



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

2019: THE PUBLIC'S PRIORITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Americans' policy priorities for this year are dominated by health care and immigration. Over the past year, immigration has risen to the top of the public's agenda, equal to health care. Despite the Democratic takeover of the House of Representatives in November, Republicans continue to be more positive about the state of the country and where it's heading than Democrats.

In a recent poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, Americans offer a long and diverse catalog of problems for the government to address in 2019. In order to explore the public's agenda for the next year, the poll accepted up to five volunteered issues from each respondent.

An increasing number of Americans mention immigration as one of their top five concerns. In the wake of the year's headlines about the border wall, the separation of children, and efforts to overhaul immigration, 49 percent mentioned an immigration issue, up from 27 percent last year. Although immigration is overwhelmingly the top issue for Republicans, the number of Democrats and independents that mention immigration increased significantly as well. The survey was completed before the federal government shutdown over funding for the border wall.

There are substantial partisan differences on several high-profile problems, including the importance of the environment, the economy, and education, but overall the public has little confidence that progress will be made in fixing any of these problems.

In addition to differences on what problems should be addressed in the coming year, Republicans and Democrats have conflicting opinions about how things are going in the United States, the condition of the national economy, and where the country is headed.



© 2018 AP Photo/Evan Vucci

Three Things You Should Know

About The AP-NORC Poll on the Public's Priorities and Outlook

Among Americans age 18 and older:

- 1) Forty-nine percent would like to see the government address the issue of immigration in the coming year, up from 27 percent in 2018.
- 2) For the past three years, more than 40 percent have named health care as one of their top concerns.
- 3) Looking ahead, only 37 percent expect 2019 to be a better year than 2018, while 18 percent say it will be worse and 45 percent say there won't be much difference.

The nationwide poll was conducted December 13-16, 2018, using the AmeriSpeak Panel®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,067 adults. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

Other findings from the poll include:

- While health care and immigration are tied as the top issue for Americans, several other problems emerge as important to more than 10 percent, including government spending, guns, and poverty.
- Sixty-five percent of Republicans mentioned immigration as one of their top five problems, up from 42 percent last year. For independents, immigration was a top issue for 42 percent, up from 22 percent. And among Democrats, the number mentioning immigration rose to 37 percent compared with 20 percent in 2017.
- Thirty-seven percent of Americans think 2019 will be a better year than 2018, and 18 percent think it will be worse year. Forty-five percent do not expect to see much difference between 2018 and 2019.
- Republicans tend to have a more positive outlook about the next year compared to their happiness with 2018. Fifty-eight percent of Republicans expect things will improve in the next year. Thirty-nine percent are pleased with how things are going in the country now, and 42 percent are unhappy.
- Democrats are more negative. Seventy-nine percent of Democrats are dissatisfied with how things are going in the country overall, and 64 percent think things will get worse in the next year.
- The public can't agree over whether the good times for the country are in the past or yet to come. Fifty-one percent say the country's best days are in the future, while 47 percent say they are behind us. Again, Republicans tend to expect the country's best days are yet to come, while Democrats are more likely to say the good times are in the past.
- Sixty percent of Republicans say the national economy will improve in the next year, and 51 percent think their own finances will get better. In contrast, only 10 percent of Democrats think the national economy will get stronger over the next year, and just 20 percent expect their own finances to improve.
- Eight in 10 Americans, regardless of political identification, think the country is greatly divided regarding important values, and only about a quarter expect it to improve over the next five years.

