

Ohio Issue Publics 2020

What issues do Ohio voters want to hear most about from the presidential candidates? How does this issue agenda vary among voters? And how might the candidate's statements influence who wins Ohio?

Some answers to these questions are provided by the mid-summer Your Vote Ohio poll, which asked a random sample of registered voters to rank the importance of sixteen issues, from highest to lowest priority. (See nearby box for survey details).

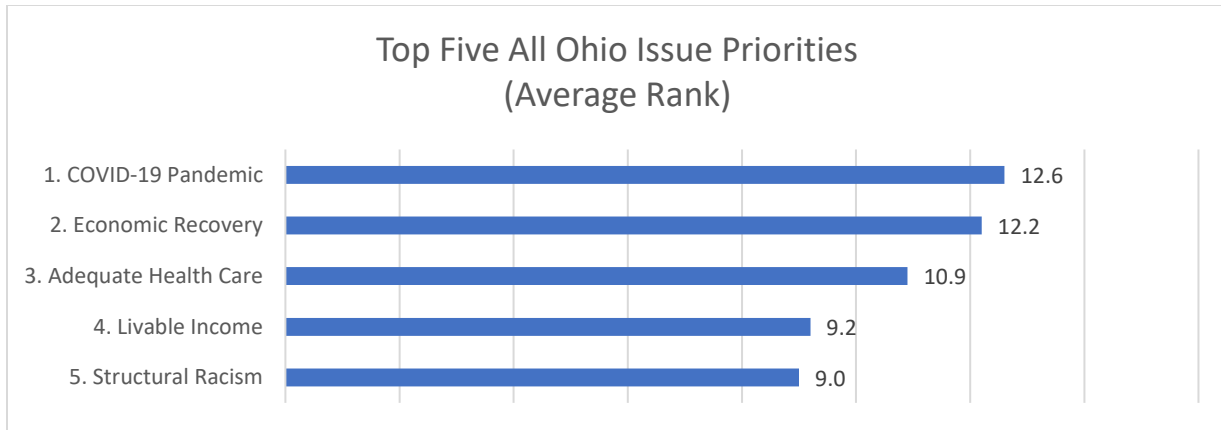
Overall, Ohio voters give top priority to the COVID-19 pandemic and related challenges. But these overall priorities are the combination of five distinct "issue publics" among Ohio voters, each with special priorities. The five issue publics are building blocks for winning Ohio in 2020.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The survey was a joint project of Your Vote Ohio and the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at The University of Akron. Conducted by the Center for Marketing and Opinion Research, it was a random sample of 1,037 registered voters in Ohio, administered 100 percent online between June 24 and July 15, 2020, with a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points. The list of 16 issues was synthesized from information gathered in Your Voice Ohio listening sessions as important to improving life in their communities and what Americans have said in national polls are most important this election year. In order of priority ranking, the 16 issues were: COVID-19 pandemic; economic recovery; adequate health care; livable income; structural racism; healthy affordable food; high quality education; criminal justice reform; affordable housing; mental health services; international affairs; environmental protection; infrastructure improvements; necessary public services, drug abuse treatment; effective immigration laws.

