2021 Updated Survey Results

Public sector employee views on finances and employment outlook due to COVID-19

Report prepared by MissionSquare Research Institute

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Executive summary

This report presents the results of a May 2021 national online survey conducted by MissionSquare Research Institute (formerly the Center for State and Local Government Excellence at ICMA-RC) and Greenwald Research of 1,203 state and local government employees, assessing their views on the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine, general concerns about COVID-19, the impact of the pandemic on their financial and employment outlook, and general satisfaction with their employer and their benefits.

Where applicable, comparisons are made between this survey and two prior MissionSquare Research Institute/Greenwald Research surveys of state and local government employees, conducted May 2020 (n=1,008) and October 2020 (n=1,205).

Top 10 takeaways

1. As of May 2021, **70%** of state and local government workers are **fully vaccinated**, and another 6% are partially vaccinated. The most influential factors in the decision to get vaccinated were ensuring their own personal health (63%), ensuring the health of friends and family (58%), and having the freedom to travel without worry (26%).

2. Positive **morale** regarding work among state and local government employees has **increased** over the past six months, **from 41%** in October 2020 **to 56%** in May 2021.

3. Thinking about their job going forward, respondents are most **concerned** about keeping their **family safe** from contracting COVID-19 (81%) – this percentage has remained **above 80%** since May 2020.

4. While 60% report that they value serving their community during this difficult time, **31%** say that working during the pandemic has made them **consider changing jobs**. One in four considering changing jobs would like to leave the government sector entirely.

5. **41%** of state and local government employees say they and their family have been **negatively impacted financially** by the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Nearly **one in three** state and local government workers (31%) have had to take on **more debt** since the start of the pandemic, and 38% of those with an emergency fund have had to spend money from it during the pandemic to make ends meet.

7. **76%** of respondents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has **impacted** the nature of **their job**. Of those, 31% say that it has been extremely or very difficult to adjust to those changes.

8. The percentage of state and local employees who are **working in person** has more than **doubled** over the past year, from 26% in May 2020 to 58% in May 2021.

9. **74%** of those engaged in any **in-person work** consider it at least **somewhat risky** in terms of their potential exposure to people who may have COVID-19.

10. The **top three suggestions** respondents had for how employers could make their organization a **better place to work** were: issuing bonuses or raises (21%), allowing work from home/remote work and flexible hours (20%), and promoting safety by following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines and providing/enforcing the use of personal protective equipment (17%).

Introduction

With the emergency use authorization of three COVID-19 vaccines for adults in the United States, and one for children as young as 12 years of age, the nation is in a sprint to get as many Americans vaccinated as possible. Across the nation, 149.7 million Americans are fully vaccinated, representing 45.1% of the total population, and 52.8% of those age 12 or older.[1]

But even with these valuable strides, there are still pockets of the country where vaccination rates lag and where COVID-19 cases are on the rise. Further, the damage that the COVID-19 pandemic has already inflicted on the United States and the entire world is substantial and devastating. As of July 8, 2021, more than 185 million cases and 4 million deaths due to COVID-19 have been recorded around the world, with the United States accounting for nearly 34 million cases and 606,000 deaths.[2]

As some states begin to lift emergency disaster declarations and cities and counties across the country consider what the "new normal" will look like and how to build resilient communities, the work of the state and local government workforce will be as critical as ever. From teachers and public safety professionals to public health and public works personnel, the approximately 18.7 million individuals who are employed by state and local government provide crucial services, programs, and activities for their communities.

To ensure that state and local governments have a resilient workforce that can respond to the current challenges and those that lie ahead, it is critical to understand how the public sector workforce views vaccines, their perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on their jobs and finances, and their outlooks on the short- and medium-term impacts of the pandemic.

In May 2020, MissionSquare Research Institute (formerly the Center for State and Local Government Excellence at ICMA-RC) and Greenwald Research conducted an online survey of 1,008 full-time state and local government employees, assessing their views on the COVID-19 pandemic's financial impacts, job impacts, and other related issues. The results of that survey were released in a June 2020 report, and key findings were also developed into three infographics (see *Additional Resources*). In October 2020, a follow-up survey was conducted with 1,205 full-time state and local government employees to understand how these perceptions had changed over the course of six months. These results were also developed into several reports, including one focused on the K-12 workforce, and corresponding infographics (see *Additional Resources*).

This report provides the results of a third round of COVID-19 survey research that assesses state and local government employees' views on the COVID-19 vaccine, general concerns about COVID-19, perceptions of financial and job impacts, and satisfaction with their employer and benefits. It presents the results of an online survey of 1,203 state and local government employees conducted by MissionSquare Research Institute ("The Institute") and Greenwald Research May 12-28, 2021. Where applicable, comparisons are made between this survey and the May and October 2020 Institute/Greenwald Research surveys.

Survey results

Sample demographics

The demographic characteristics of the 1,203 survey respondents are displayed in Table 1. The majority of survey respondents are female, White or Caucasian, working for local government, have children or stepchildren, and have a total annual personal income of less than $75,000. Respondents have a median age of 45[3] and tend to be well educated (71% have received their bachelor's or a graduate/professional degree). More than half of respondents are married and 53% work in education. There is more variation in respondents' household income, geographic region, area type and population size, and number of years working for their employer.

The demographic characteristics of the survey sample generally align with the overall state and local government workforce profile. Of the approximately 19.8 million state and local government employees who worked across the United States in 2020, 11.2 million worked in education and nearly 1 million were in police protection, with the rest filling all other state and local positions (e.g., general administration, utilities, transportation, hospitals).[4] As of 2020, state and local workers have an average age of 44.4 years; 61% are female; 78% are White; 58% are married; and 58% have a bachelor's, advanced, or professional degree.[5]

Table 1 **Sample demographics**

Gender	
Male	34%
Female	66%
Prefer to self-describe	0%

Age	
Under 40	37%
40-59	49%
60 or older	14%

Education	
Less than a high school diploma	0%
Graduated high school	7%
Some college (no degree)	12%
Associate's degree or completion of technical or vocational school	11%
Bachelor's degree	38%
Graduate/professional degree	33%

Race/ethnicity	
White or Caucasian	68%
Black or African American	15%
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish descent	14%
Asian or Pacific Islander	5%
Native American	<0.5%
Other	<0.5%

Marital status	
Married	54%
Single, never married	23%
Divorced or separated	12%
Living with a partner	8%
Widowed	3%
Prefer not to say	<0.5%

Children/stepchildren	
Yes, under 18	33%
Yes, 18 or older	33%
No children/stepchildren	40%
Prefer not to answer	1%

Region	
South	41%
Midwest	21%
West	20%
Northeast	18%

Area type	
Urban	28%
Suburban	47%
Small town	11%
Rural	14%

Employer	
State government	32%
Local government	68%

Industry	
Administration and Finance	4%
Education	53%
Health & Human Services	13%
Public Safety	16%
Parks & Recreation	1%
Public Works/Utilities	4%
Transportation	5%
All Other	3%

Number of years working with current employer	
Less than 1 year	6%
1 to 5 years	32%
6 to 10 years	19%
11 to 15 years	12%
16-20 years	11%
20+ years	19%

Total annual personal income	
Less than $25,000	6%
$25,000 to $49,999	36%
$50,000 to $74,999	26%
$75,000 to $99,999	17%
$100,000 to $124,999	6%
$125,000 to $149,999	4%
$150,000 or more	5%
Don't know	1%

Total annual household income	
Less than $25,000	4%
$25,000 to $49,999	22%
$50,000 to $74,999	22%
$75,000 to $99,999	21%
$100,000 to $124,999	14%
$125,000 to $149,999	8%
$150,000 or more	9%
Don't know	1%

Area population size	
Less than 10,000	11%
10,000 to 24,999	12%
25,000 to 49,999	14%
50,000 to 99,999	15%
100,000 to 199,999	11%
200,000 to 499,999	9%
500,000 to 999,999	5%
1,000,000 or more	8%
Don't know	14%

Note: n=1,203; some figures throughout this report may not total to 100% due to rounding or due to the allowance for multiple applicable responses.