DOMESTIC ISSUES DOMINATE THE PUBLIC'S AGENDA FOR 2019

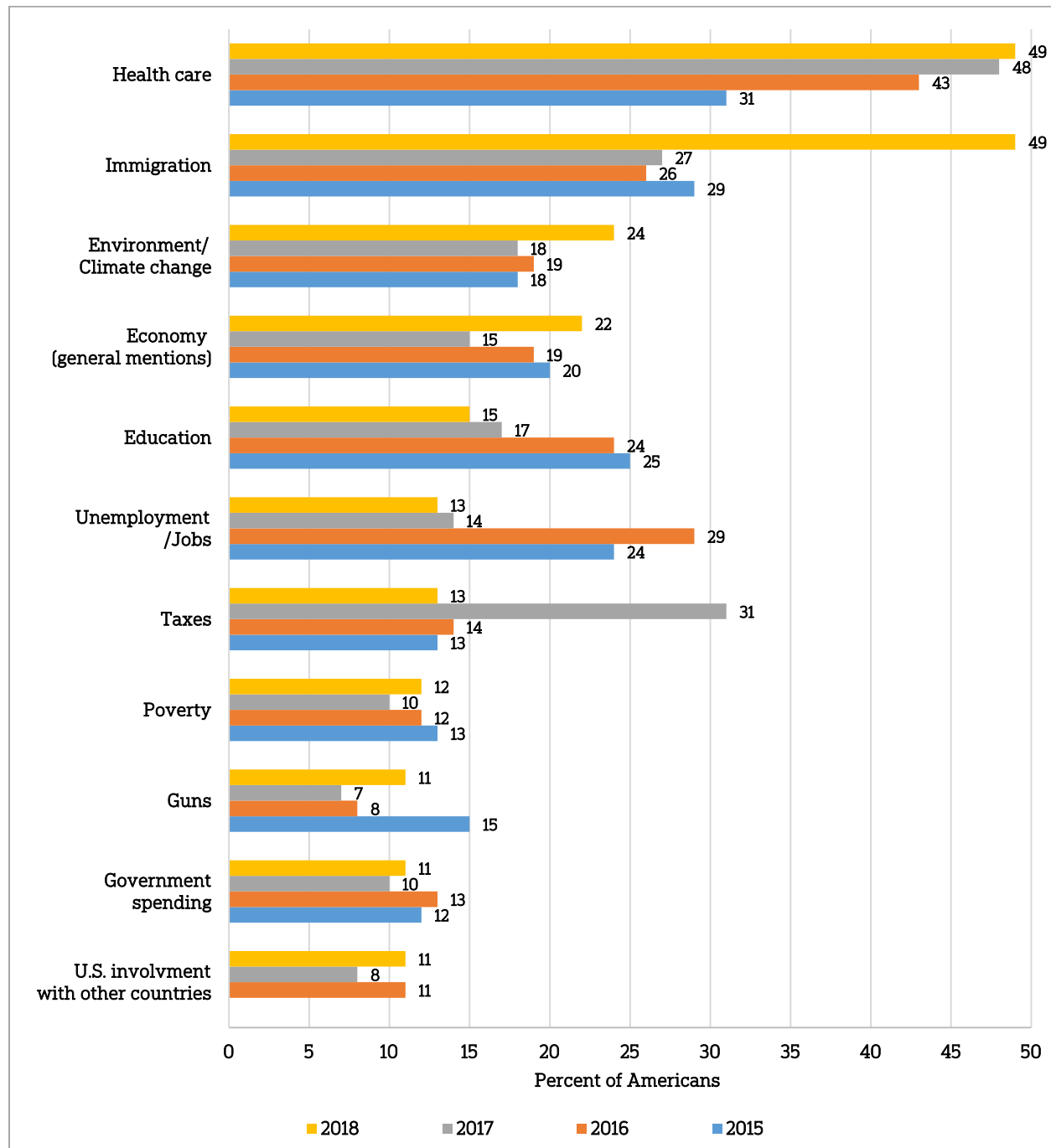
Health care continues to be the top concern, mentioned by 49 percent, nearly the same as the 48 percent who cited the issue last year. However, after a year with immigration issues dominating the headlines, that problem is mentioned by 49 percent, up from 27 percent last year.

The public was asked which problems facing the United States and the world should be addressed by the government in 2019. Up to five volunteered responses were permitted.

The survey was completed before the federal government shutdown, occurring when Congress and the White House failed to reach a compromise on the border wall in the spending bill. The survey began two days after President Donald Trump's contentious meeting with Representative Nancy Pelosi and Senator Chuck Schumer over the border wall.

