A new survey shows the deep loss of trust in major U.S. institutions since start of pandemic
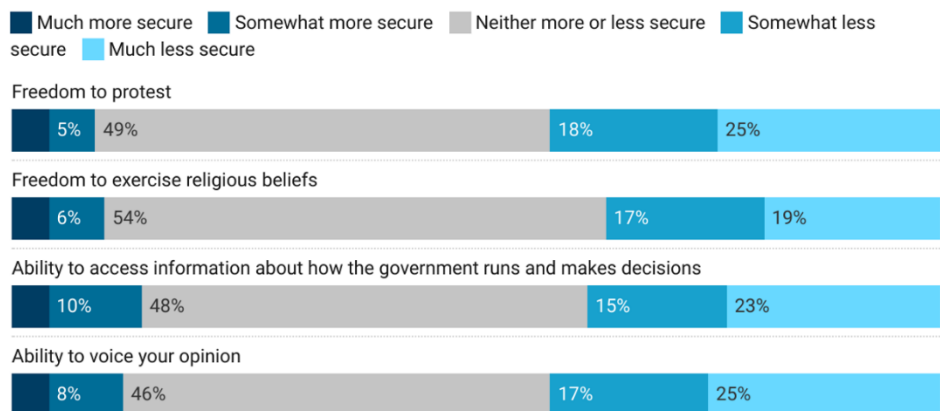
Today Americans for Prosperity, in conjunction with YouGov, released key findings and full crosstabs from a new survey that measures the U.S. general public's attitudes on the protection of their civil liberties since the start of the pandemic.

On every question asking about a specific civil liberty, more people feel that their civil liberties are less secure since the start of the pandemic than more secure.

- Freedom to protest was thought to have become the least secure of the liberties asked about, with 43 percent of people saying it was now less secure and only 9 percent thinking it was more secure.
- The ability to access information about how the government runs and makes decisions was the most even between those who felt it was less secure and more secure, with 38 percent thinking it was less secure and 14 percent thinking it was more secure.
- Almost half of people on each question felt that their civil liberties were neither more nor less secure since the start of the pandemic.

More people in the U.S. feel their rights have become less secure since beginning of pandemic

Do you feel that, since the beginning of the pandemic, your [ ] has become more secure or less secure?

Legend: Much more secure · Somewhat more secure · Neither more or less secure · Somewhat less secure · Much less secure

Freedom to protest
5% | 49% | 18% | 25%

Freedom to exercise religious beliefs
6% | 54% | 17% | 19%

Ability to access information about how the government runs and makes decisions
10% | 48% | 15% | 23%

Ability to voice your opinion
8% | 46% | 17% | 25%

Source: YouGov + AFP Polling | February 2022 · Created with Datawrapper

The U.S. public's trust has gone down for many government agencies, offices, and institutions since the beginning of the pandemic.

- The institutions that saw the largest percent of respondents say that their trust had gone "way down" were the Center for Disease Control (CDC) at 35 percent, the office of the president of the United States at 39 percent, and the U.S. Congress at 41 percent.
- Partisanship clearly plays a large role in people's understanding of and reaction to government actions during the pandemic. The least polarized responses regarding trust are both state-based: governors and state legislators.

Republicans' trust in many institutions has declined more than Democrats' since start of pandemic

Since the beginning of the pandemic, has your trust in each of the following gone up or down? [Showing % who said "Way down]

● Democrats ● Percent who answered "Way down" ● Republicans
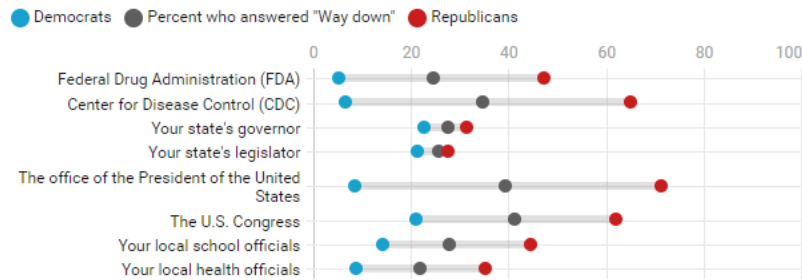
Source: YouGov + AFP | February 2022 · Created with Datawrapper

The survey inquired about five principles that could act as guideposts for government officials when constructing public health rules and still upholding people's civil liberties. On each of those five questions, **more people felt government officials did a poor job rather than a good job.**

- On inviting the public into the process, 58 percent of people thought government officials did a somewhat or very poor job. Only 22 percent said they did a somewhat or very good job.
- On clearly communicating to the public about data or reasoning regarding any restriction or requirements, 59 percent said somewhat or very poor job (with 40 percent saying 'very poor').
- 55 percent think government officials have done a somewhat or very poor job re-assessing any restrictions or requirements.
- 52 percent of people thought government officials did a somewhat or very poor job keeping any restrictions or requirements as focused and narrow as possible.
- The same percent, 52, also thought government officials did a somewhat or very poor job allowing sensible modifications to rules, as opposed to having blanket bans on activities.
- And finally, 54 percent of people thought that government officials have done a somewhat or very poor job applying any restrictions or requirements equally to all people.

Most people think government officials have done a poor job with common sense approaches to COVID rulemaking

During the COVID pandemic, do you think government officials have done a good or poor job [ ]?