Views on COVID-19 vaccine

Of the 1,203 state and local government workers who responded to the May 2021 survey, 70% reported that they are fully vaccinated (Figure 1). Another 6% indicated that they are partially vaccinated (e.g., they have received first of two doses or it has been less than two weeks since their final dose). Meanwhile, 22% have not been vaccinated, and 1% of respondents preferred not to answer this question.

When asked to indicate the three factors that were most influential in their decision to get the COVID vaccine, respondents were most likely to report that they got vaccinated to ensure their own personal health (63%), to ensure the health of their friends and family (58%), and to have the freedom to travel without worry (26%; see Figure 2).

Figure 1 **Vaccination status, May 2021** (n=1,203)

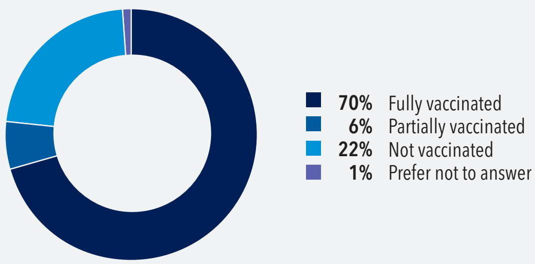
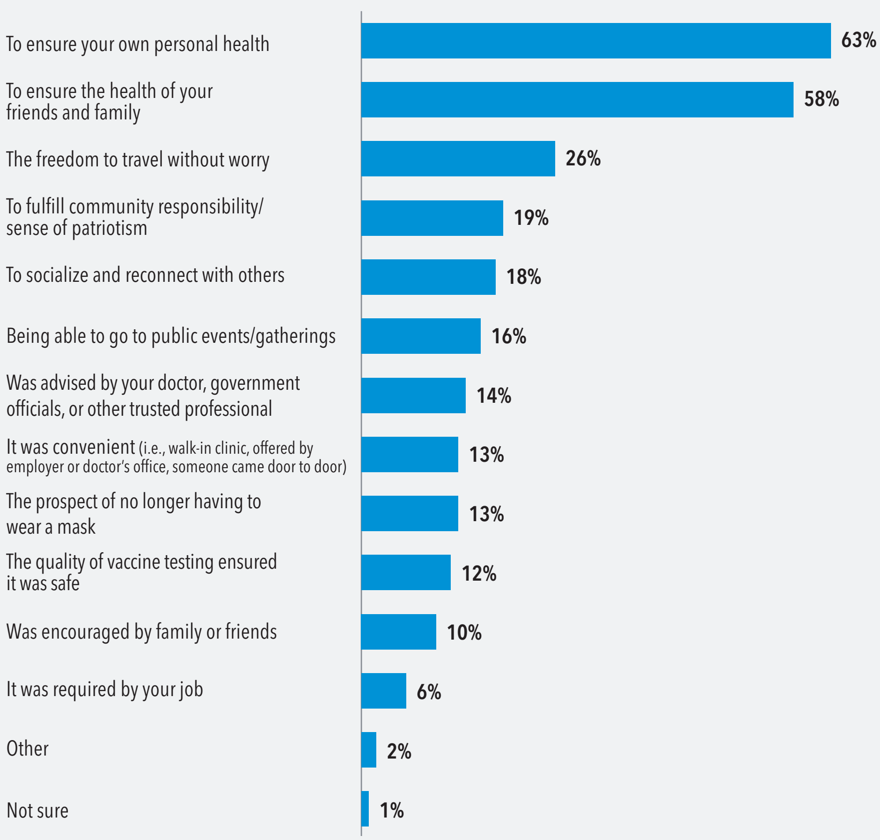


Figure 2 **Main reasons respondents got vaccinated, May 2021** (n=976)



Breaking down the numbers

Fully vaccinated state and local government workers were significantly more likely to be:

- Non-Black/African American
- Over the age of 40
- Earning a household income of $50K+
- Working in the education industry
- Living in a community with a population size of 50K+

Figure 3 **If unvaccinated, plan to get COVID vaccine? May 2021** (n=210)

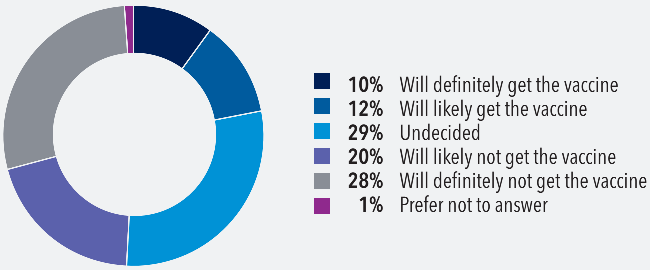
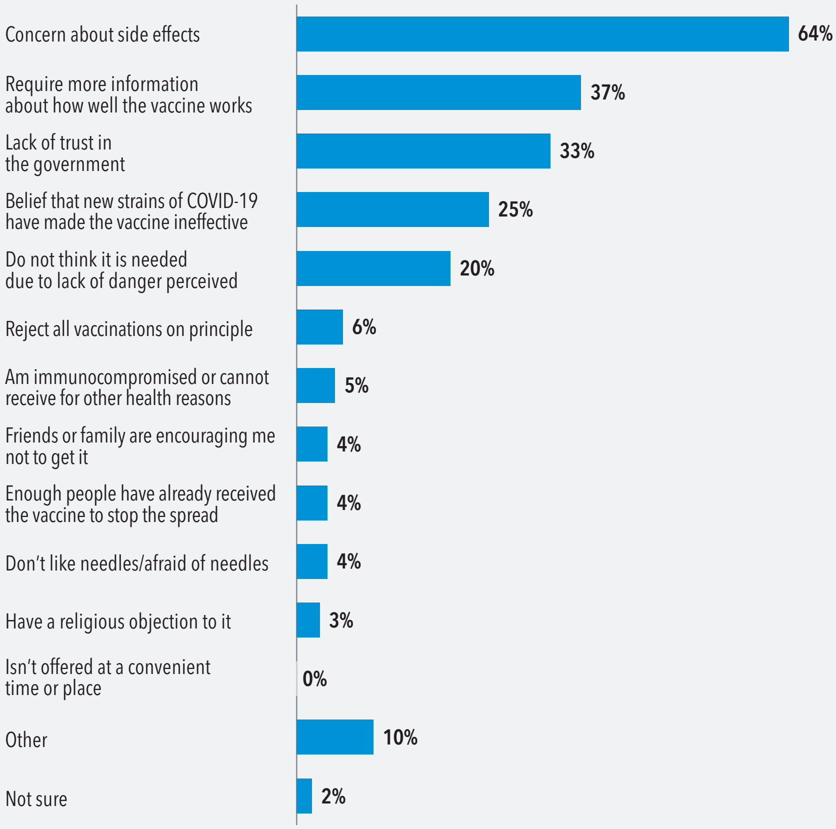


Figure 4 **Main reasons undecided/not getting vaccinated, May 2021** (n=169)



Nearly half of those unvaccinated said that they will definitely not or likely not get the vaccine.

Among those who have not received the COVID-19 vaccine, 22% reported that they will definitely or likely get the vaccine at some point (Figure 3). Nearly half of those unvaccinated, on the other hand, said that they will definitely not or likely not get the vaccine. A fairly large percentage (29%) are undecided.

Among those state and local government workers who are undecided or will not get the vaccine, the main reasons cited were a concern about the side effects of the vaccine (64%), that they require more information about how well the vaccine works (37%), and lack of trust in the government (33%).

Respondents were then asked about their employer's stance on the COVID-19 vaccine, in terms of whether they encouraged it and whether they have been accommodating for those getting it (e.g., providing a financial or other incentive for getting it, allowing paid time off for getting the vaccine and for the possible side effects after). Results are displayed in Figure 5. Nearly two in three respondents reported that their employer has been somewhat or strongly encouraging of the vaccine, while 22% indicated that their employer has been neutral on it (Figure 5). Far fewer report that their employer has provided incentives for receiving the vaccine (8%) or mandated it (5%).

Respondents were also asked about their own views on the COVID-19 vaccine. As can be seen in Figure 6, more than half of respondents (59%) believe that the vaccine will only be effective if everyone receives it. Meanwhile, 45% said that government employers should mandate that employees get vaccinated against COVID-19, and 44% reported that they are concerned about whether or not their coworkers will get the vaccine.

