

# University of Akron Poll Report: Political Polarization in the 2022 Election

## Executive Summary

Based on the 2022 University of Akron Poll, this report covers Ohioans' views on party control of the federal and state government, and underlying factors associated with such views. Key findings include:

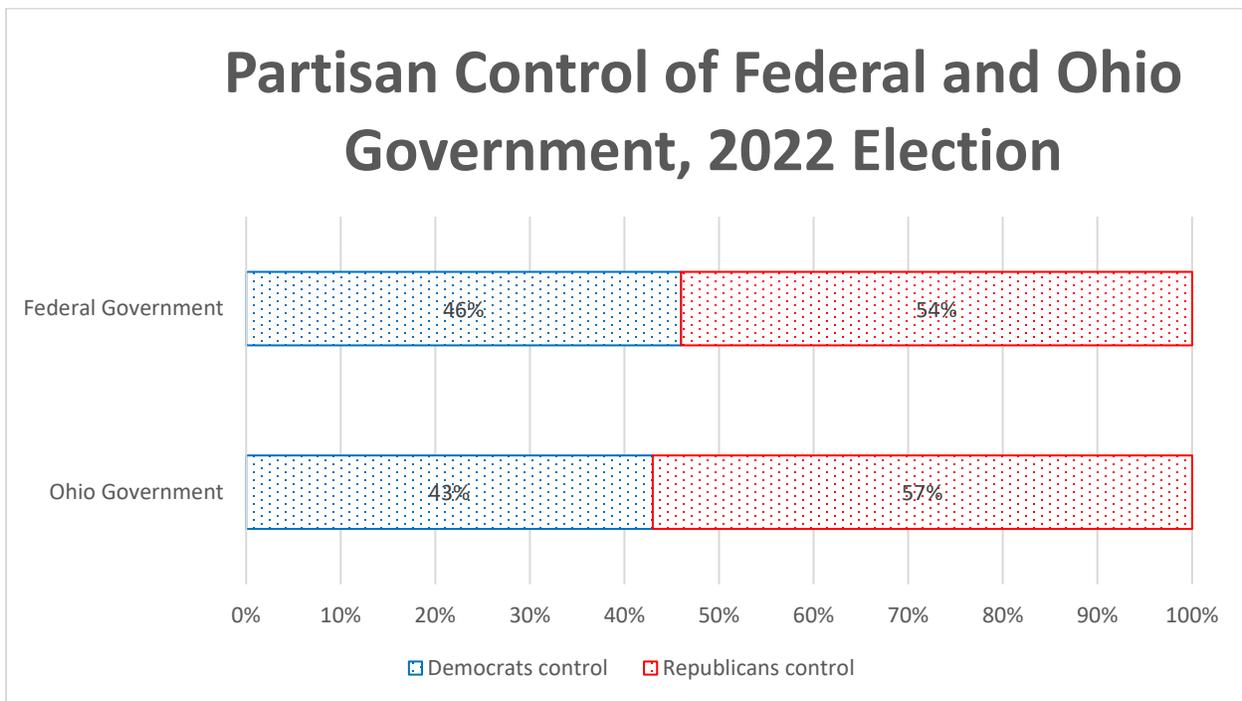
- A majority of Ohioans favor Republicans taking control of the federal government from the Democrats in 2022.
- A majority of Ohioans favor Republicans continuing to control Ohio state government over the Democrats in 2022.
- Partisan divisions among Ohioans are strongly associated with views on control of government.
- Ohioans' general assessments of the country and state are modestly associated with views on partisan control of government.
- Ohioans' evaluation of COVID-19 responses are weakly associated with views on partisan control of government.
- Opinions of Ohioans on "hot-button" issues are strongly associated with views on partisan control of government. Such issues include teaching about race in public schools, election reform, growth of federal programs, abortion restrictions, and addressing climate change.

**The Survey:** The 2022 University of Akron Poll was conducted by the Center for Marketing and Opinion Research for the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at The University of Akron. It was a random sample of 1,550 Ohio eligible voters conducted online between February 17 and March 15, 2022, with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

## Partisan Control of Federal and State Government

When asked: “*The Democrats control the federal government. This year, would you like to see the Democrats continue to control the federal government or would you like to see the Republicans take control of the federal government for a change?*” **54 percent** of Ohioans prefer Republican control of the federal government in the 2022 election, while **46 percent** prefer Democratic control of the federal government.

At the same time, when asked “*The Republicans control Ohio state government. This year, would you like to see the Republicans continue to control Ohio state government or would you like to see the Democrats take control of Ohio state government for a change?*” **57 percent** of Ohioans prefer Republican control of the state government in the 2022 election, while **43 percent** of Ohioans prefer Democratic control of the state government.



The Republican advantage in these generic measures of party control of governments (see nearby chart) are consistent with the “mid-term slump,” when the party that controls the White House typically loses congressional and state contests during the mid-term election.\* However, the results in particular races in the general election will depend on the candidates and their campaigns.

\* For more details on these questions see <https://uakron.edu/bliss/docs/research/2022%20University%20of%20Akron%20Poll-v4.pdf>

