Citizen Satisfaction with Federal Government Services Surges

Following two years of steep drops, and four years of declines overall, citizen satisfaction with U.S. federal government services surges in 2022, up 4.6% from 63.4 to 66.3 on the American Customer Satisfaction Index’s (ACSI®) 100-point scale. The results for this study are based on interviews with citizens who experienced a federal government service throughout 2022. While the big gains in 2022 have erased much of the negative movement that began in 2017, aggregate citizen satisfaction with the federal government remains below pre-COVID-19 levels. As was the case with the private sector, COVID-19 significantly stressed the federal government’s ability to effectively offer services to citizens, and ultimately eroded happiness with these services. The satisfaction gains in 2022 reversed much of this erosion.
The ACSI federal government satisfaction study examines four primary drivers of citizen satisfaction, attributes of citizen perceived quality that reflect the most relevant performance areas of government programs and services. Among these drivers of satisfaction, two of the four increased substantially between 2021 and 2022: efficiency and ease of government processes (+4.8% to 66) and ease of accessing and clarity of information (+3.0% to 69). The other two primary drivers of satisfaction—the courtesy and professionalism of customer service (-1.4% to 72) and perceptions of government website quality (-1.4% to 69)—decline slightly. These small losses, however, are not nearly large enough to prevent a big improvement in overall citizen satisfaction.
This year, as was the case last year and in many prior years, the Department of the Interior (75) leads the way in federal government satisfaction. A substantial portion of the respondents within the Department of the Interior are visitors to national parks and the National Park Service—a lower-cost and largely satisfying type of experience. The only other federal department that scores near the economy-wide national ACSI average (73.2 as of the third quarter of 2022) is the Department of Agriculture at 73. On the other hand, two departments score well below both the federal government citizen satisfaction average of 66.3 and the economy-wide national ACSI average: The Department of Housing and Urban Development (62) and the Department of the Treasury (54). Treasury lags behind in citizen satisfaction but given its primary citizen-facing mission is tax collection, this lower rating is not entirely unexpected.
Citizen Satisfaction Across Political Parties

The ACSI federal government study does not measure public approval of or satisfaction with particular politicians or political parties. As such, the survey items measured do not ask respondents to “rate” these individual politicians, their political ideologies, or their preferred (and conflicting) policy positions. Rather, the survey focuses exclusively on the quality of the services delivered by specific departments and agencies within the federal government. Nevertheless, factors like political party affiliation are likely to influence citizens’ perceptions of the government services they receive, as political party affiliation is shown to impact a wide variety of citizen perceptions, including seemingly “apolitical” perceptions regarding such things as scientific evidence and government performance. Moreover, these effects are likely growing stronger, as the current “hyperpartisan” political landscape has caused individuals to view all manner of issues through the lens of their political affiliations.

Examining trends by party affiliation between 2021 and 2022, Democrats (+9.2% to 71), Republicans (+3.1% to 66), and the relatively small group of “Other Party” supporters (+3.7% to 56) all register gains in citizen satisfaction. The substantial gain in citizen satisfaction among Democrats helps explain the large growth in aggregate, federal government-wide satisfaction, and likely reflects these respondents’ greater satisfaction with the current (and aligned) Biden administration during its first full year in office. Satisfaction among independents—those respondents who indicate no strong political party affiliation—is unchanged at 63 in 2022.
About This Report

The ACSI Federal Government Report 2022 is based on interviews with 2,126 users, chosen at random and contacted via email throughout the year. Respondents are asked to evaluate their recent experiences with federal government services.

The survey data are used as inputs to ACSI’s cause-and-effect econometric model, which estimates citizen satisfaction as the result of the survey-measured inputs of expectations and perceptions of the quality of government services. The ACSI model, in turn, links citizen satisfaction with the survey-measured outcomes of complaints and citizen trust in government. ACSI government clients receive confidential agency and best-in-class data on all modeled variables.

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