Figure 5 **Employer's stance on the COVID-19 vaccine, May 2021** (n=1,203)

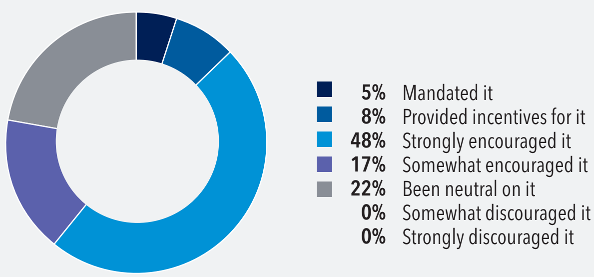
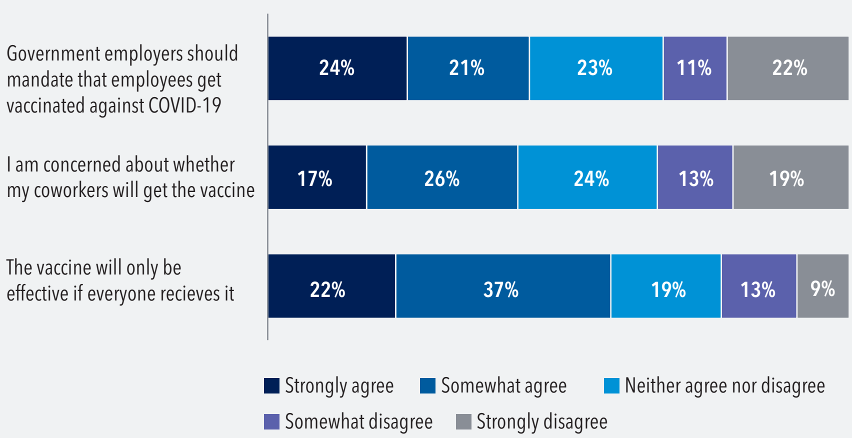


Figure 6 **Views on vaccines, May 2021** (n=1,203)



General COVID-19 concerns and morale

Positive morale regarding work among state and local government workers has increased over the past six months. While 41% of respondents reported very or somewhat positive morale in October 2020, this number climbed to 56% in May 2021

Frontline feedback

"Mandate vaccinations for all employees or offer an incentive to get vaccinations."

– Health worker

(Figure 7). Negative morale, meanwhile, decreased from 27% in October 2020 to 21% in May 2021.

In May 2021, respondents were most likely to report feeling stressed (42%), burnt-out/fatigued (42%), and anxious (31%). Since May 2020, there have been large shifts in the emotions that respondents are feeling while at work about the COVID-19 pandemic, showing several distinct patterns. As can be seen in Figure 8, while stress rose from May 2020 to October 2020, it reverted to its initial levels in May 2021.

Figure 7 **Current morale regarding work**

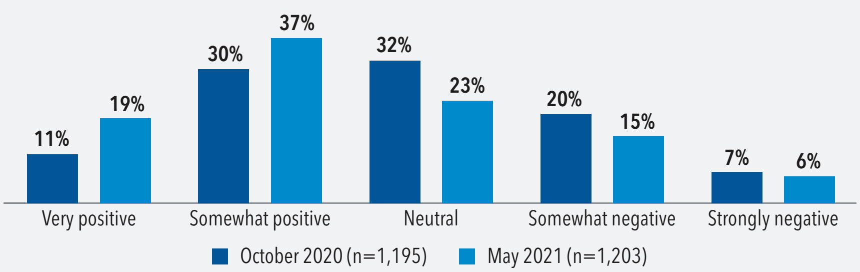
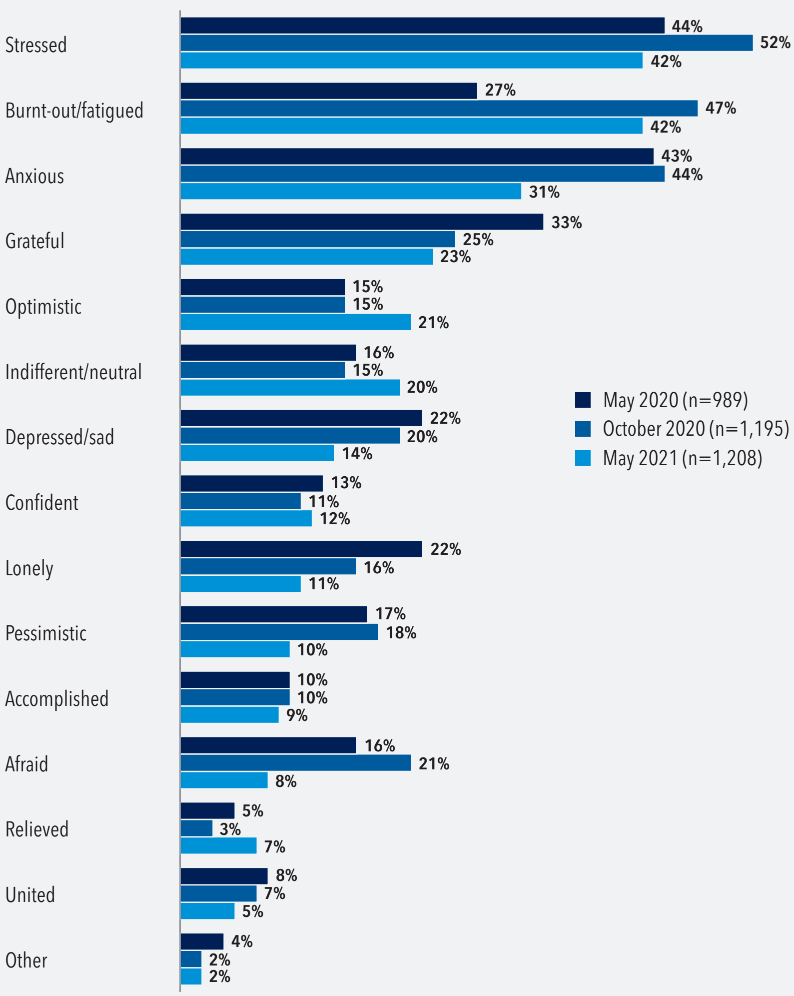


Figure 8 **Emotions felt at work about the COVID pandemic**



Frontline feedback

"More cross-training between different job functions to make filling in for others more possible and ease the chance of burnout by providing more variety of job-related tasks."

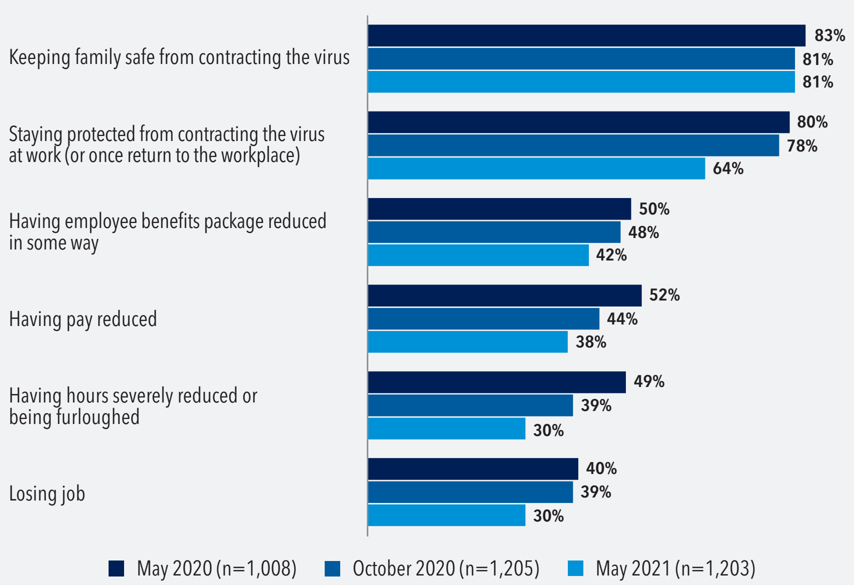
– Judicial and legal worker

Burnout/fatigue, on the other hand, which also jumped from May to October 2020, has gone down slightly over the past six months, but is nowhere near early pandemic levels. Meanwhile, while levels of anxiety started out high in May 2020 and remained so in October 2020, anxiety decreased significantly in May 2021.