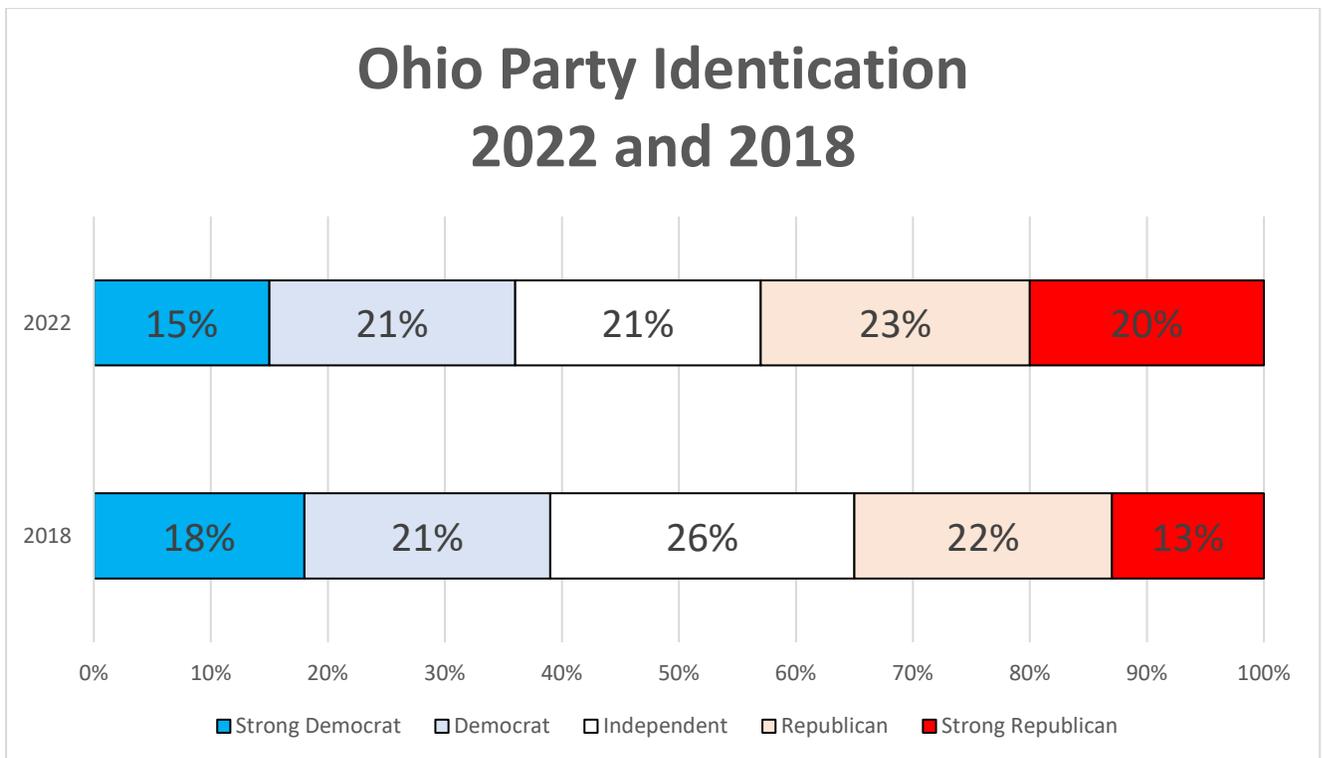
## Partisan Politization

Not surprisingly, Ohioans' views on partisan control of government reflect underlying major-party divisions.

### *Party Identification*

In 2022, Republican identifiers (including independents who lean Republican) outnumbered Democratic identifiers (including independents who lean Republican) **43 percent to 36 percent**.

These figures represent a change over a similar survey conducted in 2018, when Republican identifiers trailed Democratic identifiers **35 percent to 39 percent**. This shift is consistent with recent national polls that showed Republican gains after the 2020 election.\*



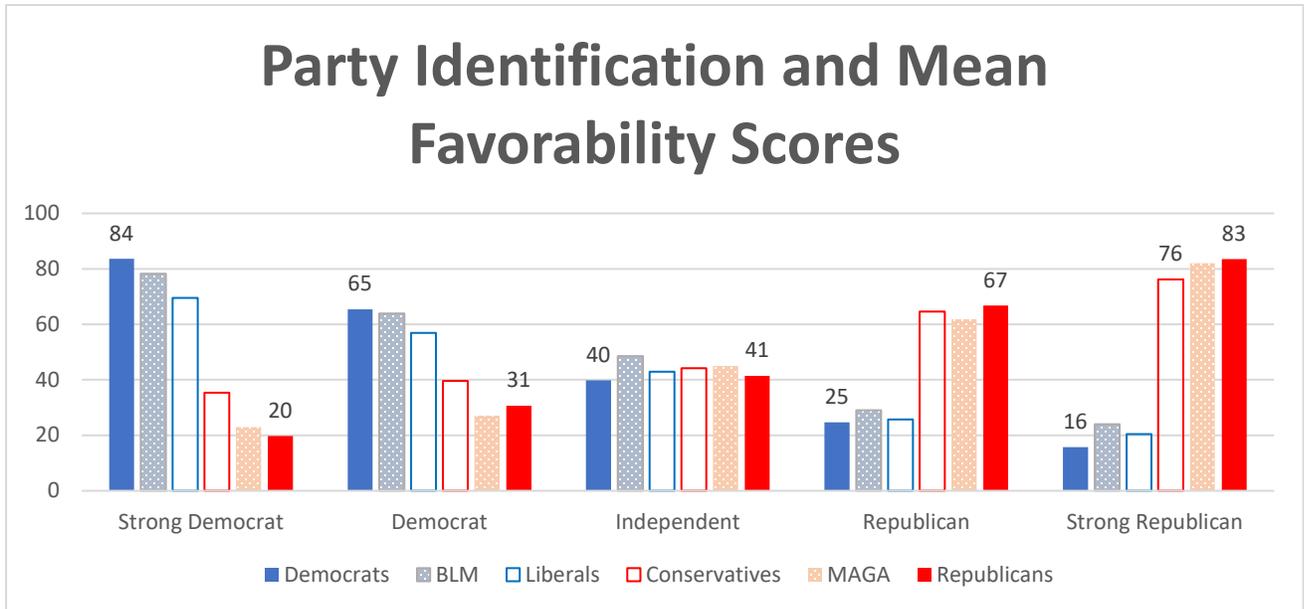
### *Favorability of Partisan and Ideological Groups*

This shift in a Republican direction reflects increased polarization among party identifiers in three related ways (see nearby chart):

- Democrats and Republicans hold highly favorable views of their own party – and highly unfavorable views of the other party;

\* For the 2018 study see <https://uakron.edu/bliss/docs/Bliss%20Poll%202018.pdf>

- Democrats and Republicans have highly favorable views of political movements associated with each party: for Democrats, Black Lives Matters (BLM), and for Republicans, Make America Great Again (MAGA);
- Democrats have highly favorable views of liberals, while Republicans have highly favorable views of conservatives.

