

Issue Salience in the 2022 Midterm Elections

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Fear of Crime Looms Large for Voters, to Republicans' Advantage

Inflation Plagues Democrats in Polling. Will It Crush Them at the Ballot Box?

In sprint to November, Democrats seize on shifting landscape over abortion

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What is the magnitude of parties' ownership over different issues?

- ▶ Closely divided on many issues
- ▶ Crime isn't a clear winning issue for Republicans among groups that care most about it

Penn/SurveyMonkey tracking poll

- ▶ River sample from SurveyMonkey, recruited via banner ads
- ▶ Post-weighting: > 150,000 responses collected mid-September through Election Day
- ▶ Weighted by age, race, gender, education, nonwhite \times education \times age, 2020 presidential vote
- ▶ Outperformed polling average in key races [details](#)
- ▶ Focus on House vote choice throughout presentation

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Which problems did the public perceive as most important in fall 2022? Asked to choose among five plausible options:

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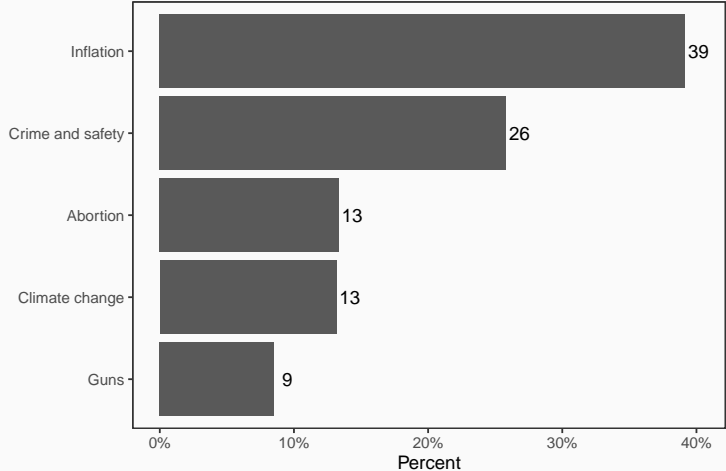
*Which one of the following issues matters most to you right now?
[Inflation; Crime and safety; Guns; Abortion; Climate change]*

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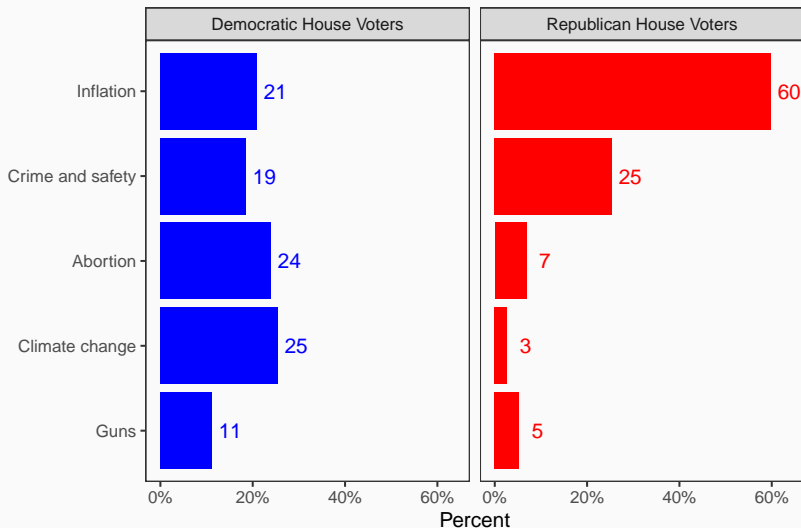