Other noteworthy trends include a significant increase in optimism from October 2020 to May 2021 (from 15% to 21%), several emotions showing incremental levels of decline over the course of the pandemic (e.g., depression/sadness, loneliness), and sharp decreases in pessimism and fear from October 2020 to May 2021. Many of the shifts observed in emotions felt at work may be at least partially explained by the changes in the availability of vaccines and the gradual lifting of restrictions, among other factors.

Thinking about their job going forward, respondents continue to be most concerned about keeping their family safe from contracting COVID-19 (81%) – this percentage has remained consistent over the three survey time points (see Figure 9). While 64% remain concerned about staying protected from contracting COVID-19 at work, this number has dropped from prior rounds of the survey. Concern about having one's benefit package reduced, pay reduced, hours reduced, or losing one's job all also showed declines from May 2020 and October 2020.

Figure 9 **Concerns about job going forward** (% very/extremely/somewhat concerned)

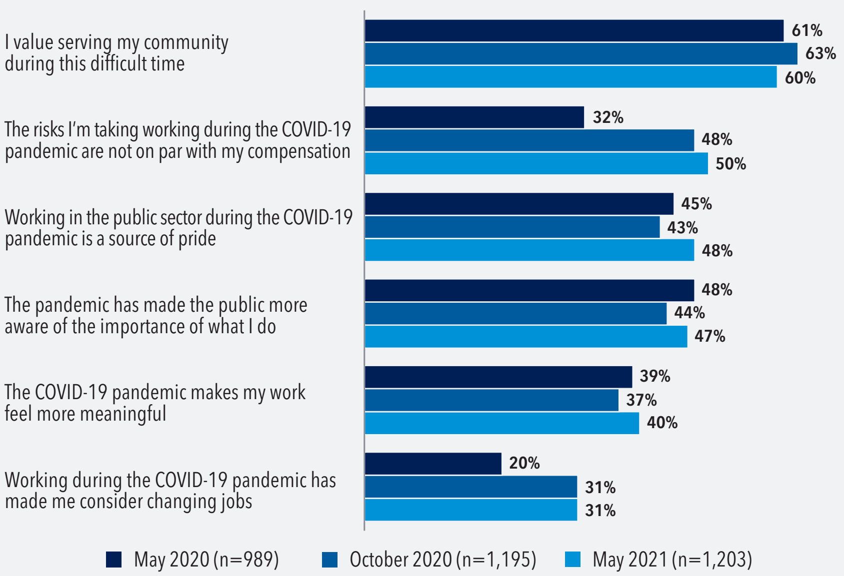


Respondents continue to be most concerned about keeping their family safe from contracting COVID-19 (81%) – this percentage has remained consistent over the three survey time points.

When it comes to respondents' feelings about working in the public sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, 60% report that they value serving their community during this difficult time. This finding has remained fairly stable across all three survey time points (see Figure 10). Feelings that the pandemic has made the public more aware of the importance of what they do, that working in the public sector during the pandemic is a source of pride, and that the pandemic makes their work feel more meaningful showed small increases from October 2020 to May 2021, with 40-48% endorsing each of these items.

At the same time, feeling that the risks they are taking during the pandemic are not on par with their compensation also rose slightly, from 48% in October 2020 to 50% in May 2021. Feeling that working during the pandemic has made them consider changing jobs remained at 31% in May 2021, the same as in October 2020 and 11 percentage points higher than in May 2020.

Figure 10 **Feelings about working in the public sector during COVID**
(% somewhat or strongly agree)



Frontline feedback

"I began this pandemic as a classroom teacher and then moved into my current role of opening a school. In my eyes, when I was a teacher teaching through this, and if I had to continue, I would have left the profession."

– **K-12 educator**

Figure 11 **Type of job change respondents have in mind, May 2021** (n=323)
(Among those considering changing jobs)

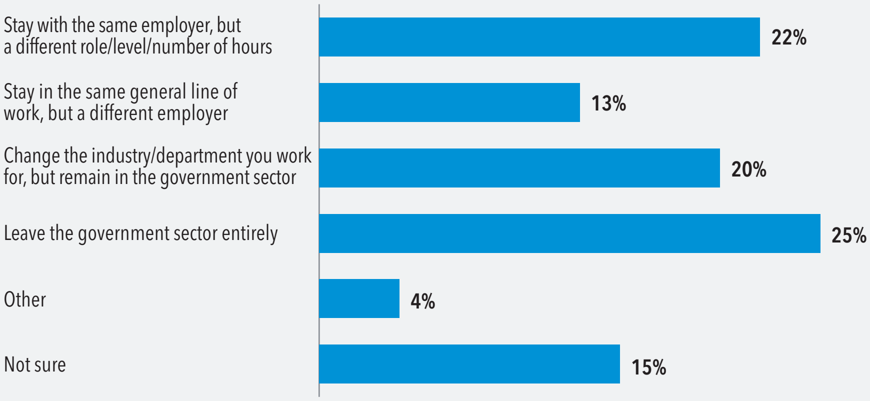
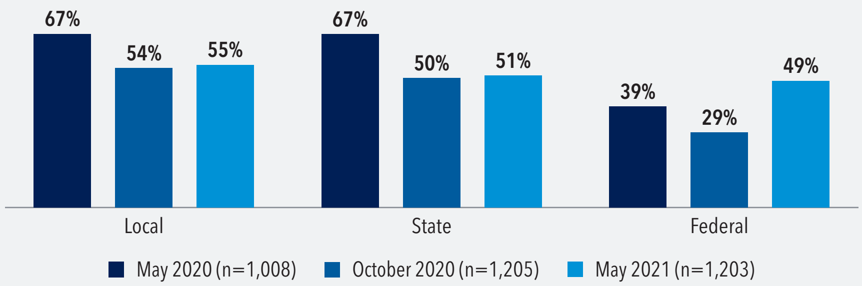


Figure 12 **Trust in government leaders to make appropriate decisions regarding employee safety during COVID-19** (% with fair amount/great deal of trust)



Respondents who indicated that the pandemic has made them consider changing jobs were asked about the type of job change they had in mind. Respondents were split in terms of what type of job change they were considering, with one in four indicating that they would like to leave the government sector entirely (Figure 11). Another 22% would like to stay with the same employer but have a different role/level/number of hours, and 20% would like to stay in the government sector but change the industry or department they work for. Only 13% wanted to stay in the same line of work, but with a different employer.

Respondents were also asked about their trust in government leaders to make appropriate decisions about employee safety during COVID-19. As shown in Figure 12, while trust in state and local government leaders had decreased from May 2020 to October 2020, level of trust remained stable from October 2020 to May 2021, with 55% reporting a fair amount or great deal of trust in local government leaders, and 51% in state government leaders. For federal government leaders, on the other hand, trust jumped from a low of 29% in October 2020 to 49% in May 2021, a level of trust nearly equal to trust in state and local government leaders.

Breaking down the numbers

Those considering changing jobs were significantly more likely to be:

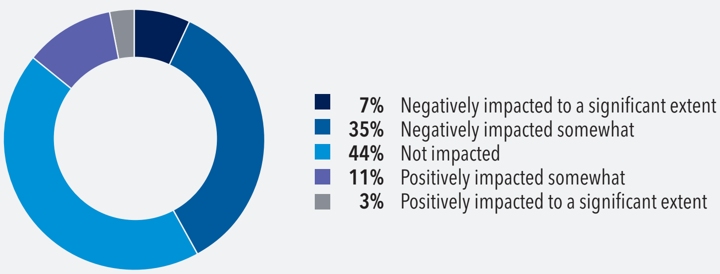
- Female
- Black or African American
- Under 40 years of age
- Working in education or in health and human services
- Concerned about their risk of exposure to COVID-19 at work
- Working fully remotely

Financial impact

In May 2021, more than four in ten (41%) of state and local government employees surveyed reported that they and their family have been negatively impacted financially by the COVID-19 pandemic; 7% reported that they have been negatively impacted financially to a significant extent. This is lower than the 56% and 54% who reported negative impacts in May 2020 and October 2020, respectively. Asked for the first time this survey round about positive financial impacts due to the pandemic, 14% reported a positive financial impact (Figure 13).