All Ohio Priorities

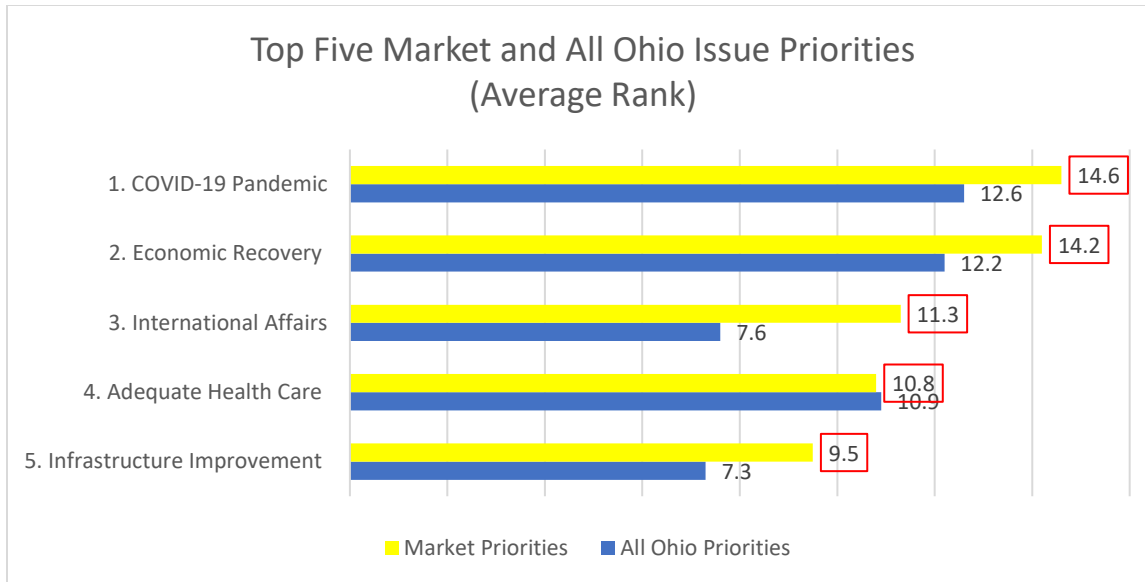
Not surprising, the COVID-19 Pandemic ranks as the top priority for all Ohio voters (with an average score of 12.6 out of 16). Economic Recovery is in second place (12.2), followed by Adequate Health Care (10.9) in third place. Rounding out the top five issues is a Livable Income (9.2) in fourth place and Structural Racism (9.0) in fifth place. [See nearby chart.]



The issue agenda tell us what voters want to *hear about most*, not what answers *may persuade* them to vote one way or another. Such persuasion is likely to depend in part on how voters combine issue priorities. These issue publics include voters with “market,” “safety net,” “public order,” “progressive,” and “populist” priorities.

Market Priorities

Voters with market priorities make up about one-fifth of Ohio registered voters (21.3 percent). The “market” label reflects an emphasis on economic growth. Note that this issue public gives the top ranking to the COVID-19 Pandemic (14.6 out of 16), followed closely by Economic Recovery in second place (14.2), and International Affairs in third place (11.3). In fact, these voters rank these three issues the *highest* of all five issue publics. Rounding out the top five priorities is Adequate Health Care in fourth place (10.8) and Infrastructure Improvements in fifth place (9.5). [See nearby chart.]



In contrast, market-oriented voters give lower rankings to Structural Racism (6.3) and Criminal Justice Reform (6.6), and middle-level rankings to High Quality Education (9.1) and a Livable Income (8.6).