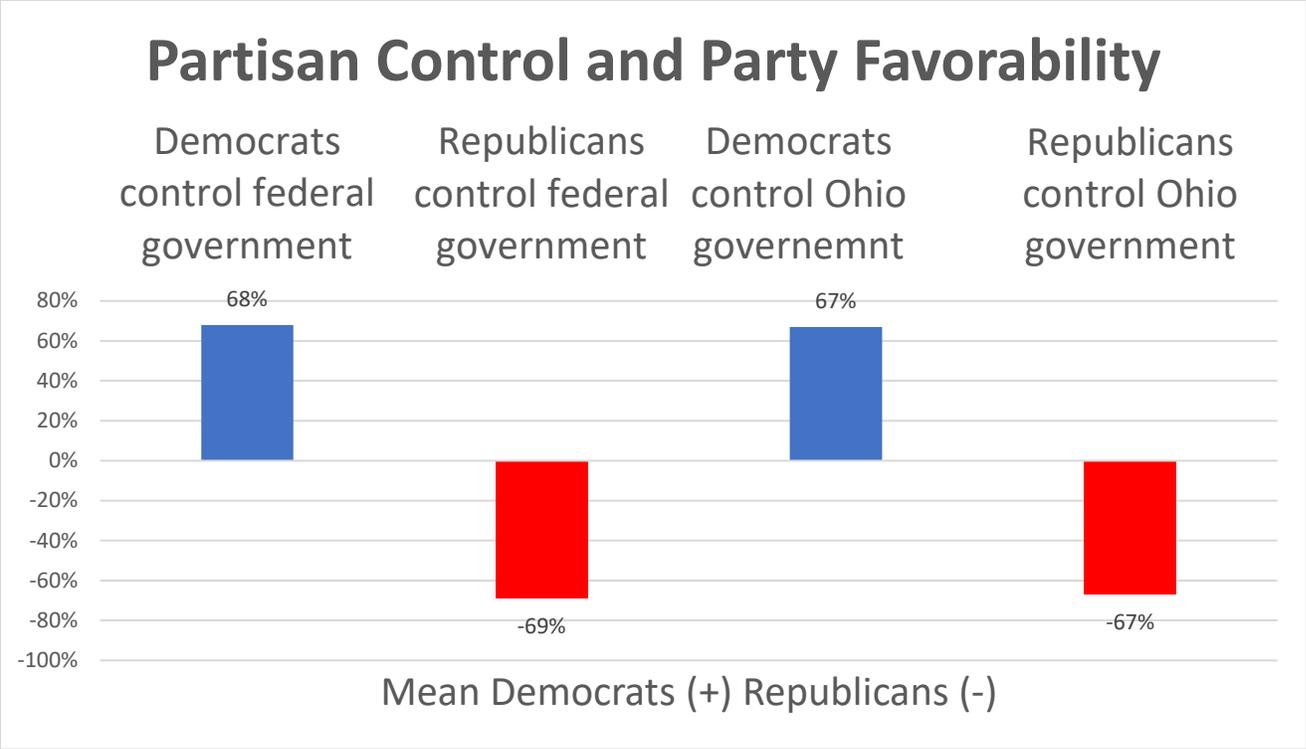


Meanwhile, independents (who do not lean toward one of the parties) are much less favorable toward all such groups, including the Democrats or Republicans.

#### *Party Favorability and Partisan Control of Government*

Ohioans’ preferences for party control of government are strongly associated with mean favorability scores of the major parties (see nearby chart).

Indeed, these figures are nearly symmetrical, with those who prefer the Democrats in control of the federal government having a high mean Democratic favorability score (**68 percent**) nearly equal to the mean Republican favorability of those who prefer Republican in control (**-69 percent**). A similar pattern holds of control of Ohio government (**67 and -67 percent**, respectively).



**Right/Wrong Track**

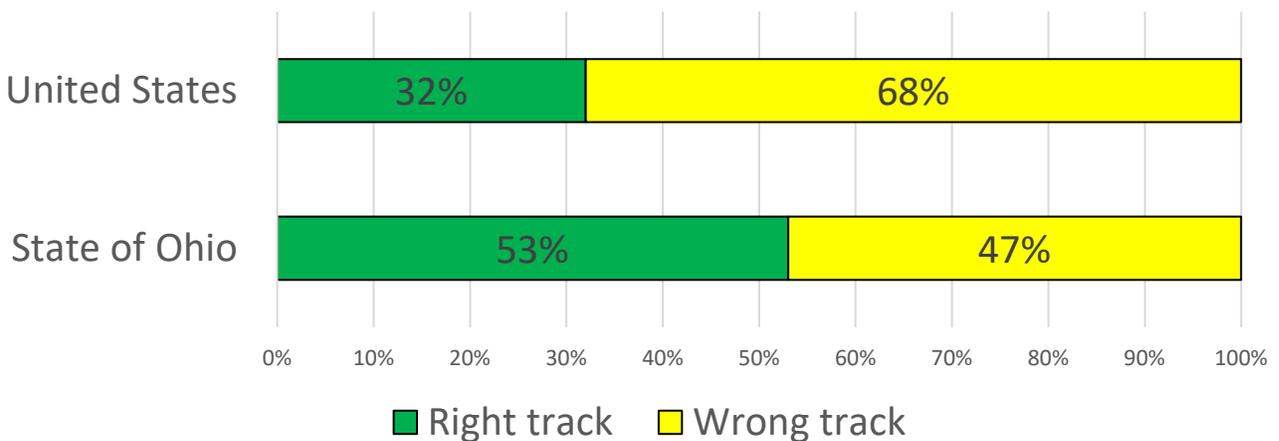
General assessments of the direction of the country and the state are another underlying factor in Ohioans’ views of partisan control of government (see nearby chart).

When asked “Overall, would you say that the UNITED STATES is on the right track or the wrong track?” **32 percent** of Ohioans say the United States is on the “right track,” and **68 percent** say the country is on the “wrong track.”

In contrast, when asked, “Overall, would you say that the STATE OF OHIO is on the right track or the wrong track?” **53 percent** of Ohioans say the state of Ohio is on the “right track” and **47 percent** say the state is on the “wrong track.”

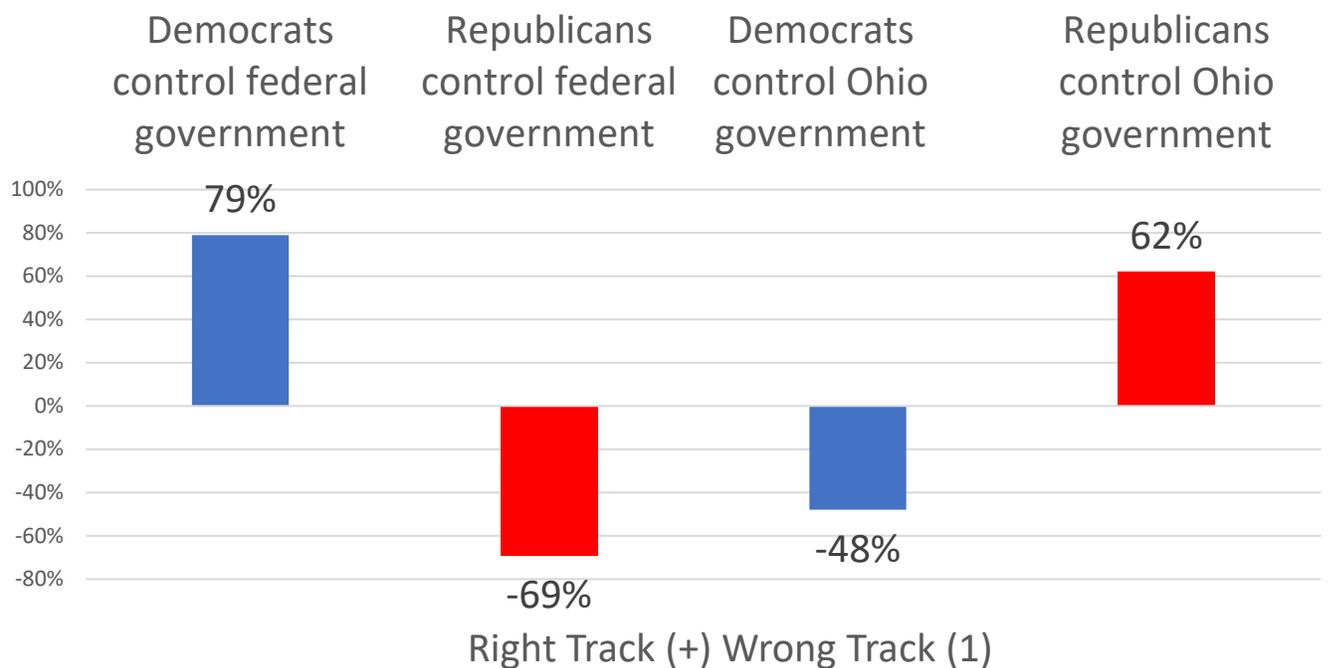
These measures reflect many different factors, but typically the state of the economy is among the most important.