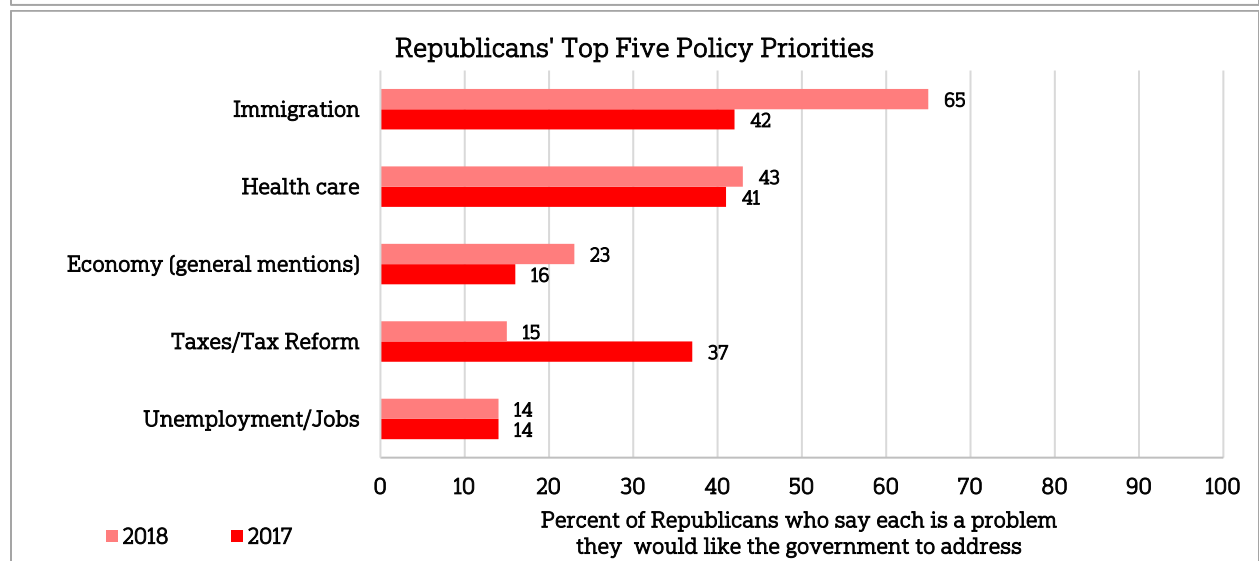
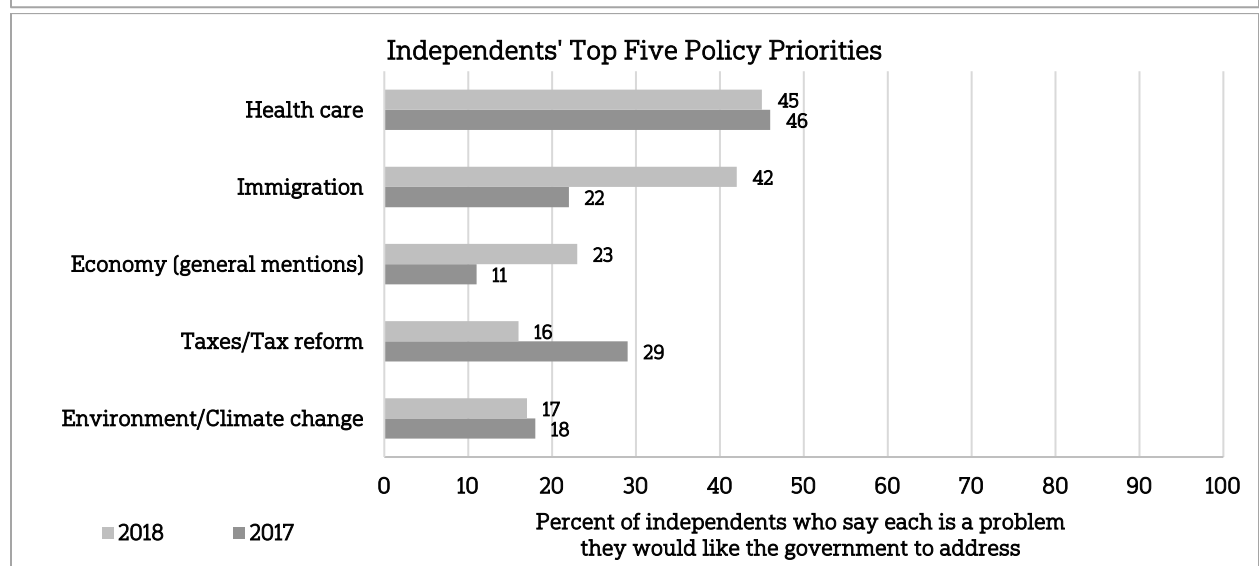
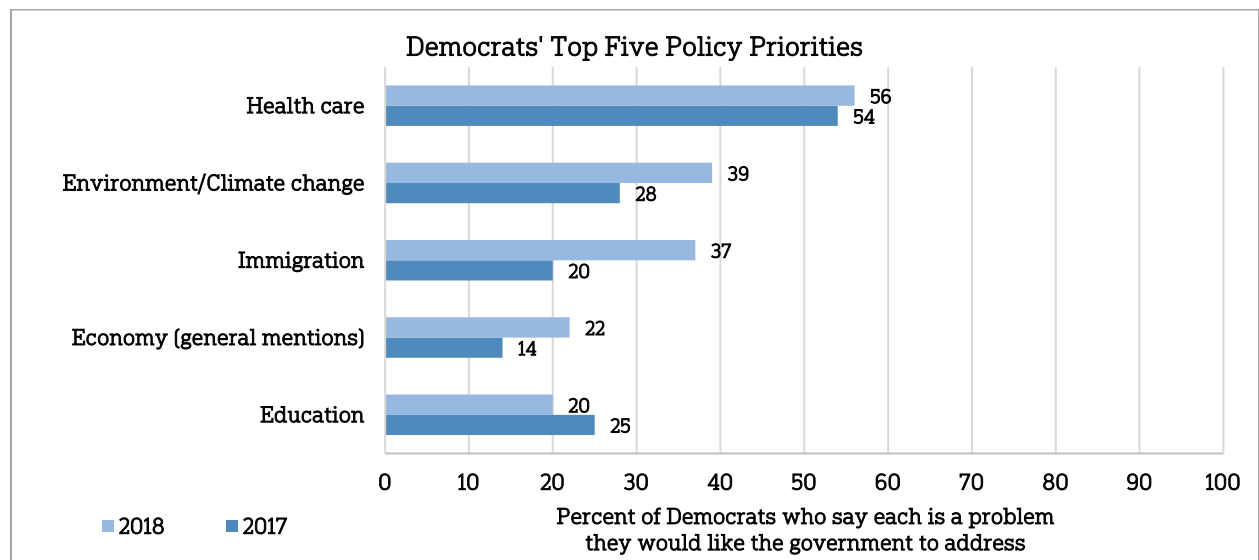
At the end of 2017, taxes were a top concern for 31 percent; mentioned by only 13 percent in 2018. The 2017 survey was conducted while Congress was debating and voting on the Republican tax reform bill.