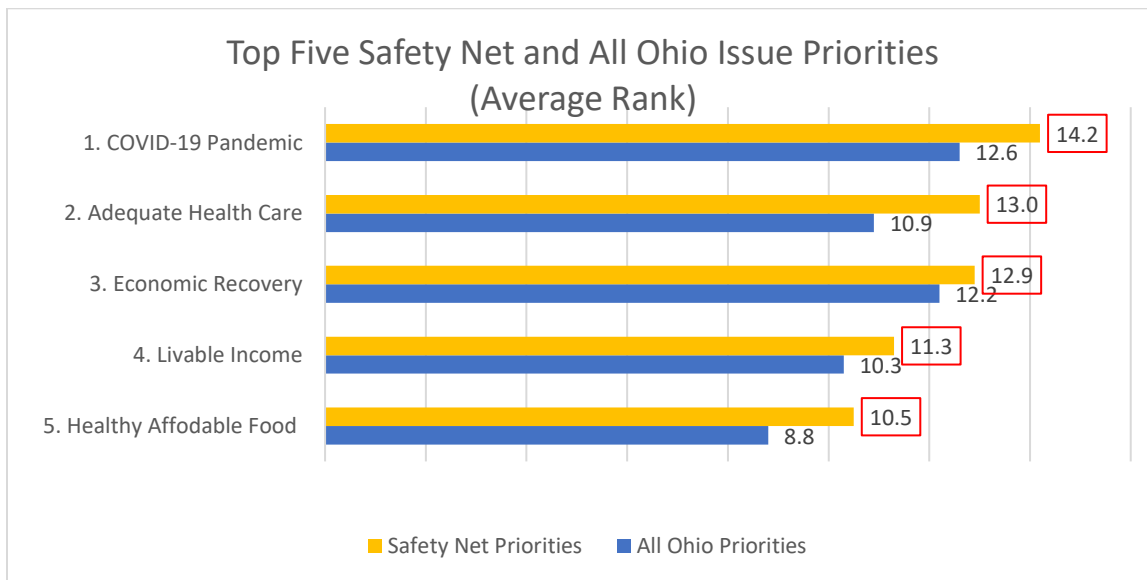
Voters with market priorities tend to be older, white, married men (in fact, the most masculine of the five groups). They tend to be well-educated, affluent, and participate in Catholic and Mainline Protestant congregations. But there is some demographic diversity as well: two-fifths are women and one-fifth belong to the white working class. These voters are most common in northeastern Ohio, but found in the metropolitan areas across the state.

Politically, these voters tend to be conservative Republicans, and on balance supported Donald Trump’s re-election at the time of the poll. However, more than one-quarter backed the election of Joe Biden. (Biden held a slim four percentage-point lead in this mid-summer poll.) These voters are evenly divided on whether the country is on the “right” or “wrong” track (50% each). They are likely to vote this year, and to win Ohio, Donald Trump needs to maximize their support.

Market-oriented voters most want to hear the presidential candidates’ views on the pandemic, especially as it relates to the performance of the economy.

Safety Net Priorities

Voters with safety net priorities also make up about one-fifth of Ohio registered voters (21.5 percent). The “safety net” label reflects an emphasis on basic human needs. Note that this issue public gives top ranking to the COVID-19 Pandemic as well (14.2 out of 16, almost as high as market-oriented voters), followed by Adequate Health Care in second place (13.0), and Economic Recovery close behind in third place (12.9). Rounding out the top five priorities is a Livable Income in fourth place (11.3) and Affordable Healthy Food in fifth place (10.5). In fact, these voters rank Adequate Health Care, Livable Income, and Affordable Healthy Food the *highest* of all five issue publics. [See nearby chart.]



In contrast, safety net-oriented voters also give lower rankings to Structural Racism (7.3) and Criminal Justice Reform (6.8), and give middle-level rankings to Affordable Housing (9.9) and High Quality Education (8.7).