## Right Track/Wrong Track, US and Ohio



The perceived direction of the country is related to Ohioans’ views of partisan control of the federal government (see nearby chart), with **79 percent** of those who prefer Democrats in control saying the country is on the “right track,” while **-69 percent** of those who prefer Republicans in control saying the country is on “wrong track.” An analogous pattern holds for the state of Ohio—but in reverse order: **62 percent** of those who prefer Republicans in control of state government say Ohio is on the “right track,” while **-48 percent** of those who prefer Democrats in control say the state is on the “wrong track.”

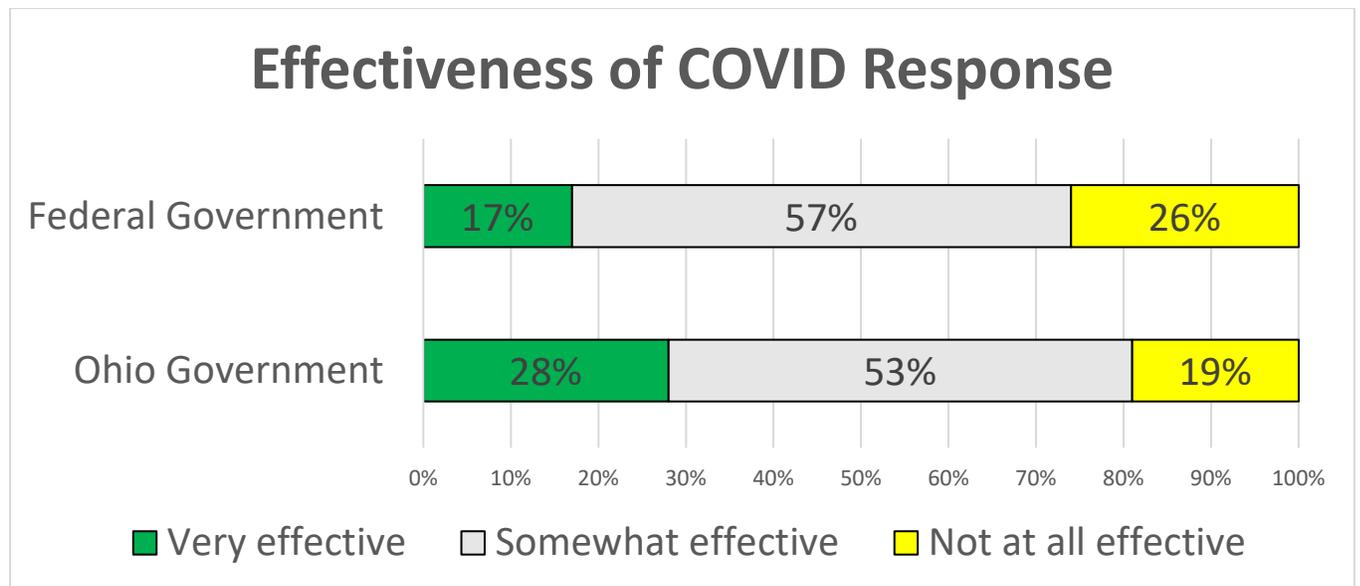
## Partisan Control and Right/Wrong Track



## Effectiveness of COVID-19 Responses

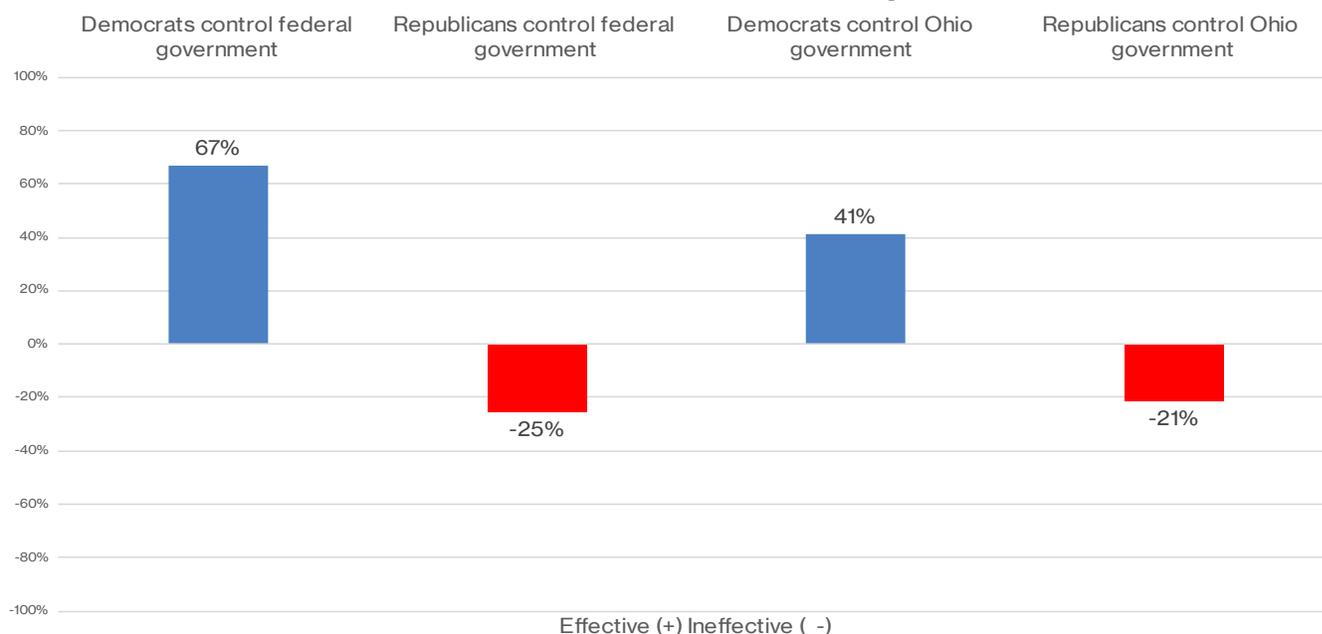
Effectiveness of the federal and state government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic is a special circumstance underlying Ohioans' views of partisan control of government (see nearby chart).

When asked about the effectiveness of the federal government's response to COVID, **17 percent** of Ohioans say the response was "very effective" and **26 percent** say it was "not at all effective," with the remaining **57 percent** saying it was "somewhat effective." Meanwhile, the Ohio state government received better marks when asked a parallel question: **28 percent** say the response was "very effective," and **19 percent** say it was "not at all effective," with the remaining **53 percent** saying it was "somewhat effective."