Health care and immigration top the public's agenda for the coming year.



Question: Thinking about the problems facing the United States and the world today, which problems would you like the government to be working on in the year 2016/2017/2018/2019? Please list up to five problems. [Percentages above among those who provided at least one problem. Problems named by more than 10 percent in 2018 are shown above.] Source: AP-NORC Center polls, the latest conducted Dec. 13-16, 2018, with 1,067 adults nationwide.

Regardless of party identification, the problem of immigration has increased substantially over the past year. The top issue for both Democrats and independents is health care, while Republicans place it second behind immigration.



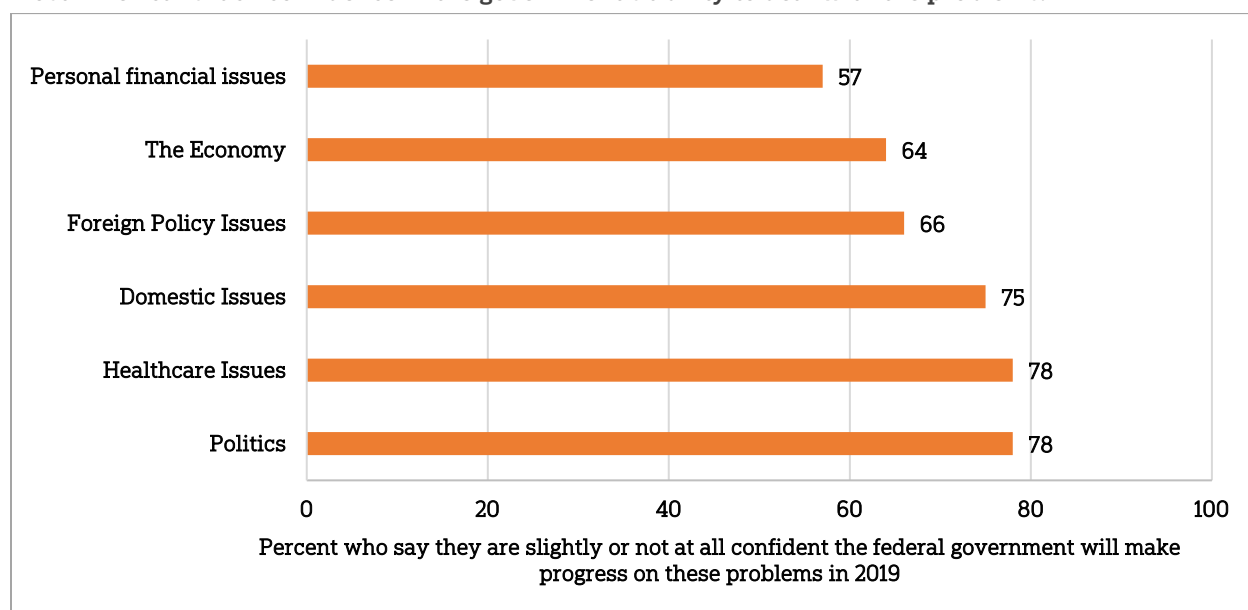
Question: Thinking about the problems facing the United States and the world today, which problems would you like the government to be working on in the year 2018/2019? Please list up to five problems. [Percentages above among those who provided at least one problem. Five most-cited problems in 2019 by each group shown above.]
 Source: AP-NORC Center polls, the latest conducted Dec. 13-16, 2018, with 1,067 adults nationwide.

Domestic issues, such as education, the environment, and racism are cited by 74 percent of Americans. Economic issues, including unemployment, taxes, and government spending, are among the top priorities of 62 percent of the public. Thirteen percent mentioned personal financial topics, like wage increases and housing costs. Political matters, including Trump and smaller government, are named by 30 percent.

FEW ARE CONFIDENT GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE PROGRESS ON TOP ISSUES IN 2019

Few Americans are very confident in the federal government's ability to make progress on any of their most important problems. Among those who mention political or health care issues as one of their top priorities for 2019, 78 percent lack confidence that the federal government will be able to make progress on the issue over the next year.

Most Americans lack confidence in the government's ability to deal with the problems.



Question: How confident are you in the ability of the federal government to make progress on this problem in 2019? [Asked for each verbatim problem cited. Broad categories of issues are shown above.]