■ Very good job   ■ Somewhat good job   ☐ Not sure   ■ Somewhat poor job   ■ Very poor job

Inviting public input

5%	17%	20%	21%	37%

Being transparent with the public

7%	21%	13%	19%	40%

Re-assessing any restrictions or requirements based on new data or information

6%	23%	15%	21%	34%

Keeping any restricitons or requirements as focusd and narrow as possible

5%	22%	21%	19%	33%

Source: AFP + YouGov | February 2022 · Get the data · Created with Datawrapper

When asked if people thought communications from health officials explaining their decisions were generally clear or unclear, 46 percent said unclear and 35 percent said clear. There were large partisan differences in responses, with Republicans much less likely to say that communications were clear compared to Democrats.

Although large partisan differences exist, more people generally feel communications from health officials were unclear

Were communications from health officials explaining their decisions generally clear or unclear?

■ Communications from health officials explaining their decisions were generally clear   ☐ Not sure
■ Communications from health officials explaining their decisions were generally unclear

Democrat

59%	17%	24%

Republican

14%	14%	72%

Independent/Other

30%	17%	52%

Source: AFP + YouGov | February 2022 · Created with Datawrapper

With regards to government's role in stopping COVID misinformation online, whether intentional or not, the public was somewhat evenly split among three options. Thirty percent of the public feels the government should ban the posting of misinformation online, 36 percent feels the government should not ban misinformation, but government officials should use their own speech to explain why the

misinformation is false, and another 18% feels that the government should not ban misinformation and should largely be hands off.

- Democrats (52 percent) were much more likely than Republicans (19 percent) to say that the government should ban misinformation outright.
- The youngest cohort in the survey, those 18-24 were least likely to call for an outright government ban of misinformation.

The youngest age group is much less authoritarian than other groups

Like with many topics, some individuals post mis-information about COVID online, deliberate or not. What do you think the proper response to that mis-information should be from government officials?

- The government should ban posting of covid misinformation online
- The government should not seek to ban covid misinforation online, but government officials should use their own speech to explain why the misinformation is false
- The government should not seek to ban covid misinforation online, and should largely be hands off
- Something else

Age				
18-24	14%	52%	11%	24%
25-44	31%	33%	14%	22%
45-64	34%	34%	21%	11%
65+	32%	37%	24%	7%
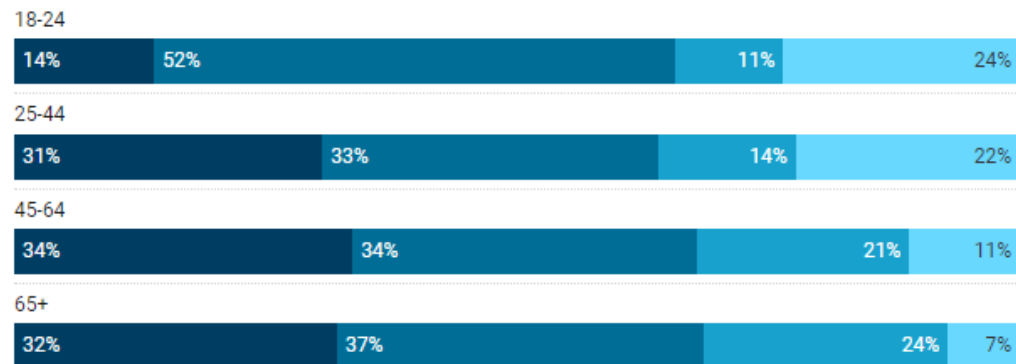
Source: YouGov + AFP | February 2022 · Created with Datawrapper

And finally, with respect to the feeling to self-censor their views, or self-censor their questions of others, about COVID, 20 percent said they felt a lot of pressure to self-censor, 26 percent said some pressure, 24 percent said not much pressure, and 30 percent said not pressure at all.

People's perception of self-censorship while discussing COVID is fairly evenly split across the spectrum

How much pressure have you felt to self-censor specifically about your views, or even ask questions of others, about COVID and the proper response to COVID?

- ■ A lot of pressure to self-censor
- ■ Some pressure to self-censor
- ■ Not much pressure to self-censor
- ■ No pressure at all to self-censor

General Public

20%	26%	24%	30%

Key Takeaways from YouGov/American for Prosperity Poll on COVID and Civil Liberties

Many have argued that while many COVID-restrictions infringed on civil liberties, the benefits of such measures outweigh the costs.

But, as the results of this survey make clear, government officials could have done a better job protecting civil liberties during the pandemic.

And although it's good to see the largest percentage of those polled answering "no pressure at all" to the question of whether Americans felt pressured to self-censor their views about COVID and the proper response, 46 percent of people saying "a lot" or "some" pressure to self-censor is very high.

If Americans feel their civil liberties are at greater risk today, that's bad news for foundational rights and the progress they make possible, as well as for our political leaders.

"Civil liberties and COVID response never should have been in conflict," said Americans for Prosperity vice president for legal and judicial strategy **Casey Mattox**. "But two years into this pandemic, Americans feel their rights are less secure. And the result is decreased confidence in public officials themselves. Government leaders can learn from this experience. They need public confidence to combat public health challenges, but that trust erodes when Americans perceive them as ignoring reasonable concerns about their basic rights."

Methodology

 YouGov interviewed 1068 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 1000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame based on the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample, matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores, those matched cases and the frame were combined, and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 and 2020 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.

Read the survey toplines and tables.