Interestingly, positive evaluation of the response to COVID-19 is strongly associated with support for Democratic control of the federal (**67 percent**) and Ohio (**41 percent**) governments. In contrast, negative evaluation of the response to COVID-19 is weakly associated with Republican control of the federal (**-25 percent**) and state government (**-21 percent**).

## Partisan Control and COVID Response



### “Hot-button” Issues

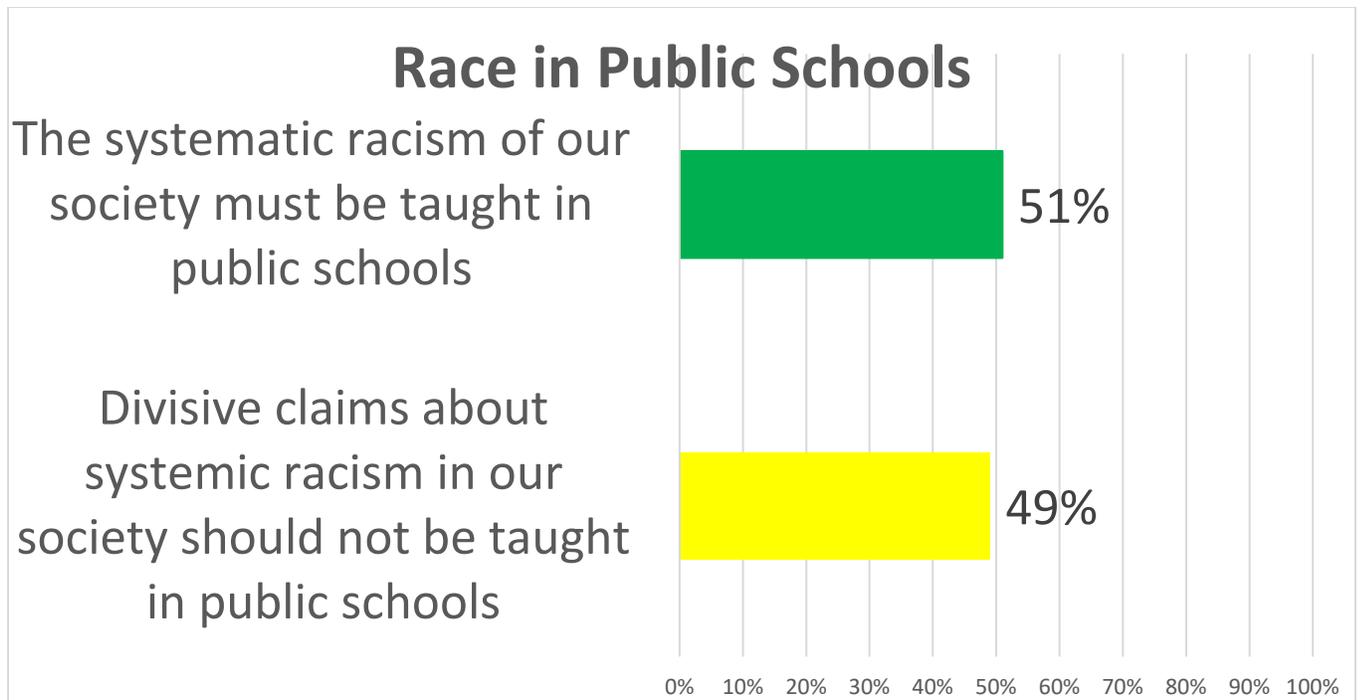
Ohioans’ views on five prominent “hot-button” issues are another underlying factor associated with views on partisan control of government.

#### *Teaching about Race in Public Schools*

Controversy over the teaching about race in public schools is less prominent in Ohio than in other states, but national debates have engaged state and local officeholders. This policy question is largely a state responsibility, but with implications for federal education funding.

When asked to choose between two alternatives (see nearby chart),

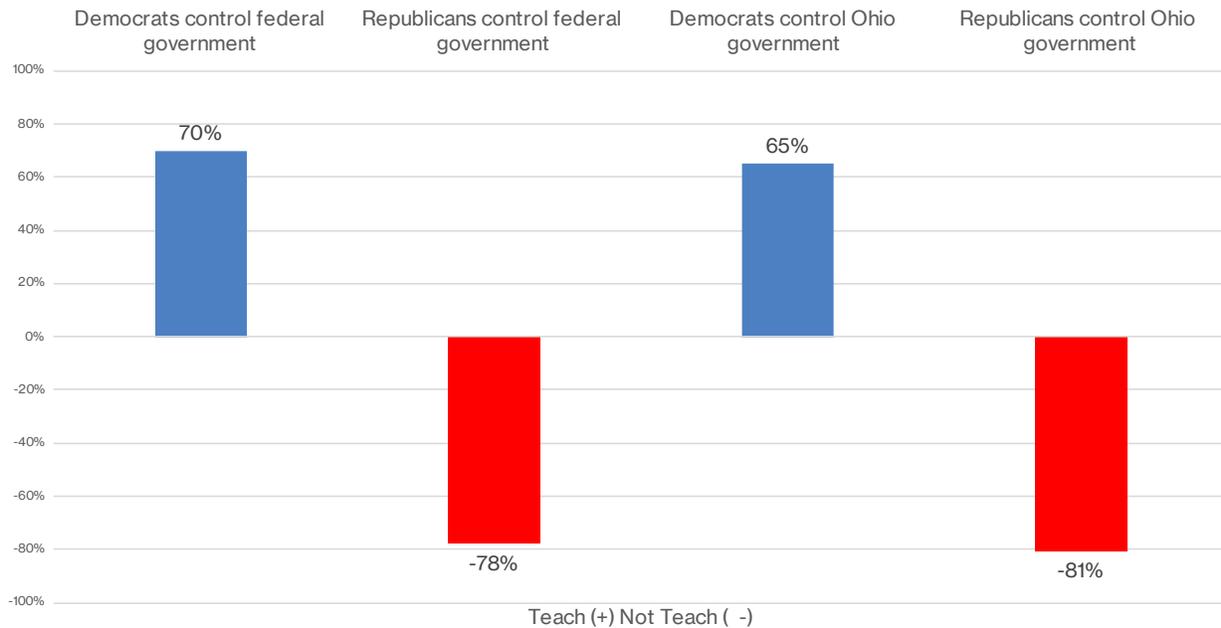
- **51 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“The systematic racism of our society must be taught in public schools”*
- **49 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“Divisive claims about racism in our society should not be taught in public schools”*



Ohioans' views on teaching about race in public schools are strongly associated with views of partisan control of government (see nearby chart).

