

Small Business Owners Say Economy Is Top Presidential Election Issue, New Poll Shows

8 in 10 small business owners rate the U.S. economy as average or poor

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The state of the U.S. economy is having a major influence on small business owners' attitudes towards the upcoming election, according to a new poll taken August 21-27 and released today by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and MetLife. Over half (57%) of small business owners rank the economy as the first or second most important issue influencing who they will vote for this November.

The survey also found that small business owners continue to view the economy as predominately negative. Most (78%) small business owners categorized the economy as "average," "somewhat poor" or "very poor" in August. That marks an 8-point increase from July and a significant (40 point) downward shift since January 2020, when 38% said the same.¹

"The pandemic has had an uneven economic impact on industries and workers, many of whom are small business owners. It's no wonder their driving issue for the upcoming election is the economy," said Neil Bradley, executive vice president and chief policy officer at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "We are now in a [K-shaped recovery](#), where many small businesses face severe long-term challenges. We need our elected leaders to come together and provide targeted relief to the industries and small businesses who have been the most deeply impacted. Inaction is simply unacceptable."

After the economy, small business owners cite taxes (27%), COVID-19 (25%), and healthcare (25%) as the most important 2020 election issues.

Political Positions and Partisan Gridlock

When it comes to political positions, 81% of small business owners report that the impact of a candidate's policies on their business play a role in deciding which candidate to support. Nearly half (48%) say it plays a *major* factor in their decision. Additionally:

- Female small business owners are twice as likely to consider race issues/racial inequality as one of the top two important factors when considering which presidential candidate to vote for compared to their male counterparts (16% vs. 8%). 18% of minority business owners and 10% of non-minority small business owners said the same.
- Veteran owned small businesses are more likely to view education (25%) and immigration reform (19%) as important versus all small business owners (12% and 7%, respectively).

The majority (68%) of small business owners agree that it is more important for political leaders to compromise than stick to their beliefs in order to get things done. Overwhelmingly, small business owners (82%) believe partisan gridlock in the federal government is a serious problem.

"Small business owners want the candidates they elect to work together and get things done," said Tom Sullivan, U.S. Chamber vice president of small business policy. "We find ourselves at a time where the

¹ Beginning in Q2 2020 (after the January survey) the MetLife/U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Index survey has been conducted via a monthly online survey, in place of the typical phone-based approach.

stakes could not be greater. Our representatives need to roll up their sleeves and find ways they can work together to ensure all businesses and sectors of the economy can be part of the economic recovery.”

Election Engagement

The majority (62%) of small business owners are more interested in the 2020 election (including 40% who are “much” more interested) compared to 2016. Meanwhile, just 11% say they are less interested in this presidential election compared to the previous one.

Interest levels break out differently across regions, sectors, and demographics:

- The most familiar “election battleground” regions are most interested in the election. Midwestern small businesses are more likely to show interest (71%) when compared to other regions (63% in the South, 58% in the Northeast, and 57% in the West).
- Minority-owned businesses seem to be less interested than their non-minority counterparts: 54% of minority-owned small businesses have more interest in this election compared to 64% of non-minority-owned small businesses saying the same.
- Women-owned business report being more interested in this election compared to the previous election: 65% of female-owned businesses report more interest in this election, while 60% of male-owned businesses report the same. The degree of interest is also higher among women business owners, 45% indicate they are “much more” interested in the 2020 presidential election (vs. 36% of male counterparts).
- All generations of small businesses report more interest in this election – 63% for Baby Boomers or older, 62% for Gen X, and 60% for Millennials.

Coronavirus Concerns

Overall, three-quarters of small businesses (74%) are concerned about the impact that the coronavirus will have on their business. Yet, the number of small businesses reporting feeling “very” concerned about the virus’s impact has decreased more than 20 points since March to 35%.

Today, more small business owners think the recovery period will take longer than they originally anticipated when the pandemic began. In April, 46% of small business owners said it would take “six months to a year” for the U.S. business climate to get back to normal. Now more than half (55%) of small businesses say the same.

“While we have seen some improvement since the pandemic hit, small business owners remain overwhelmingly concerned about the economy,” said Jessica Moser, senior vice president, Small and Specialty Business at MetLife. “As we head into this election season, small businesses are clearly saying they are looking for leaders to create policy solutions that will help them with recovery.”

The current Small Business Index score is 50.3 (an increase from 39.5 in Q2). However, this is still substantially below pre-pandemic levels: the Index score was 71.7 in Q1 of 2020, based on data collected before the full economic impact of the coronavirus set in.

About the Small Business Index

The MetLife & U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Index is part of a multiyear collaboration by MetLife and the U.S. Chamber to elevate the voice of America's small business owners and highlight the important role they play in the nation's economy. The initiative produces the quarterly Index, which is a survey of 1,000 small businesses to take the temperature of the sector, see where small business owners are confident, and where they are experiencing challenges.

Prior to the Q3 2020 release, MetLife and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce had switched to producing a special monthly coronavirus report, the Small Business Coronavirus Impact Poll, from April – July 2020. To read those reports, visit uschamber.com/sbpoll.

For small business resources on the coronavirus, please visit uschamber.com/co. The latest resources, step-by-step guidance, and insights to help American businesses, workers, and families is available at uschamber.com/coronavirus.

About the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world's largest business organization representing companies of all sizes across every sector of the economy. Our members range from the small businesses and local chambers of commerce that line the Main Streets of America to leading industry associations and large corporations. They all share one thing: They count on the U.S. Chamber to be their voice in Washington, across the country, and around the world. For more than 100 years, we have advocated for pro-business policies that help businesses create jobs and grow our economy.

About MetLife

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