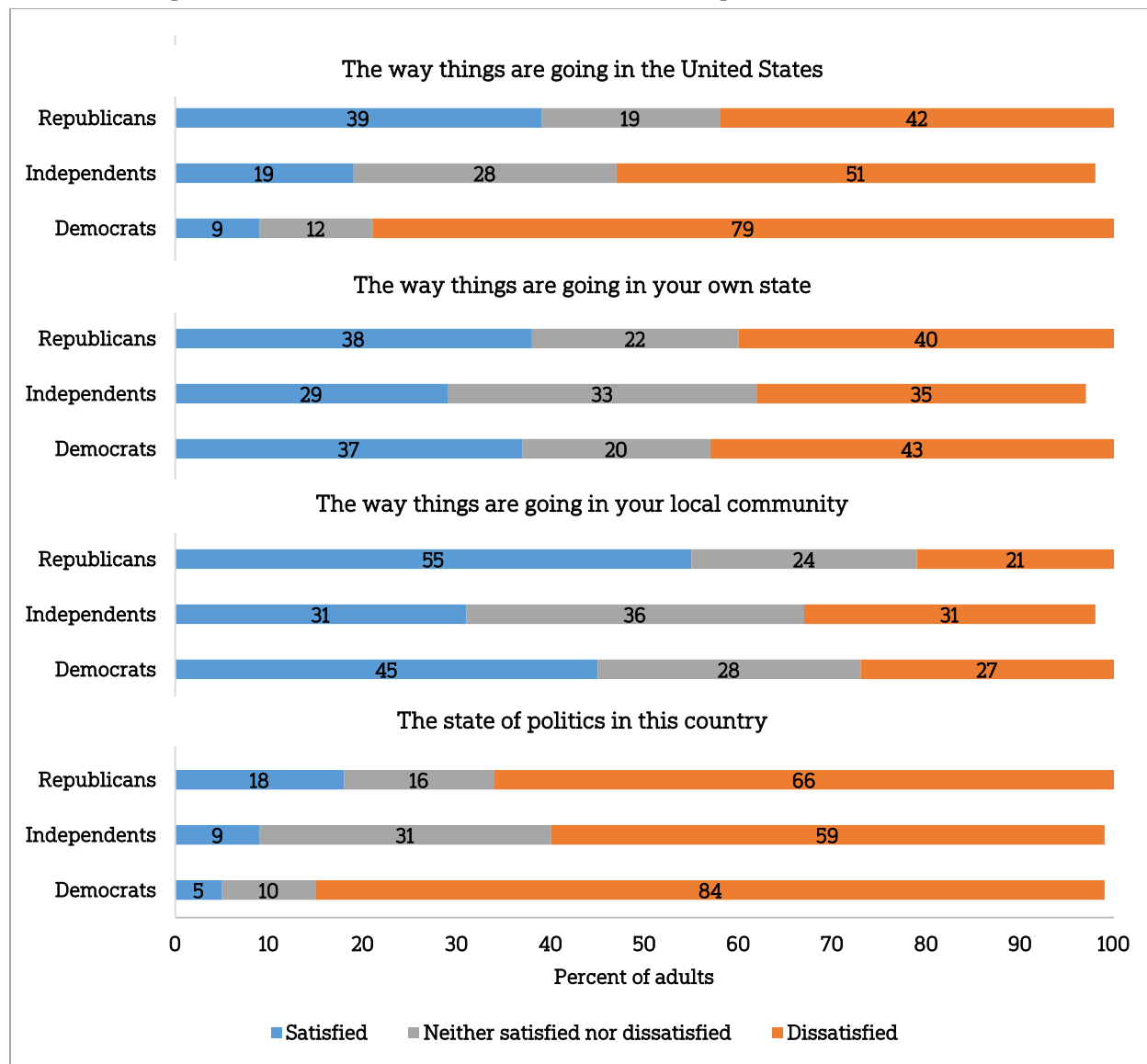
Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 13-16, 2018, with 1,067 adults nationwide.

MOST AMERICANS ARE DISCONTENTED WITH THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN THE COUNTRY

Sixty percent of Americans are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States, and 73 percent are unhappy with the state of politics. The public is divided about how things are going in their own state, but more positive about their local community.

Democrats are particularly unhappy with the country, but most Americans, regardless of party identification, are displeased with the state of politics in this country. There has been little change in people's opinions about the country or politics since the questions were asked in October, before the midterm elections.

