She’s the Difference: Rising Cost of Living Dominates Concerns
Survey of Likely Voters Age 50 and Over

A new poll from AARP found that women voters age 50 and over have one thing on their minds – kitchen table economics and the day-to-day experience of rising prices. They are worried about having enough income to cover their living expenses, saving for retirement and if Social Security will be there for them when they need it. And, the majority say the economy is not working well for them – a significant increase from before the pandemic. While this cohort of women is far from a monolith, these concerns are generally consistent across age, income, and race/ethnicity.

The opinions of these women matter. They are a key bloc of voters who can make the difference in 2022, deciding the balance of power in Congress and in statehouses across the country. According to voter file and Census Bureau data, they make up a little more than one-quarter (27%) of registered voters and cast nearly a third (30%) of all ballots in both the 2020 and 2018 elections. In 2020, 83% of registered women voters in this age group turned out, and in 2018, the last mid-term election, they were 15% more likely to vote than the population at large.

Women voters age 50 and over may be committed to turning out, but they haven’t made up their minds yet about how they will vote. Only 17% say they know who they will vote for in November, and nearly two-thirds (65%) say they will not make a decision until weeks or even days before Election Day. Right now, they are dissatisfied voters. They feel the country is deeply divided and give elected officials poor grades on a range of issues, particularly on the critical issue of rising prices. They are split more evenly by party (44% Republican – 45% Democrat) in sharp contrast to their male counterparts who are solidly Republican, and they prefer candidates who will prioritize working together to get things done.

This survey was conducted by NORC and analyzed by a bipartisan team of pollsters: Lake Research Partners, GBAO, Echelon Insights, and Bellwether Research.

KEY FINDINGS

Rising costs – and having enough income and retirement savings to keep up with them – are the biggest worries for women voters age 50 and over.

- Nearly half (46%) of women voters age 50 and over rank rising cost of living as the most important issue facing the country. It is the top issue for women across age groups (50-64 and 65+) and income levels. While racism ranks highest among Black women voters age 50 and over, rising cost of living is a close second, and it is the number one issue for White, Hispanic/Latina and AAPI women.

- A majority (59%) say rising prices are the most important thing to them personally when thinking about the economy. Rising prices are rated significantly higher than government spending (11%), wages and income (11%), the stock market (9%), taxes (6%), and unemployment (1%).

- When thinking about the economy, these women are most concerned about having saved enough for retirement (24%) and the cost of food (23%), findings that are consistent across racial and ethnic groups.
Nearly three-fourths (72%) say they are concerned about their income keeping up with rising costs, and two-thirds (67%) are concerned about Social Security being whey they retire. And, women voters age 50 and over are more likely to be very concerned about Social Security (43%) than their male counterparts (34%).

A majority of women voters age 50 and over say the economy is not working well for them—a significant decline from pre-COVID-19.

More women voters age 50 and over say the economy is NOT working well for them personally (52%) than say it is working well (48%). This is a significant shift from an AARP 2019 survey of registered voters which found that only 37% of women age 50 and over thought that the economy was not working well for them while 57% said it was working well.

Most say their personal financial situation will stay the same or get worse in the next 12 months. A plurality (47%) say they think their personal financial situation will stay the same, while 39% think it will get worse, and 13% think it will improve.

Women voters age 50 and over are unimpressed with the job politicians are doing, and while they are very committed to voting, they are not yet committed to voting for either party in particular.

Only 17% of women voters age 50 and over have decided who they will vote for in November, including 22% of Republicans, 14% of Democrats and 7% of Independents. Nineteen percent say they will decide several months before the election; 36% say several weeks before; 21% say several days before and 8% anticipate deciding on Election Day.

Significant majorities give elected officials D/F grades on issues including prices rising faster than income (82%), crime (78%) immigration (75%), cost of healthcare and prescription drugs (75%), and the wage gap between rich and poor (71%).

On most issues, Republican and Independent women voters age 50 and over are more likely than Democratic women voters in this age group to give elected officials a failing grade of “F”. Exceptions include the wage gap between rich and poor, protecting voting access and climate change, where Democratic women age 50 and over are more likely to score elected officials as failing. A plurality of Independent women gives failing grades on prices rising faster than income, immigration and the cost of healthcare and prescription drugs.

By more than a two-to-one margin, women voters age 50 and over prefer a politician who is willing to work together to get things done, even if it means compromising on voters’ values (67%) over a politician who consistently fights for their values, even if this means not finding a solution very often (30%). There are, however, some important differences among subgroups. The majority (53%) of Hispanic/Latina women in this age group prefer a politician who consistently fights for their values. And, while Republican women voters age 50 and over are more likely to favor a values-prioritizing politician (40%) than Democratic women (21%) or Independents (29%), the majority (57%) prefer those willing to work together.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY: The AARP national survey was conducted by phone and online from February 18 to March 3, 2022 using NORC’s Foresight 50+ Panel. The final poll included 1,836 voters age 50 and over who are likely to vote in 2022, with oversamples of Black voters, Hispanic/Latino voters, Asian American/Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander voters as well as American Indian/Alaska Native voters. The survey includes a sample of 984 women voters 50 and over. Study margin of error: +/- 3.29%. For more information, contact Rachelle Cummins at rcummins@aarp.org. For media inquiries, contact media@aarp.org.