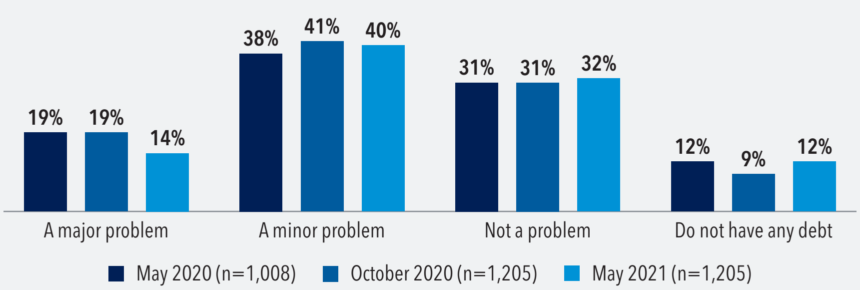
Respondents were asked to what extent debt (e.g., a mortgage, car loan, student loans, credit card debt, medical debt) is a problem for them and their family. As shown in Figure 14, the percentage reporting that debt is either a major or a minor problem for them and their family was 54%, a slight decrease from October 2020 (60%) and May 2020 (57%).

Figure 13 **Financial impact of COVID-19, May 2021** (n=1,203)



Note: Percentages may not equal 100% due to excluding responses for "Not sure" from figure.

Figure 14 **Extent to which debt is a problem**



Frontline feedback

"My work hours were cut resulting in less pay. I would like to get back my time so I can get the pay I was receiving before COVID which will great[ly] help my financial situation and retirement."

– K-12 educator

Nearly one in three state and local government workers (31%) have had to take on more debt since the start of the pandemic (Figure 15). This is the same percentage that reported having to do so in October 2020.

About seven in 10 respondents (71%) reported that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they and their family had an emergency fund set up to help pay for major unexpected expenses or to cover necessities if they lost their main source of income (Figure 16).

Among those with an emergency fund partially or fully funded, 38% have had to spend money from it since the start of the pandemic to make ends meet, similar to the 40% who reported having to do so in October 2020 (Figure 17).

Figure 15 **Had to take on more debt since start of pandemic?**

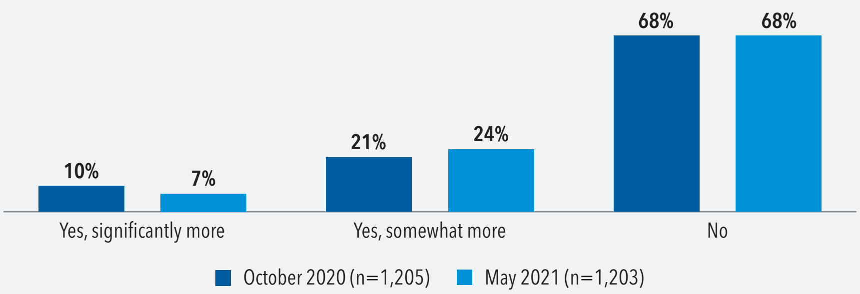


Figure 16 **Emergency fund prior to pandemic? May 2021** (n=1,203)

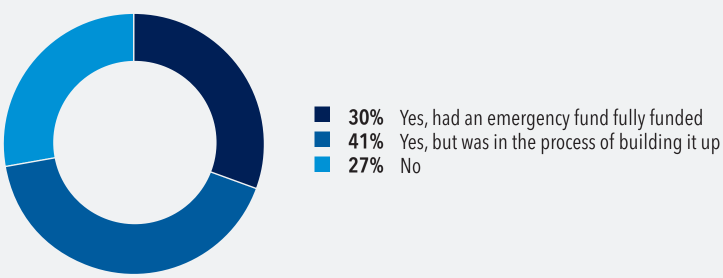
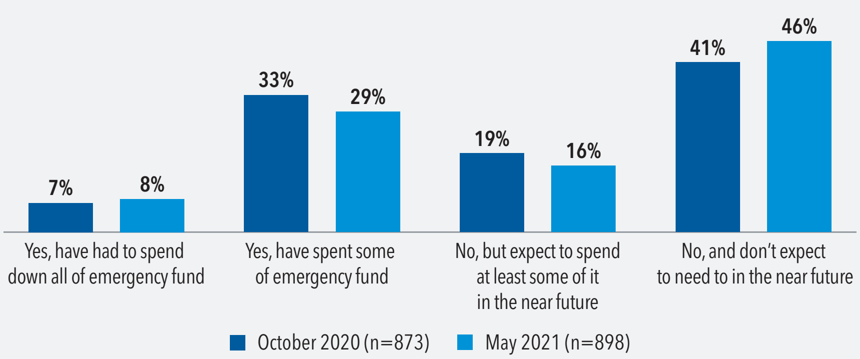


Figure 17 **Had to spend money from emergency fund to make ends meet?**



Note: Percentages may not equal 100% due to excluding responses for "Not sure" from figures.

Breaking down the numbers

Those who have had to spend down all of their emergency fund since the start of the pandemic were significantly more likely to be:

- Female
- Black or African American
- Under age 60
- Earning a household income of less than $100K
- Working in education or health and human services
- Concerned about their risk of exposure to COVID at work

When asked whether they have changed the amount they are saving for retirement since the start of the pandemic, 23% report that they have reduced their retirement savings, down slightly from 26% in October 2020 (Figure 18). Fewer (15%) have increased their retirement savings.

More respondents (33%) reported that they have reduced the amount they are saving in general or for things other than retirement. This is down from 40% in October 2020 (Figure 19). In contrast, one in four respondents (25%) have increased their general savings.

Many respondents have also changed their spending habits. As can be seen in Figure 20, 41% have spent significantly or somewhat less than normal since the start of the pandemic (down from 46% in October 2020). Meanwhile, 25% have spent somewhat or significantly more – slightly less than the 26% who reported doing so in October 2020.

Throughout the last year there has been a great deal of media coverage of new and emerging investing trends, such as the rise in popularity of NFTs, Bitcoin and other

Figure 18 **Change in amount saving for retirement since start of pandemic?**

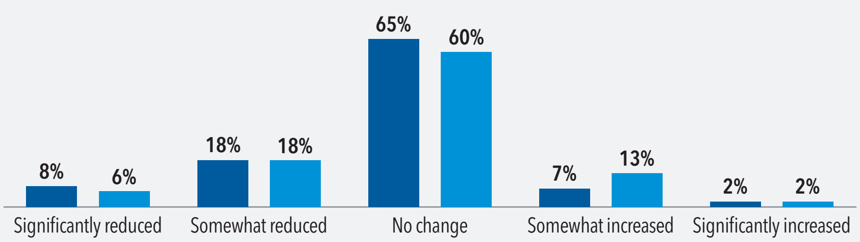


Figure 19 **Change in amount saving in general since start of pandemic?**

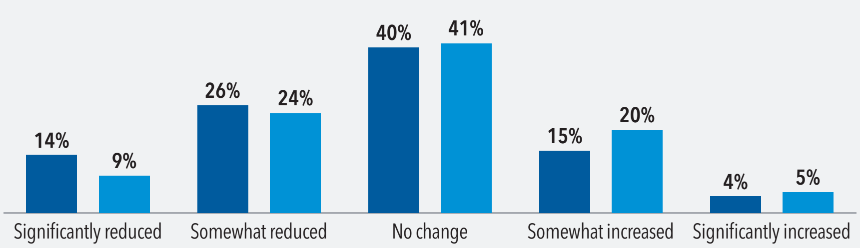
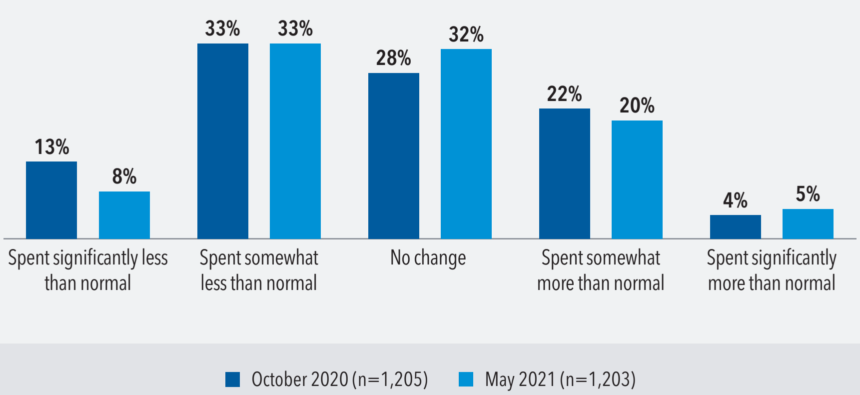


Figure 20 **Change in spending since start of pandemic?**



41% have spent significantly or somewhat less than normal since the start of the pandemic (down from 46% in October 2020).

crypto-currencies, and activist online investing such as with WallStreetBets and GameStop. Respondents were asked about their level of interest in these topics. In total, 18% of those surveyed were very or extremely interested in these investments, while 49% were not too interested or not at all interested (Figure 21).