- Large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Democratic control of the federal government (**70 percent**) and state government (**65 percent**) agree that *“The systematic racism of our society must be taught in public schools.”*
- Meanwhile, large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Republican control of the federal government (**-78 percent**) and state government (**-81 percent**) agree that *“Divisive claims about racism in our society should not be taught in public schools.”*

## Partisan Control and Race in Public Schools



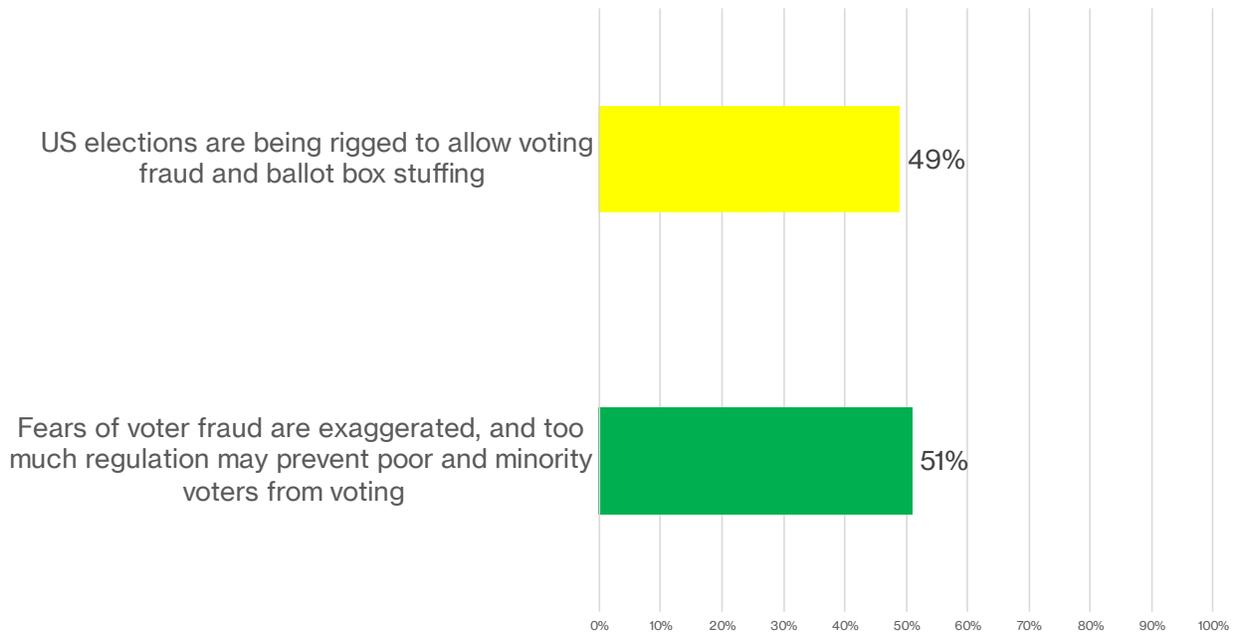
### *Election Reform*

Controversy over election reform is much less prominent in Ohio than in other states, but the national fervor has attracted considerable attention. Like public education, this policy question is largely a state responsibility, but with implications for federal regulations.

When asked to choose between two alternatives (see nearby chart),

- **49 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“US elections are being rigged to allow voting fraud and ballot box stuffing”*
- **51 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“Fears of voter fraud are exaggerated, and too much regulation may prevent poor and minority voters from voting”*

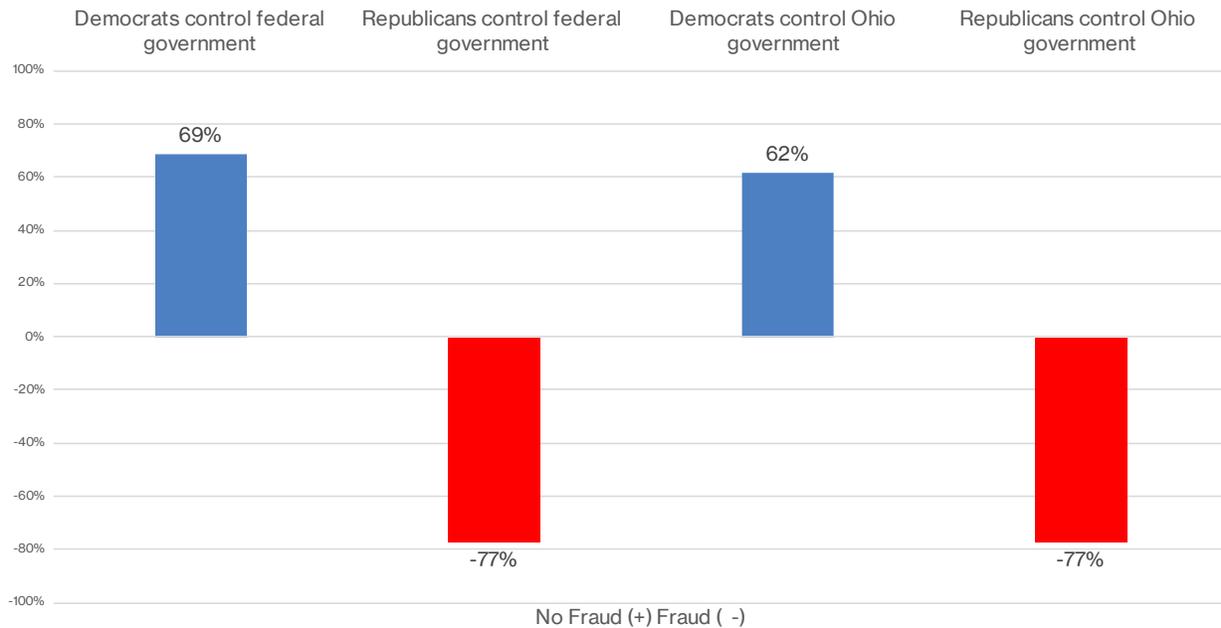
## Election Reform



Ohioans' views on election reform are strongly associated with views of partisan control of government (see nearby chart).

- Large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Democratic control of the federal government (**69 percent**) and state government (**62 percent**) agree that *“US elections are being rigged to allow voting fraud and ballot box stuffing”*
- Meanwhile, large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Republican control of the federal government (**-77 percent**) and state government (**-77 percent**) agree that *“Fears of voter fraud are exaggerated, and too much regulation may prevent poor and minority voters from voting”*