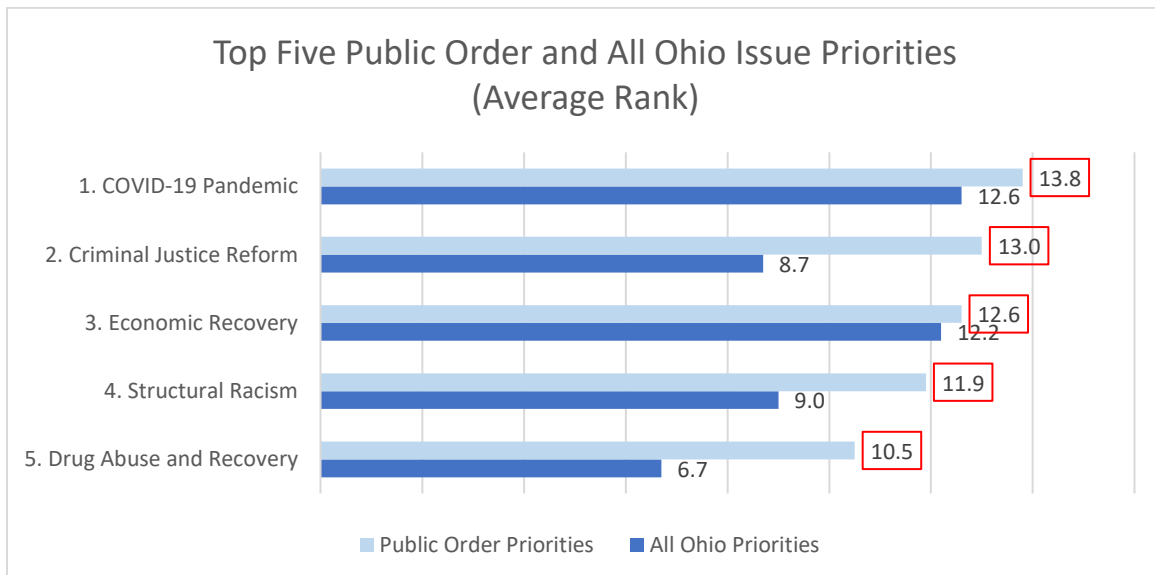
Voters with safety net priorities tend to be middle-age, white, married women (in fact, the most feminine of all the groups). They tend to have moderate levels of education and income, and participate in Catholic and Evangelical Protestant congregations. There is some demographic diversity here as well: one-third are men and one-quarter belong to the white working class. These voters are most common in northeastern and western Ohio.

Politically, these voters are closely divided between Republicans and Democrats, with a large contingent of independents. They tend to be ideologically moderate. This group was almost evenly split in their presidential preferences at the time of the poll. Almost three-quarters of these voters say the country is on the “wrong” track (73%). Safety net-oriented voters are swing voters in 2020 and the candidate that prevails among them may well win Ohio. Both turnout and vote choice will matter.

Safety net-oriented voters most want to hear the presidential candidates’ views on the pandemic, especially as it relates to the well being of ordinary people.

Public Order Priorities

Voters with public order priorities are the largest of the five groups, making up a little more than one-fifth of Ohio registered voters (22.3 percent). The “public order” label reflects an emphasis on effective security. Note that this issue public also gives top ranking to the COVID-19 Pandemic (13.8 out of 16, a bit lower than the safe net-oriented voters), followed by Criminal Justice Reform in second place (13.0) and Economic Recovery in third place (12.6). Rounding out the top five priorities is Structural Racism in fourth place (11.9) and Drug Abuse Treatment in fifth place (10.5). In fact, these voters rank Criminal Justice Reform and Drug Abuse Treatment the *highest* of all five issue publics (and are a close second on Structural Racism). [See nearby chart.]



In contrast, public order-oriented voters give lower rankings to Adequate Health Care (8.4, the only group where this issue did not rank in their top five priorities) and a Livable Wage (6.1), and give middle-level rankings to Healthy Affordable Food (9.1) and High Quality Education (9.1).

Voters with public order priorities tend to be young and single, almost evenly divided between men and women. They have moderate levels of education and income, a bit higher than safety-net oriented voters. Almost one-third are non-whites, with more than two-fifths of African Americans falling in this group. At the same time, more than one-fifth belong to the white working class. These voters are the most religiously observant of the five groups, but participate in a wide variety of congregations. They are most common in central and southern Ohio, but also within the state's major cities.