Respondents were also asked how concerned they are that the COVID-19 pandemic and the related economic crisis will impact being able to retire when they want. As shown in Figure 22, respondents' concern remained fairly steady over time from May 2020 (38% very or extremely concerned) to October 2020 (40%) and May 2021 (39%).

A similar trend can be seen in Figure 23 for being able to save enough to be financially secure throughout retirement. While 41% were very or extremely concerned about this in May 2020, this number was 43% in both October 2020 and May 2021.

Figure 21 **Interest in new and emerging investment trends, May 2021** (n=1,203)

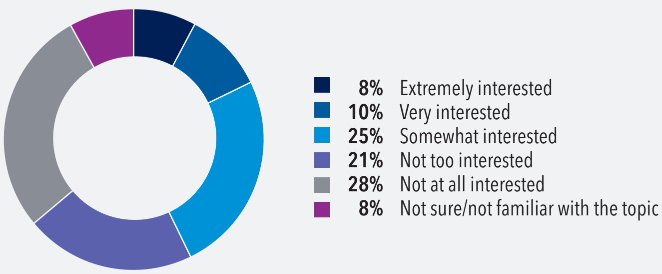


Figure 22 **Concern about being able to retire when want due to pandemic**

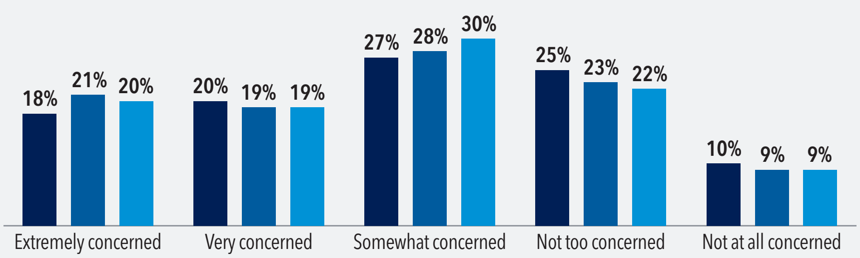
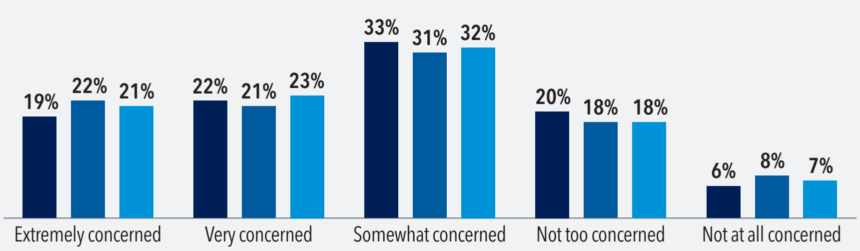


Figure 23 **Concern about being able to save enough to be financially secure throughout retirement due to pandemic**



May 2020 (n=1,008) October 2020 (n=1,205) May 2021 (n=1,203)

Concern about being able to retire when they want remained fairly steady over time from May 2020 (38% very or extremely concerned) to October 2020 (40%) and May 2021 (39%).

Job outlook

In May 2021, more than three in four respondents (76%) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the nature of their job (e.g., what they do, where they work, how they go about the tasks required). This is down slightly from the 85% in May 2020 and the 82% in October 2020 who reported that the nature of their job had changed (Figure 24). About one in three respondents (32%) indicated that the pandemic has impacted the nature of their job significantly, down from 41% in both May 2020 and October 2020.

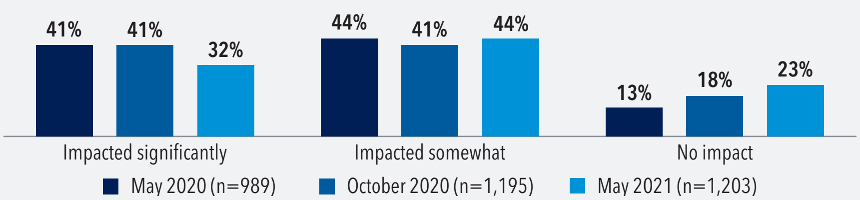
Respondents were relatively split at all three time points surveyed in their assessment of how difficult it has been to adjust to those changes. Among those reporting some impact to the nature of their work in May 2021, 31% reported that it has been extremely or very difficult to adjust to those changes (Figure 25). This number is similar to the 32% in October 2020 who reported it had been very or extremely difficult, and slightly higher than the 26% in May 2021.

In contrast, 34% reported that it had been not too difficult or not at all difficult, similar to the 37% in May 2020 and the 33% in October 2020.

To better understand how the nature of their job has changed, respondents were asked about their current work location. As displayed in Figure 26, while 42% of respondents reported working fully remotely in May 2020 (i.e., not going into a workplace or

76% reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the nature of their job.

Figure 24 **Extent to which COVID has impacted nature of job**



Note: Percentages may not equal 100% due to excluding responses for "Not sure" from figures.

Figure 25 **Difficulty adjusting to changes to job as a result of COVID-19**

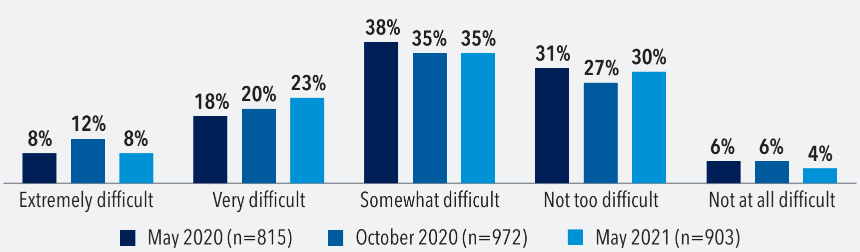
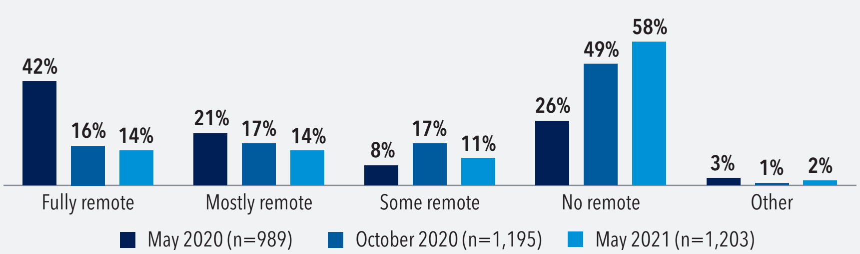


Figure 26 **Working remotely?**



interacting in person with other people) and only 26% reported no remote work (i.e., job requires going into a workplace and/or interacting in person or with other people), the percentage of state and local workers working in person has continued to rise over the past year, jumping to 49% in October 2020 and increasing further to 58% in May 2021.

Among those currently engaging in any remote work, only 23% had worked remotely prior to the pandemic (Figure 27).

Respondents were asked how difficult it has been over the past six months to balance the many competing work and homelife demands that individuals have faced since the start of the pandemic. About one in four said that it has been very or extremely difficult, and another 31% reported that it has been somewhat difficult (Figure 28).