## Partisan Control and Election Reform



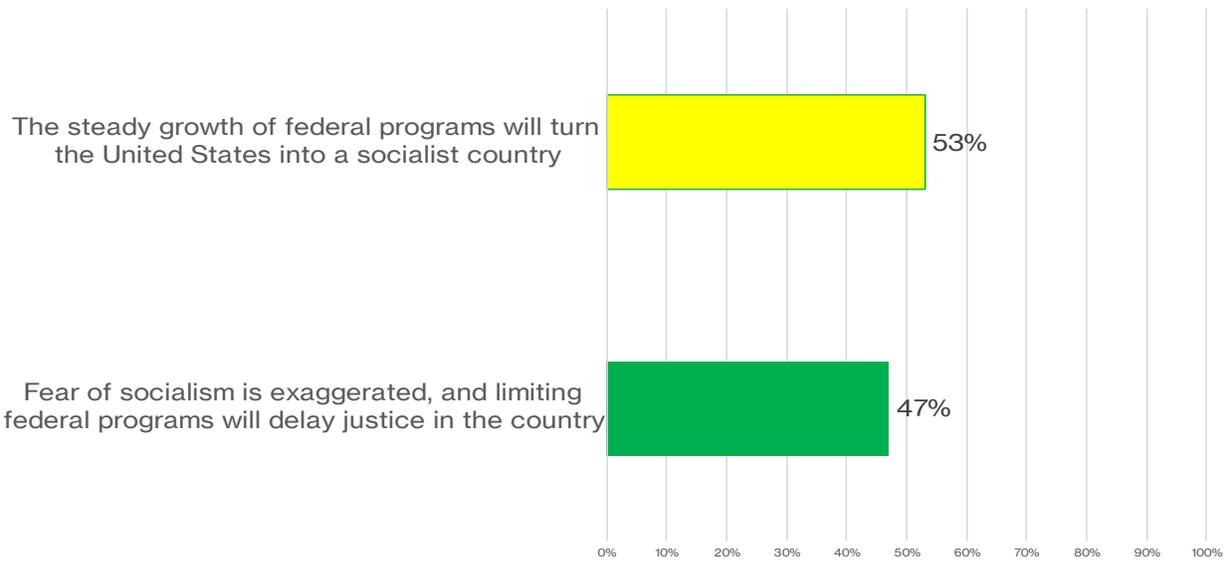
### *Growth of Federal Programs*

Proposed growth in federal programs is reviving an old controversy across the country as well as in Ohio. This policy question is largely a federal government responsibility, but with implications for state governments because federal programs often influence state activities.

When asked to choose between two alternatives (see nearby chart),

- **53 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“The steady growth of federal programs will turn the United States into a socialist country”*
- **47 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“The steady growth of federal programs will bring justice but not socialism to the country”*

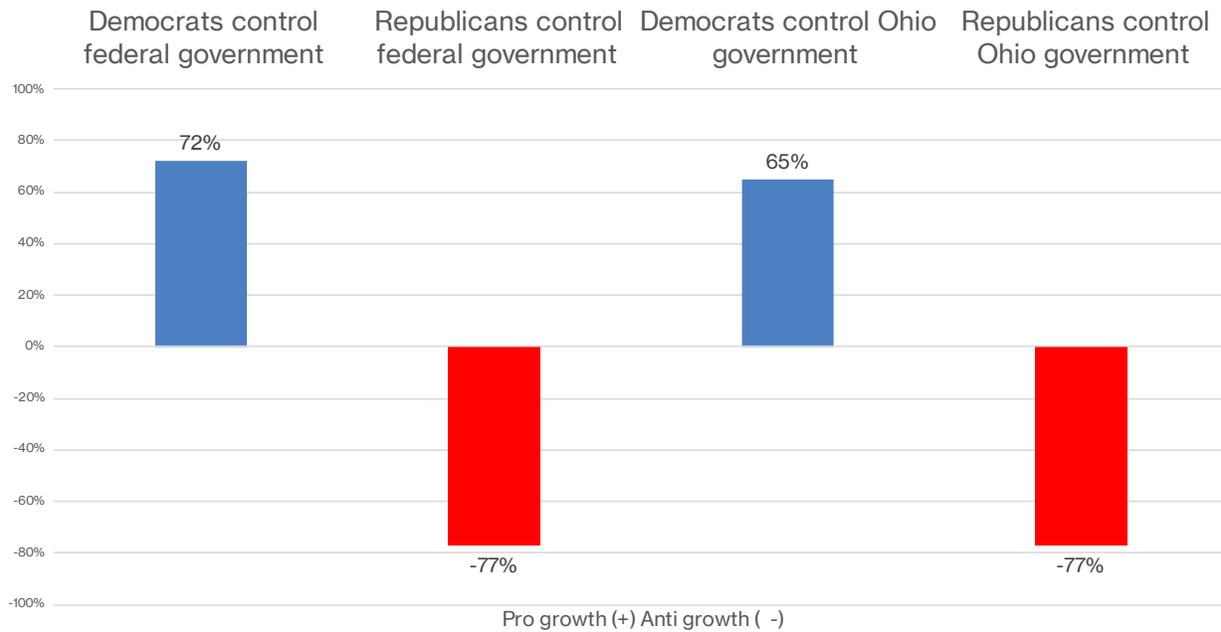
### Growth of Federal Programs



Ohioans' views on the growth of federal programs are strongly associate with views of partisan control of government (see nearby chart).

- Large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Democratic control of the federal government (**72 percent**) and state government (**65 percent**) agree that *“The steady growth of federal programs will bring justice but not socialism to the country”*
- Meanwhile, large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Republican control of the federal government (**-77 percent**) and state government (**-77 percent**) agree that *“The steady growth of federal programs will turn the United States into a socialist country”*

### Partisan Control and Program Growth



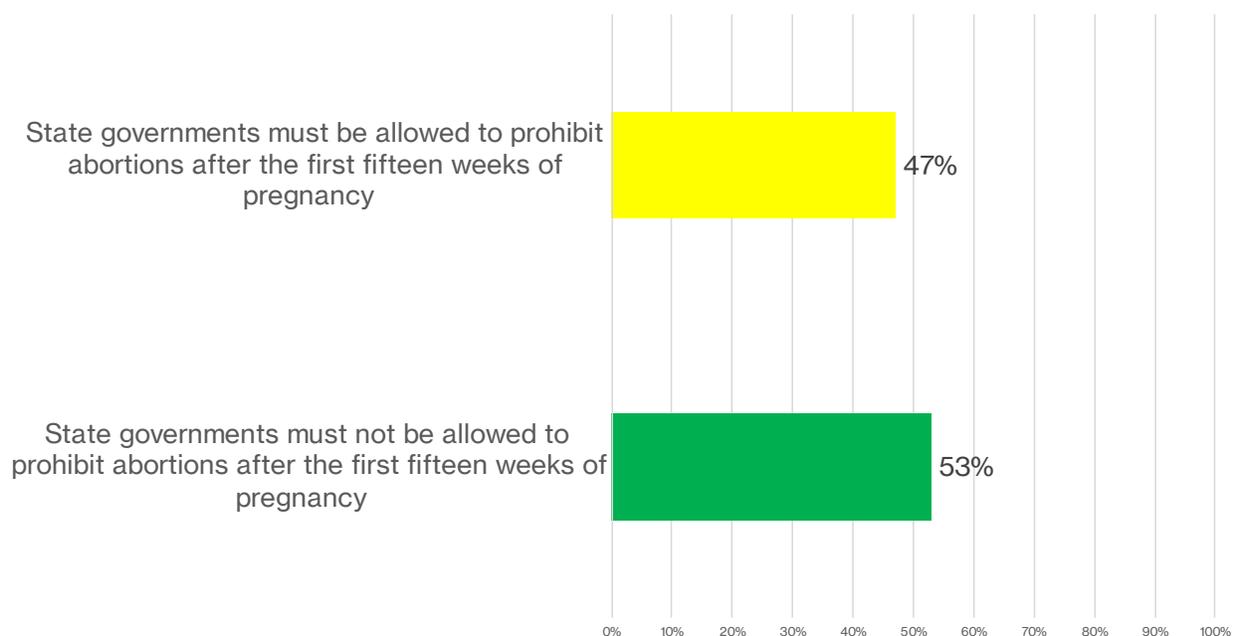
### Abortion Restrictions

The U.S. Supreme Court’s review of a Mississippi state law restricting abortions after 15-weeks of pregnancy has reinvigorated an ongoing debate. This policy question is both a federal and state government responsibility because federal law sets limits on state law.