Most Important Problem, by House Vote Choice

2. Were Dems and Reps divided over which problems are most important?

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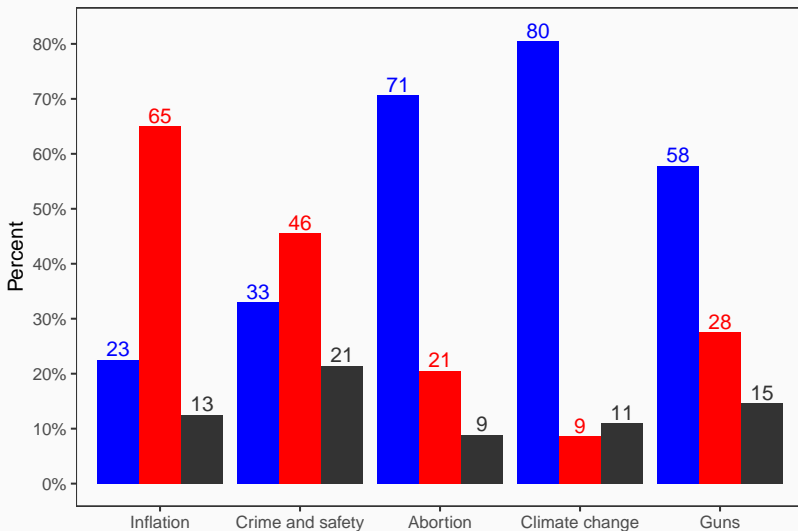


House Vote Choice, by Most Important Problem

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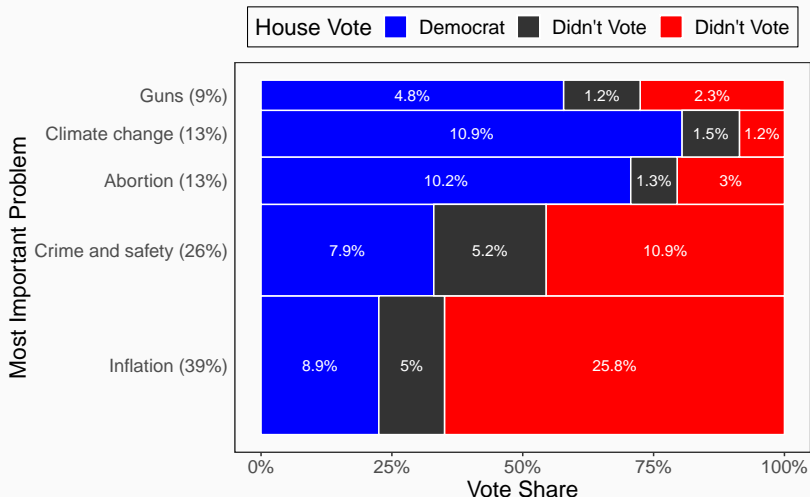


Putting It Together: Voting Bloc Analysis

Partition the electorate into combinations of MIP and House vote choice:

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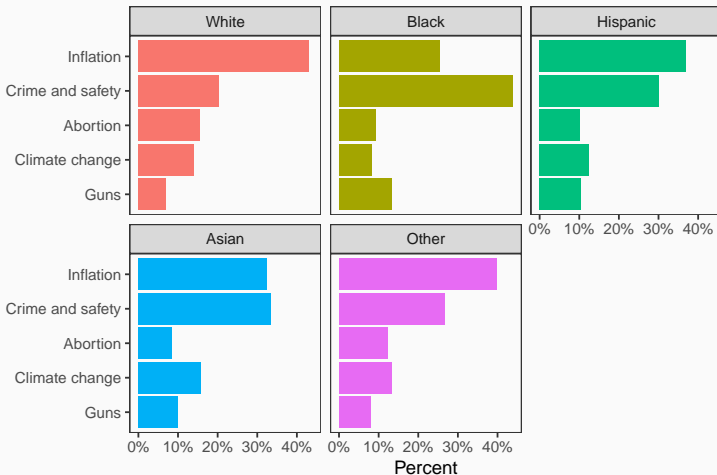


Most Important Problem, by Race

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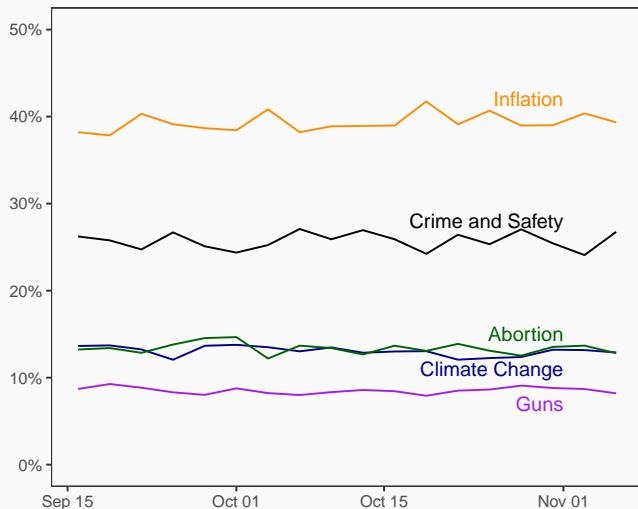