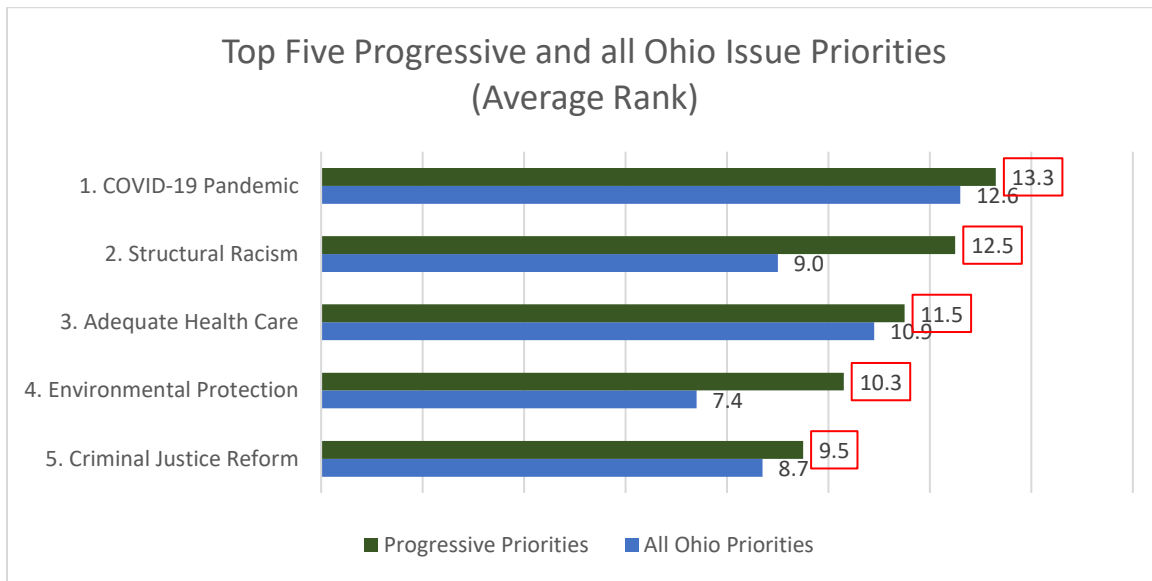
Politically, these voters are also closely divided between Republicans and Democrats, with a large contingent of independents. They tend to be ideologically moderate as well. And this group was divided in their presidential preferences at the time of the poll, but with an advantage to Joe Biden. Only about one-half of these voters say the country is on the “wrong” track (52%). These voters are open to persuasion this year and Joe Biden needs high turnout and good support among them to win Ohio.

Public order-oriented voters most want to hear the presidential candidates' views on the pandemic, but also about the impact of public safety on ordinary people.

Progressive Priorities

Voters with progressive priorities make up one-fifth of Ohio registered voters (20.0 percent). The “progressive” label reflects an emphasis on fundamental social reform. Note that this issue public also gives top ranking to the COVID-19 Pandemic (13.3 out of 16, a little lower than voters with public order priorities), followed closely by Structural Racism in second place (12.5), and Adequate Health Care in third place (11.5). Rounding out the top five priorities is Environmental Protection in fourth place (10.3) and Criminal Justice Reform in fifth place (9.5). In fact, these voters rank Structural Racism and Environmental

Protection *highest* of all five groups (and are a close second on Criminal Justice Reform). [See nearby chart.]



In contrast, progressive-oriented voters give lower rankings to Healthy Affordable Food (6.9) and High Quality Education (7.2), and give middle-level rankings to Economic Recovery (9.4) and a Livable Income (9.3).

