support investing funds in community programs and pandemic relief instead of cutting taxes for corporations and the wealthy.

The plan to use relief funds to invest in community services has strong support across partisan lines: 77 percent of Democrats, 70 percent of Independents, and 67 percent of Republicans support investments in community services. To compare, less than 10 percent of Southern voters believe that pandemic relief funds should be used to cut taxes for corporations and the wealthy. Across race, 69 percent of Black voters, 67 percent of Hispanic voters, and 72 percent of White voters say relief funds should be invested in community services and pandemic relief programs.

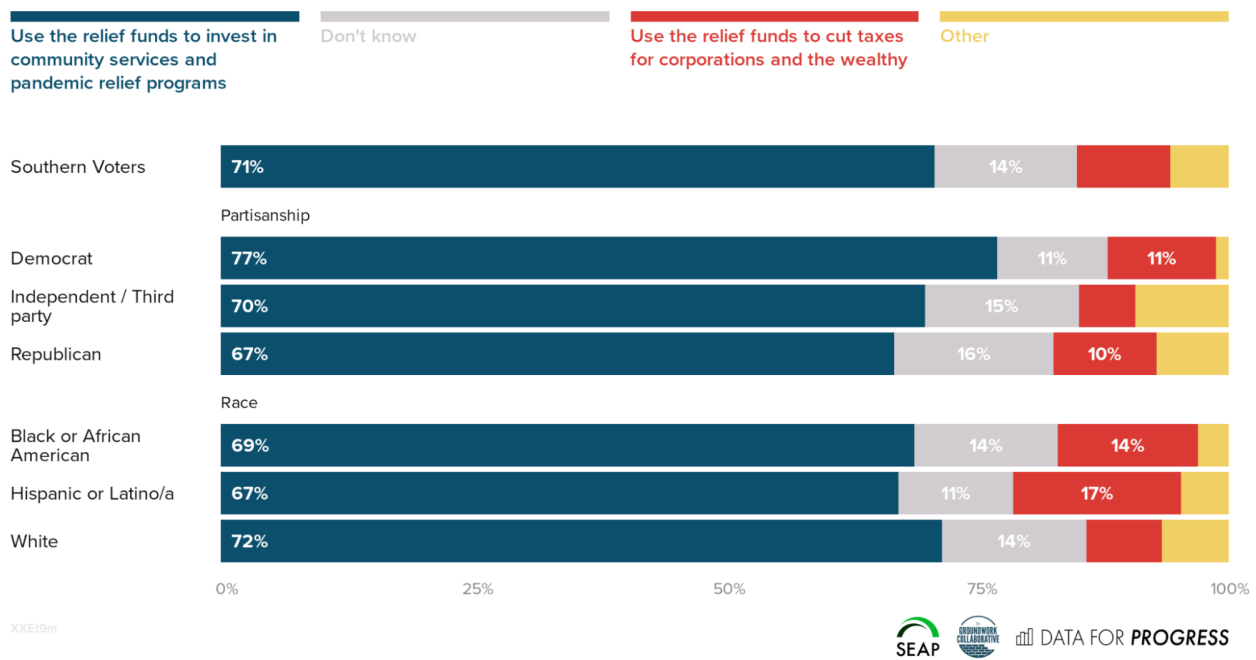
Over Two-Thirds of Southern Voters Think That Funds From the American Rescue Plan Should Be Invested in Community Programs and Pandemic Relief Instead of Tax Cuts for the Wealthy

As a part of the American Rescue Plan, your state received an allocation of federal relief funds to help people recover from the pandemic.

Some groups want to use the incoming federal relief funds to cut taxes for corporations and the wealthy.

Other groups want to use the federal relief funds to invest the funds in state and local government services that will benefit the community.

Now, knowing the different sides, which comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