Balancing these demands may be particularly challenging for those who have needed to take care of their children during the workday. As shown in Figure 29, among those with children or stepchildren under the age of 18, in the past six months 71% have had to work from home while also taking care of their children (whether during school or

Figure 27 **Working remotely pre-COVID-19? May 2021** (n=546)

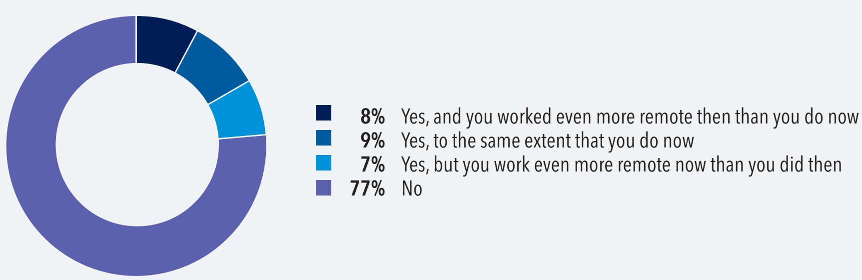


Figure 28 **Difficulty balancing work and homelife demands during past six months, May 2021** (n=1,203)

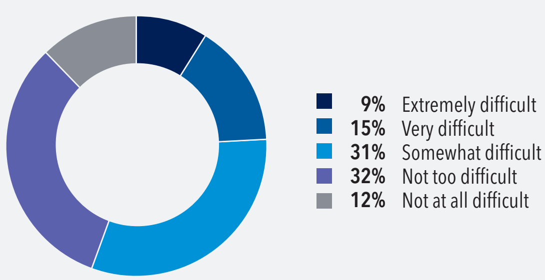
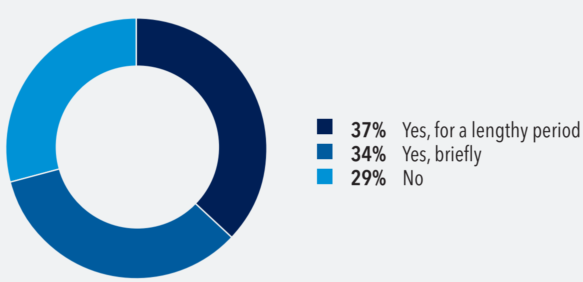


Figure 29 **Had to work from home while also taking care of your children in past six months, May 2021** (n=362)



Breaking down the numbers

Those who have found it extremely difficult to balance work and homelife demands during the past six months were significantly more likely to be:

- Female
- Non-White/Caucasian
- Under age 40
- Living in an area with a population of 200K+
- Working in education
- Concerned about their risk of exposure to COVID at work

day care closures or when they have been participating in virtual schooling), with 37% having done so for a lengthy period.

Among those respondents engaged in any in-person work in May 2021 or prior to the pandemic, the majority (74%) considered it at least somewhat risky, in terms of their potential exposure to people who may have COVID-19 (Figure 30). These numbers were 70% in May 2020 and 76% in October 2020. Meanwhile, 39% believed that it is very or extremely risky, down from 47% in October 2020 and similar to the 40% in May 2020.

Among those respondents engaged in any in-person work in May 2021, the majority (75%) felt they did not have a choice as to whether or not to do so (Figure 31). Two in three (66%) reported that their employer did not give them the choice, while 12% said that this was due to a factor outside of work.

Asked whether they think there will be more or less of an opportunity to work remotely than there was prior to the pandemic, just over one in four respondents (26%) believe there will be significantly or somewhat more opportunity. A greater percentage of respondents (32%) think there will be less opportunity, while 42% anticipate no difference (Figure 32).

Figure 30 **Perceived risk of exposure to COVID-19 at work**

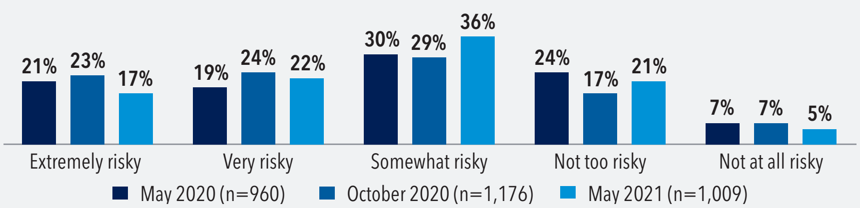


Figure 31 **Feel had a choice about return to work in person during past six months, May 2021** (n=1,009)

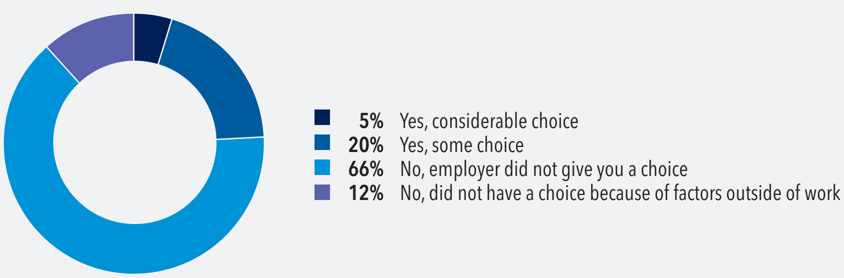
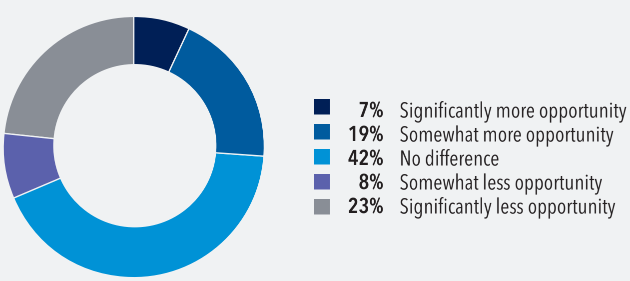


Figure 32 **Perceptions of change in opportunity for remote work post-pandemic, May 2021** (n=1,203)



Frontline feedback

"My employer could do a better job communicating with their employees during this pandemic, especially with regard to a plan for returning to the workplace. For example, I would love to continue working remotely most of the time post-pandemic, but there has not been any mention made of what will be expected as things 'get back to normal.'"

– **Government administration professional**

Satisfaction with employer and benefits

Overall, just over half of respondents (51%) reported in May 2021 that they are very or extremely satisfied with their employer, up slightly from the 46% in October 2020. In contrast, only 12% said they were not too satisfied or not at all satisfied, down from 17% in October 2020 (Figure 33).

As shown in Figure 34, the three elements of their job that they were most satisfied with are job security (66% were extremely or very satisfied), their leave benefits (65%), and their health insurance (60%). These are the same three elements that they were

Figure 33 **Satisfaction with employer**

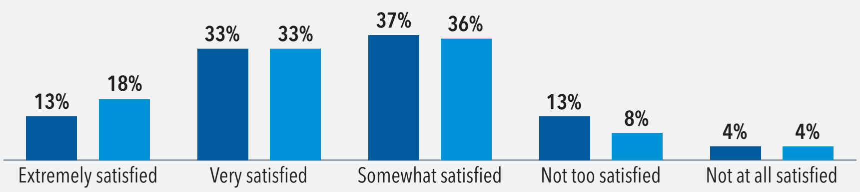
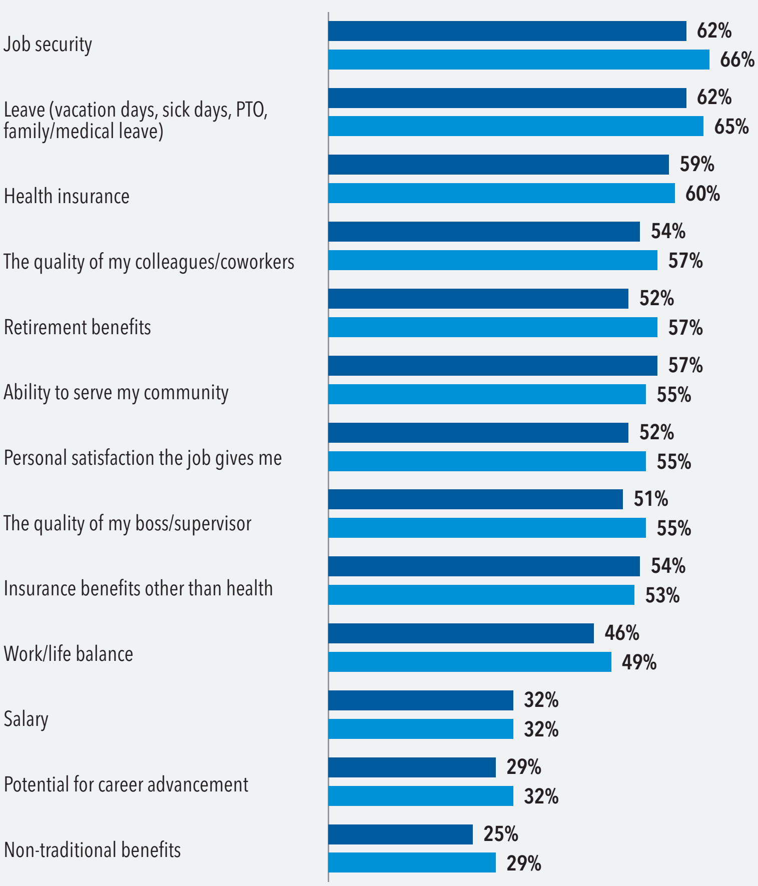