When asked to choose between two alternatives (see nearby chart),

- **47 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“State governments must be allowed to prohibit abortions after the first fifteen weeks of pregnancy”*
- **53 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“State governments must not be allowed to prohibit abortions after the first fifteen weeks of pregnancy”*

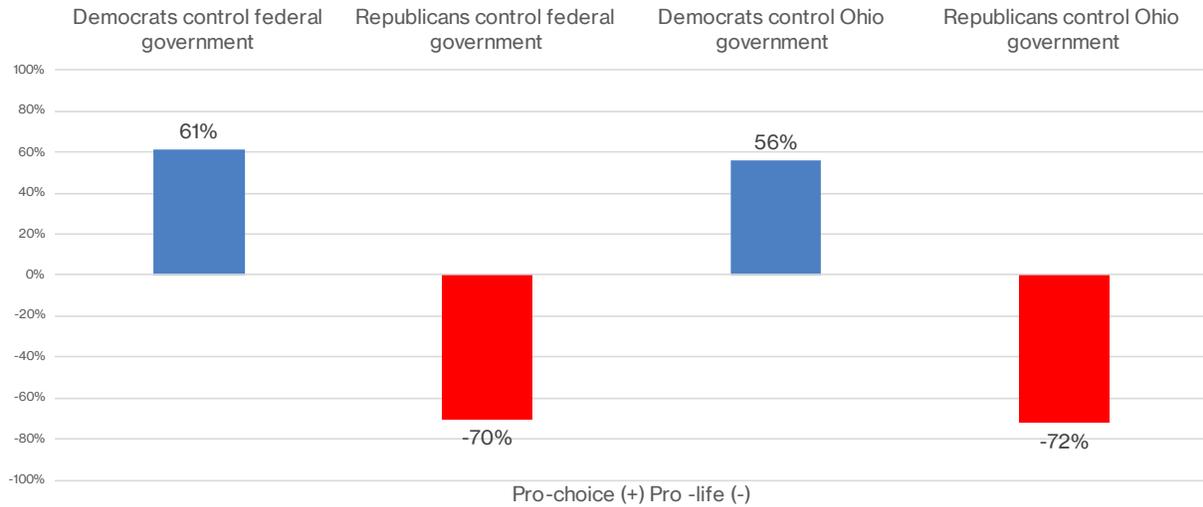
## Abortion Restrictions



Ohioans' views on abortion restrictions are strongly associated with views of partisan control of government (see nearby chart).

- Large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Democratic control of the federal government (**61 percent**) and state government (**56 percent**) agree that *“State governments must not be allowed to prohibit abortions after the first fifteen weeks of pregnancy”*
- Meanwhile, large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Republican control of the federal government (**-70 percent**) and state government (**-72 percent**) agree that *“State governments must be allowed to prohibit abortions after the first fifteen weeks of pregnancy”*

## Partisan Control and Abortion Restrictions



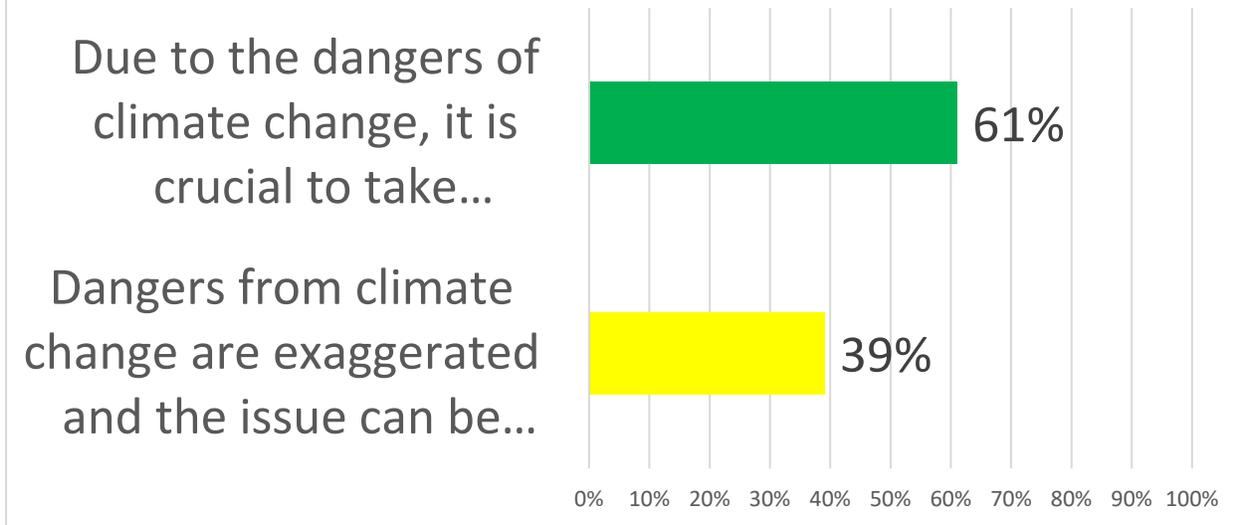
### *Addressing Climate Change*

The degree of immediacy in addressing climate change is part of the controversy surrounding the topic. This policy question is both a federal and state government responsibility.

When asked to choose between two alternatives (see nearby chart),

- **61 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“Due to the dangers of climate change, it is crucial to take immediate steps to address the issue”*
- **39 percent** of Ohioans agree that: *“Dangers from climate change are exaggerated and the issue can be addressed steadily over time”*

## Climate Change



Ohioans' views on addressing climate change are strongly associated with views of partisan control of government (see nearby chart).

- Large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Democratic control of the federal government (**64 percent**) and state government (**60 percent**) agree that *“Due to the dangers of climate change, it is crucial to take immediate steps to address the issue”*
- Meanwhile, large majorities of Ohioans who prefer Republican control of the federal government (**-83 percent**) and state government (**-85 percent**) agree that *“Dangers from climate change are exaggerated and the issue can be addressed steadily over time”*

## Partisan Control and Climate Change