Stability in Issue Importance Over the Campaign

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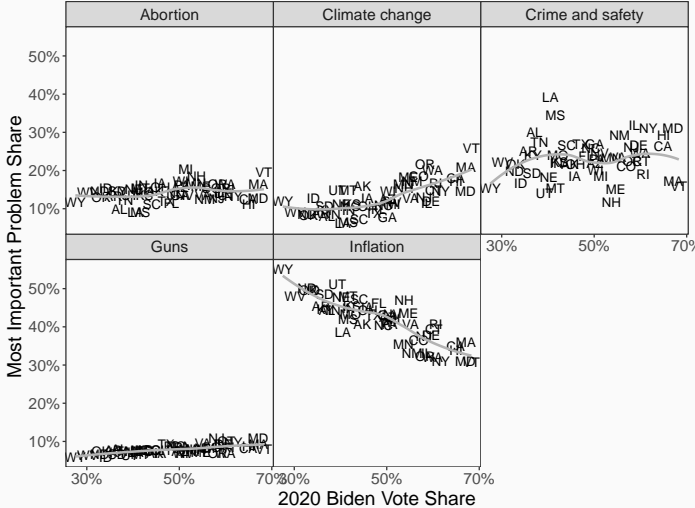
Note: Three-day rolling average; weights applied within each time window

State-Level Variation

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Note: MRP estimates of most important problem by state.

Issue Ownership

- ▶ Strategic debates about which issues to emphasize rely on issue “ownership”
- ▶ Only beneficial for a party to campaign on an issue if the party is more aligned with the public than the other party
- ▶ Key to understanding plausibility of narratives about realignment

Questions About Policy Agreement

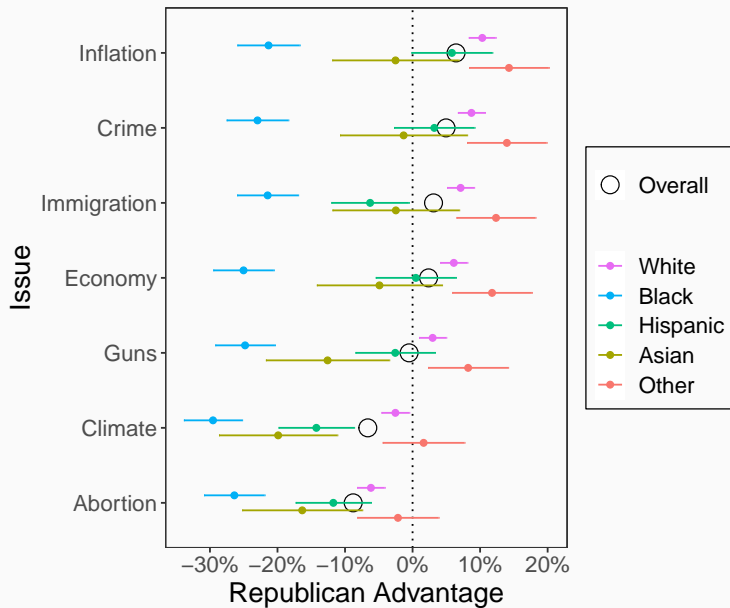
Smaller sample ($N \approx 8,000$) asked about party preference on several issues:

Who do you agree more with on [issue], the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?

[The economy; Crime; Illegal immigration; Gun policy; Abortion; Inflation; Climate change]

Responses across issues are highly correlated, but there are still meaningful differences.

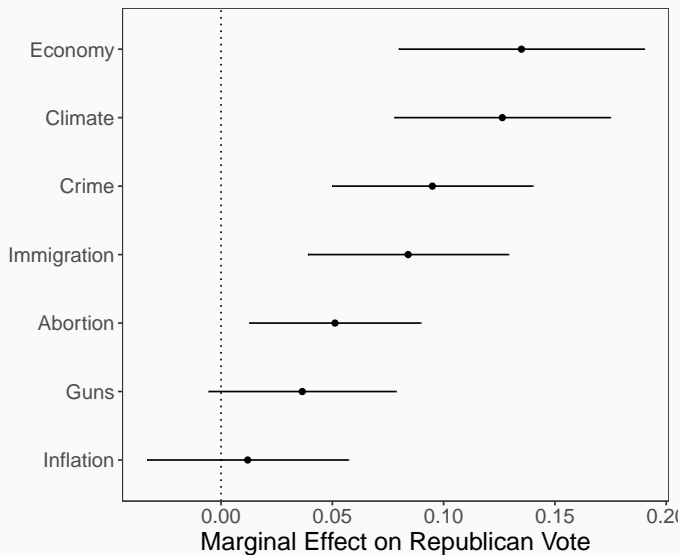
Issue Ownership



Which Issues Uniquely Predict Vote Choice?