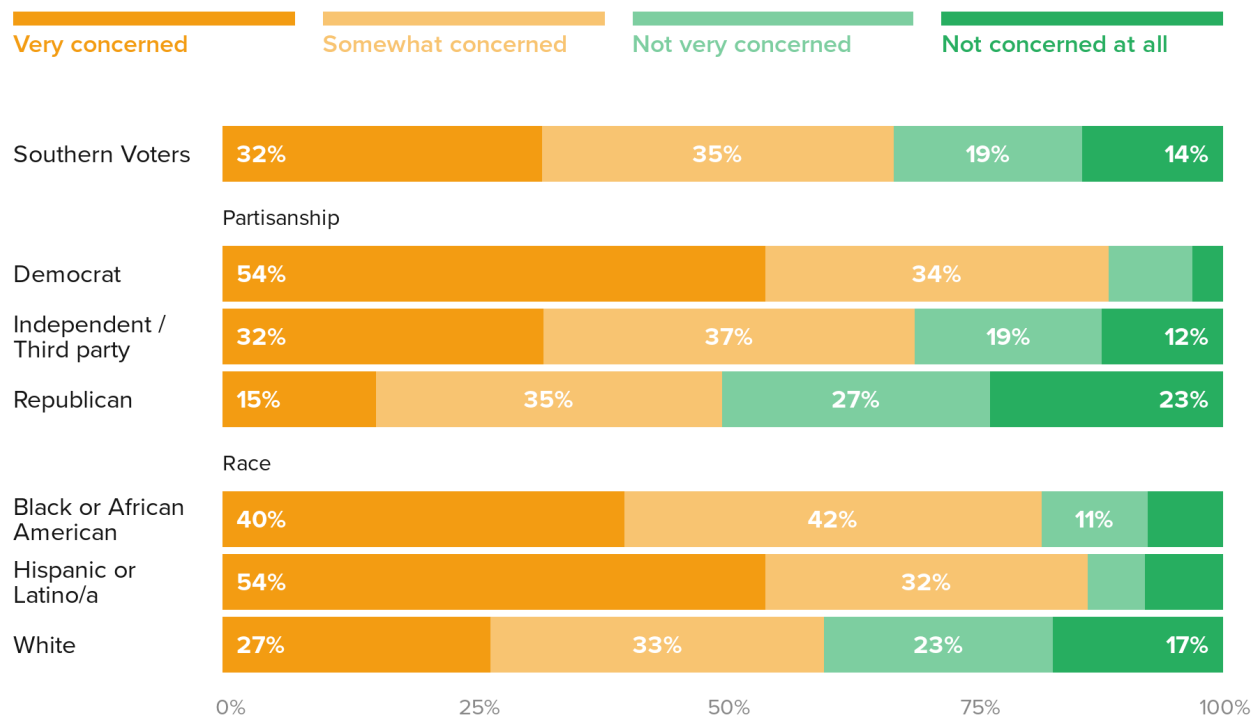


Southern Voters are Concerned About Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events

As the pressure mounts for lawmakers to take action against the rising threat of climate change, we find that more than two-thirds of voters in the South share this concern. This includes 88 percent of Democrats and 69 percent of Independents. Republicans, meanwhile, are split down the middle on the issue – 50 percent are concerned about climate change. We also see a difference in the level of concern among races. Compared to 60 percent of white voters, 86 percent of Hispanic voters and 82 percent of Black voters say that they are concerned about climate change.

A Majority of Southern Voters Are Concerned About Climate Change

How concerned are you about climate change?



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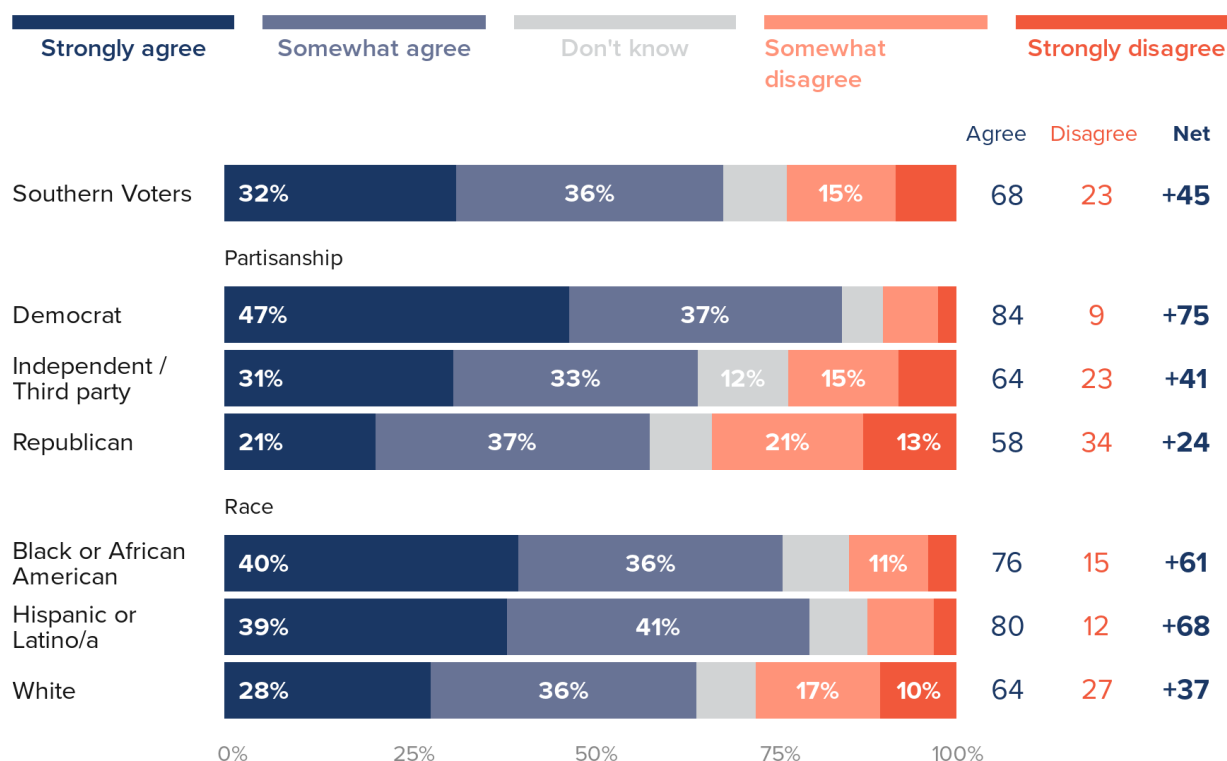


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We then asked voters whether they agreed or disagreed that extreme weather events have become more frequent or severe in their communities over the last five years. By a +45-point margin, voters said they agree that extreme weather events have worsened in the last five years (68 agree, 23 disagree). Across party identification, Democrats agreed with the statement by a +75-point margin, and Independents and Republicans said the same by margins of +41 and +24 points. Meanwhile, Black and Hispanic respondents agreed that extreme weather events have become more severe by margins of +61 points and +68 points, respectively, while white respondents agreed by a +37-point margin.