Figure 34 **Satisfaction with job elements** (% extremely or very satisfied)



October 2020 (n=1,205) May 2021 (n=1,203)

Frontline feedback

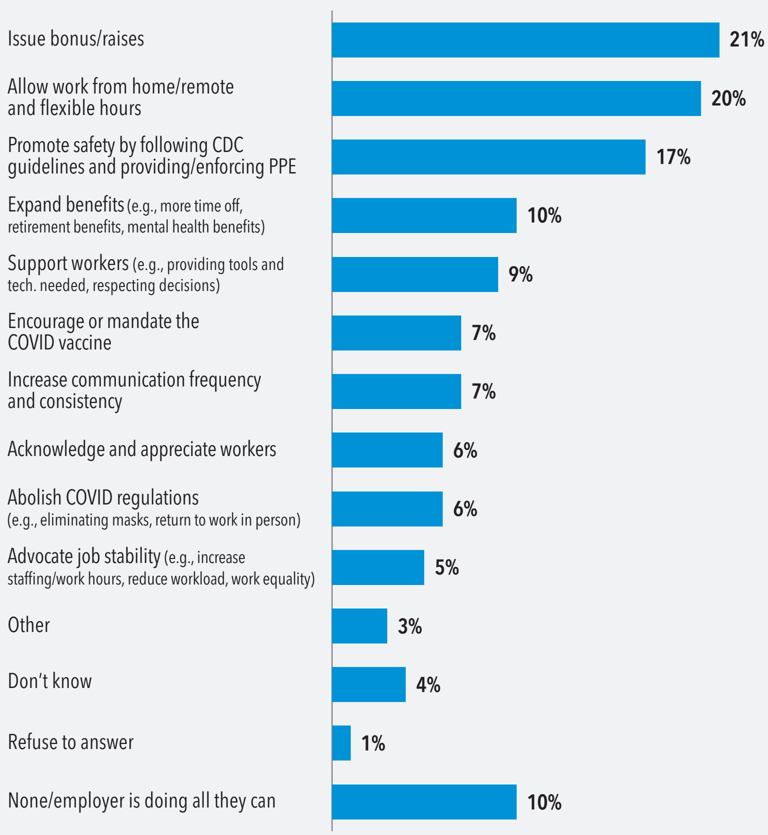
"Show appreciation for the work that we've done during the pandemic. It doesn't have to be monetary – a simple 'thank you' goes a long way."

– **K-12 educator**

most satisfied with in October 2020. In contrast, less than one in three respondents were very or extremely satisfied with their potential for career advancement, their salary, and their nontraditional benefits (e.g., tuition assistance or student loan repayment, employee assistance programs, child care assistance).

Finally, with the pandemic creating many challenges for government workers over the past year, respondents were asked to describe in their own words what one or two realistic actions their employer could take that would be most impactful in making their workplace a better place to work. Responses were coded and are displayed in Figure 35. Respondents were most likely to recommend the issuing of bonuses or raises (21%), allowing work from home/remote work and flexible hours (20%), and promoting safety by following CDC guidelines and providing/enforcing the use of PPE (17%).

Figure 35 **Realistic action employer could take to make the workplace better, May 2021** (n=1,203)



Frontline feedback

"The pay in public education is insultingly low. I could make the same at McDonald's, but I'd have to go to McDonald's every day. If you break it down, I make $12 an hour. I appreciate working in a climate-controlled office and getting holidays off, but I'll never be able to take a vacation or retire on what I make. The problem is bigger than just one school, it's a national issue that needs to be addressed."

– **Postsecondary educator**

Conclusion

This report describes the results of a survey of state and local government employees that assessed their views on the COVID-19 vaccine, the pandemic's impact on their employment outlook, general concerns about COVID-19, perceptions of their finances, and satisfaction with their employer and their benefits. Where applicable, comparisons are made between this survey and surveys conducted in May 2020 and October 2020.

Results indicate that many state and local government workers are fully vaccinated, and many have chosen to receive the vaccine to protect their health and the health of their family, friends, and communities. With an increasing number of public sector workers returning to in-person work, employees are particularly concerned about keeping themselves safe at work and protecting their family from contracting COVID-19.

Morale has increased over the past six months, and many feel a sense of pride working during the pandemic and that the pandemic has made their work feel more meaningful. However, one in three still indicate that working during the pandemic has made them consider changing jobs, with many of those considering leaving the public sector entirely.

The negative financial impact of the pandemic continues to affect a significant portion of state and local government employees, with many having had to take on more debt, spend from their emergency fund, or reduce other savings.

Despite the many challenges they have faced and continue to face, more than half of state and local government workers are satisfied with their employer, and they have concrete recommendations for steps their employer can take to improve the workplace.

As state and local government leaders navigate the road ahead and consider what the "new normal" will look like, understanding their employees' views on the COVID-19 vaccine — and the financial, personal, and job impacts that the pandemic has had and continues to have — will help ensure that public sector organizations remain employers of choice and can successfully recruit, retain, and retire a talented and diverse workforce of the future.

Methods

Information for this report was collected from a 12-minute survey with 1,203 full-time state and local government employees. The online survey was fielded by Greenwald Research from May 12 through May 28, 2021. Where appropriate, data was compared with MissionSquare Research Institute/Greenwald Research surveys of full-time state and local government employees conducted in May 2020 (n=1,008) and October 2020 (n=1,205). The final data for all three surveys were weighted by gender, age, income, and industry type to reflect the distribution of the state and local government workforce as found in the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey and the U.S. Census of Governments.

Additional resources

Reports

Survey Results: Public Sector Employee Views on Finances and Employment Outlook Due to COVID-19 (June 2020)

Update on Public Sector Employee Views on Finances and Employment Outlook Due to COVID-19: May vs. October 2020 (January 2021)

K-12 Public School Employee Views on Finances, Employment Outlook, and Safety Concerns Due to COVID-19 (February 2021)

Infographics

Public Sector Employee Views on COVID-19 (June 2020)

K-12 Education Employee Views on COVID-19 (August 2020)

African American State and Local Employee Views on COVID-19 (September 2020)

Public Sector Employee Views on COVID-19: May 2020 vs. October 2020 (December 2020)

K-12 Education Employee Views on COVID-19: March 2020 vs. October 2020 (December 2020)

Career Stage Differences in Public Sector Employee Concerns about COVID-19 (March 2021)

COVID-19 Vaccines: Public Sector Worker Vaccination Status and Views (June 2021)

Endnotes

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "COVID Data Tracker," available at **https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations**.
2. "Coronavirus Dashboard," Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University, available at **https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html**
3. The mean (average) age of respondents was also 45.
4. U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Government Employment and Payroll Tables," available at **https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2020/econ/apes/annual-apes.html**
5. Author analysis of IPUMS-CPS. See IPUMS-CPS, "Current Population Survey," at **https://cps.ipums.org/cps/sda.shtml**

MissionSquare Research Institute (formerly the Center for State and Local Government Excellence at ICMA-RC) promotes excellence in state and local government and other public service organizations so they can attract and retain talented employees. The organization identifies leading practices and conducts research on retirement plans, health and wellness benefits, workforce demographics and skill set needs, labor force development, and topics facing the not-for-profit industry and the education sector. MissionSquare Research Institute brings leaders together with respected researchers. For more information and to access research and publications, visit **slge.org** and follow on **Twitter** and **LinkedIn**.

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