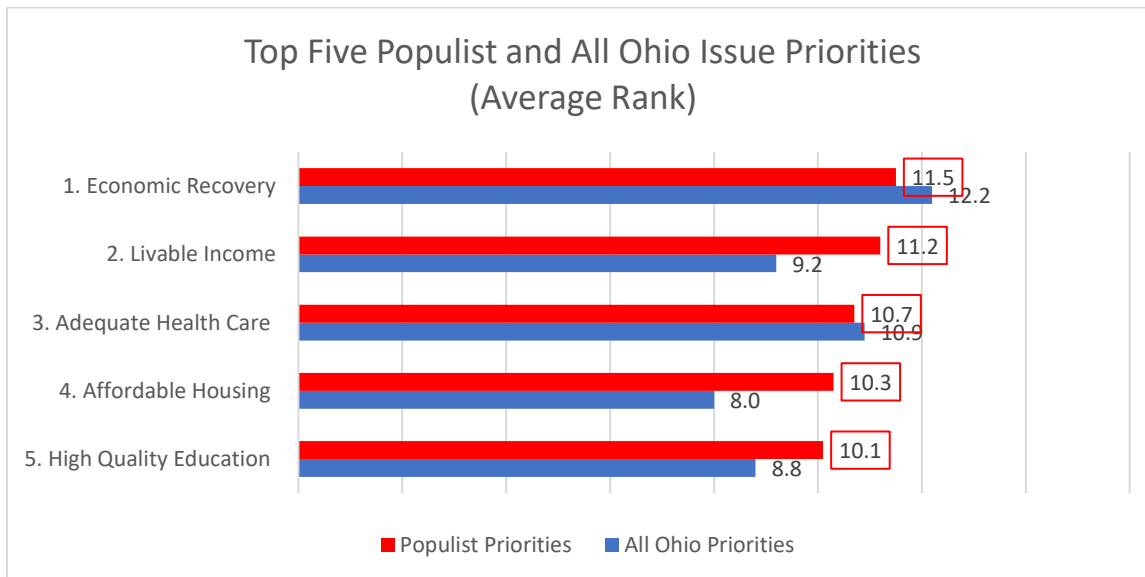
Voters with progressive priorities tend to be young, single white women (in fact, the second youngest and second most feminine of the five groups). They tend to be well-educated, with middle incomes, and they are the most likely to be religiously unaffiliated. There is some demographic diversity as well: almost one-fifth are non-white and one-fifth belong to the white working class. These voters are most common in northeastern and central Ohio.

Politically, these voters tend to be liberal Democrats and on balance supported Joe Biden election at the time of the poll. However, one-quarter were weak Biden backers or for minor party candidates. Nearly nine in ten of these voters say the country in on “wrong” track (86%). These voters are likely to vote this year, and to win Ohio, Joe Biden needs to maximize their support.

Progressive-oriented voters most want to hear the presidential candidates’ views on the pandemic, and also about racial tensions and environmental challenges.

Populist Priorities

Voters with populist priorities are the smallest of the five issue publics, making up about one-seventh of Ohio registered voters (14.9 percent). The “populist” label reflects a discontent with public and private institutions. Note that this issue public gives top ranking to Economic Recovery (11.5 out of 16—lower than all the other groups except the progressive-oriented voters), followed closely by a Livable Income in second place (11.2), and Adequate Health Care in third place (10.7). Rounding out the top five priorities is Affordable Housing in fourth place (10.3) and High Quality Education in fifth place (10.1). In fact, these voters rank Affordable Housing and High Quality Education the *highest* of all five issue publics. [See nearby chart.]



In contrast to the other four issue publics, populist-oriented voters give the COVID-19 Pandemic the *lowest* ranking overall of all five groups (4.5 out of 16). They also give lower rankings to Criminal Justice Reform (6.7), Environmental Protection (6.1), and Structural Racism (6.0). At the same time, these voters rank Infrastructure Improvements (9.6), Mental Health Services (9.2), Immigration Reform (9.0) and Necessary Public Services (8.5) *highest* of all five groups, and are close seconds on Healthy Affordable Food (9.8) and International Affairs (8.8).

Voters with populist priorities tend to be white men of various ages (in fact, the second most masculine of the five groups). They tend to have the least education and the lowest incomes. Many participate in Evangelical Protestant congregations, but just as many are religiously unaffiliated. More than one-quarter belong to the white working class and one-sixth are non-whites. These voters are most common in eastern Ohio.

Politically, these voters tend to be Republicans and Independents, and a majority are ideologically conservative. On balance, they supported Donald Trump's re-election at the time of the poll. However, one-sixth backed Joe Biden, while another one-sixth were undecided or for minor party candidates. More than one-half of these voters say the country is on the "right" track (55%). To win Ohio, President Trump needs high turnout and a good showing among these voters.

Populist-oriented voters are not interested in the pandemic, and instead they most want to hear the presidential candidates' views on the financial well-being of ordinary people.