A Majority of Southern Voters Say Extreme Weather Events Have Become More Frequent or Extreme

Do you agree or disagree that extreme weather events have become more frequent or more severe in your community over the last five years?



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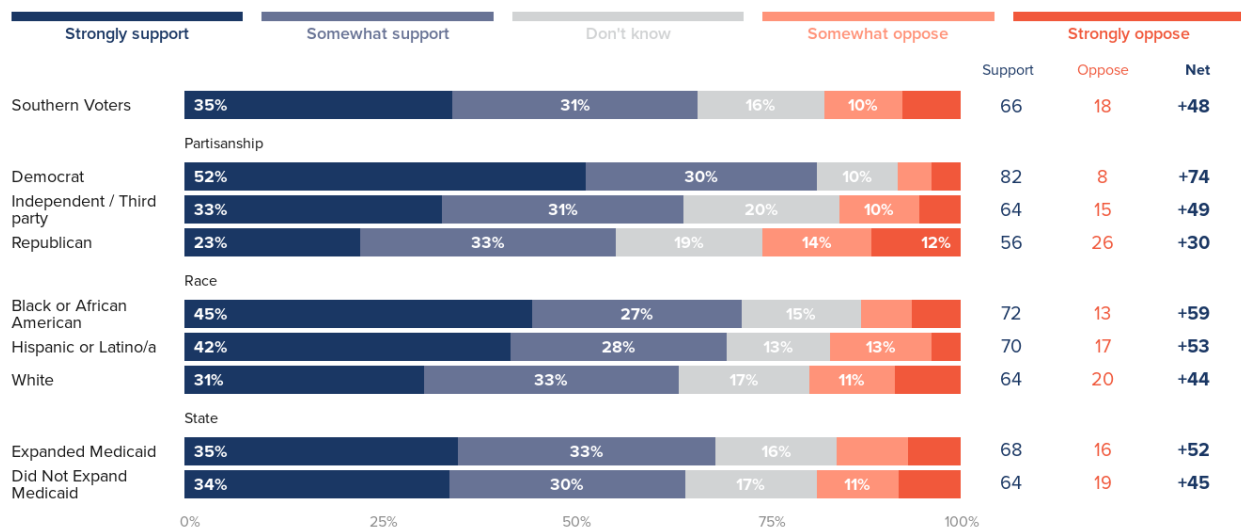
Southern Voters Support Medicaid Expansion

Finally, we asked voters whether or not they support the expansion of Medicaid to cover adults up to age 64 who earn an income at or below 138% of the federal poverty line (\$17,609 for an individual in 2020). We find that overall, voters support this expansion by a margin of +48 points (66 support, 18 oppose). Support for Medicaid expansion extends across party lines – Democrats, Independents, and Republicans all support this provision by margins of +74 points, +49 points, and +30 points, respectively. Similarly, Black, Hispanic, and white voters say the same by +59-point, +53-point, +44-point margins, respectively. We also find strong support for Medicaid expansion when breaking down the results by respondents living in states that have and have not expanded Medicaid. Among the former, we find that voters support expanding Medicaid by a margin of +52 points, while voters in states that have not expanded Medicaid support the proposal by a slightly lower, but still significant, margin of +45 points.

Two-Thirds of Southern Voters Support Expanding Medicaid to Cover Individuals Making up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Line

Medicaid is a federal and state partnership funded health insurance program for low-income individuals, children, their parents, the elderly and people with disabilities. A provision of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) fully-funds the expansion of Medicaid to adults up to age 64 who make at or below 138% of the federal poverty line.

Do you support or oppose Medicaid expansion to 138% of the federal poverty line (\$17,609 for an individual in 2020)?



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Conclusion

Across 12 states in the American South, majorities of voters support Medicaid expansion and investing federal aid in pandemic relief and community service programs. Majorities of voters are also concerned about climate change and find that extreme weather events have become more common over the last five years. Additionally, we find that the coronavirus pandemic has negatively affected wages, hours, and debt burden for one fifth of voters, disproportionately impacting voters of color. We also see that voters who received stimulus payments from the federal government have been positively impacted by the relief funds.

As lawmakers in Congress weigh cuts to the Build Back Better agenda, these results indicate that there is broad support in the South for historic investments in health care, climate resilience, and families.

This survey was conducted in September 2021 using web-panel respondents. The sample size was 2,222, and the margin of error is ± 2 percentage points.

Read the full poll and methodology [here](#).