- ▶ Respondents may agree with a party on an issue, but it only affects vote if the preference is sufficiently strong and voter cares about that issue
- ▶ Regress an indicator for voting Republican on indicators for preferring Republicans on each issue
- ▶ Coefficients are (roughly) interpretable as average issue weights

Predictors of Republican Voting



Note: Includes controls for age, race, gender, education, and party ID.

Summing Up

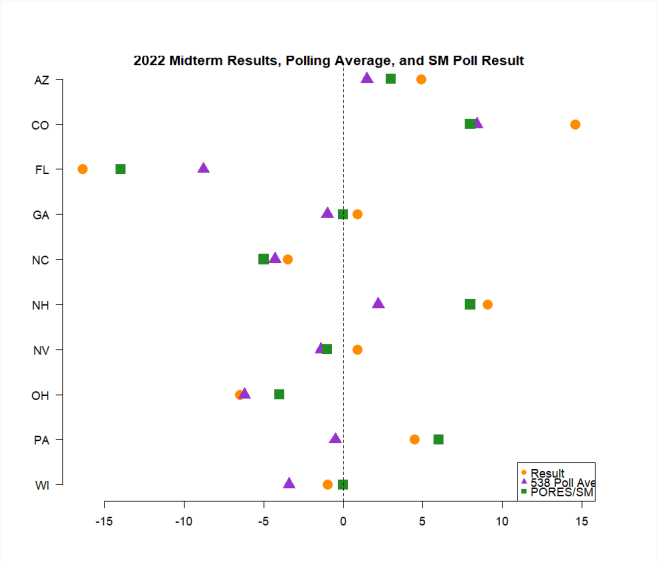
- ▶ Inflation was cited as the most important issue among five plausible alternatives — likely proxying for general economic concerns
- ▶ Republicans, especially, viewed inflation as important
- ▶ Crime and safety was next most-important problem, especially among non-white voters
- ▶ Democrats are seen as better on crime among racial/ethnic groups that care most about it

Thanks!

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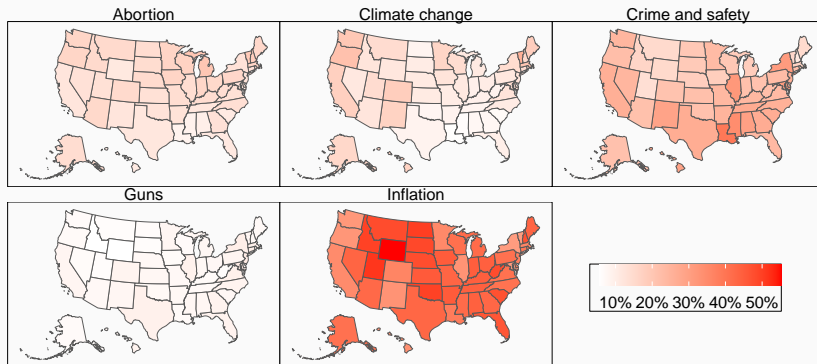
`williammarble.co`

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State-Level Variation



Note: MRP estimates of most important problem.

Do Voters Distinguish Between Parties Across Issues?

Correlation in party preference across issues

Economy	1	0.83	0.78	0.77	0.77	0.75	0.68
Inflation	0.83	1	0.77	0.75	0.73	0.7	0.65
Crime	0.78	0.77	1	0.76	0.74	0.71	0.65
Immigration	0.77	0.75	0.76	1	0.72	0.73	0.66
Guns	0.77	0.73	0.74	0.72	1	0.75	0.69
Climate	0.75	0.7	0.71	0.73	0.75	1	0.72
Abortion	0.68	0.65	0.65	0.66	0.69	0.72	1
	Economy	Inflation	Crime	Immigration	Guns	Climate	Abortion