There is widespread dissatisfaction with the state of affairs and politics in the United States.

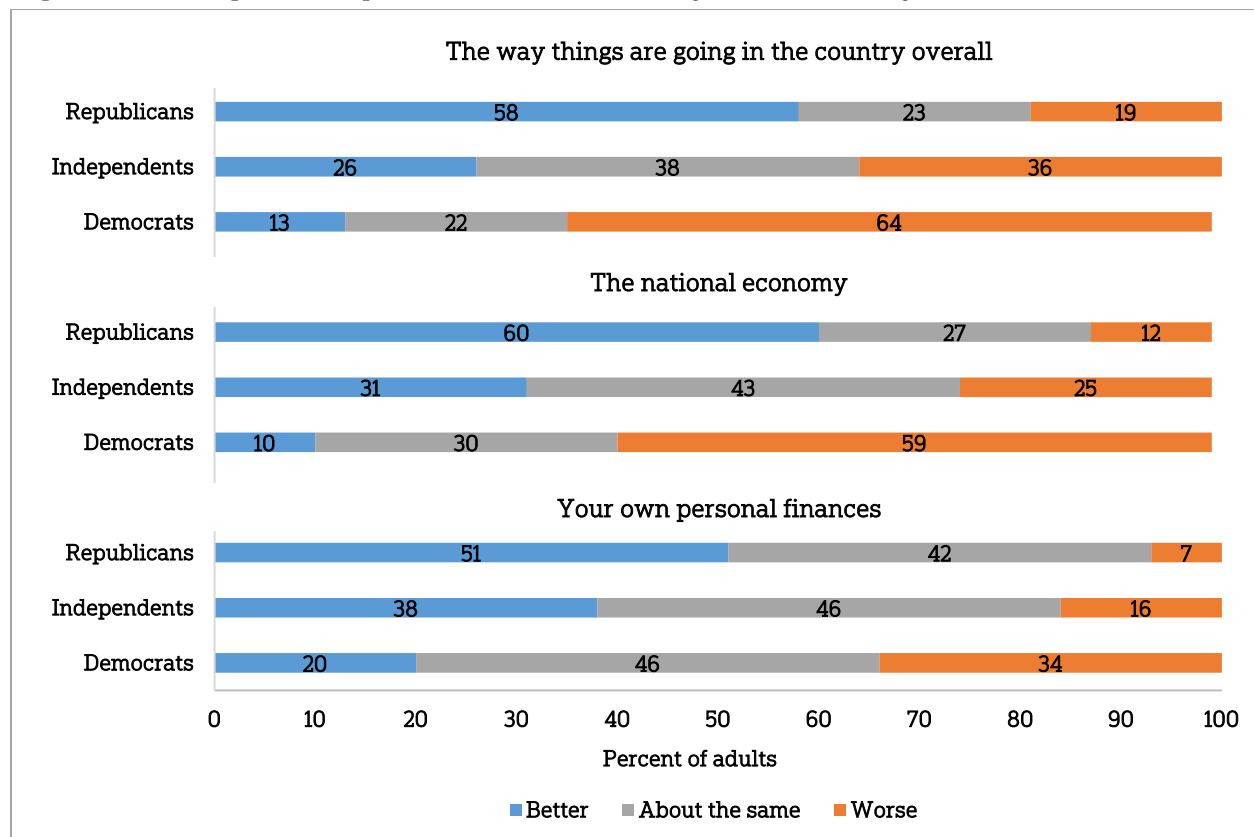


Question: Are you satisfied, dissatisfied, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied about each of the following?
 Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 13-16, 2018, with 1,067 adults nationwide.

At least 8 in 10, regardless of party identification, consider Americans greatly divided when it comes to important values. And only 23 percent anticipate any coming together on values in the next five years.

Looking forward, few Americans expect much improvement with how things are going, the national economy, or their own personal finances. But as with many other issues, Republicans are more positive than Democrats or independents.

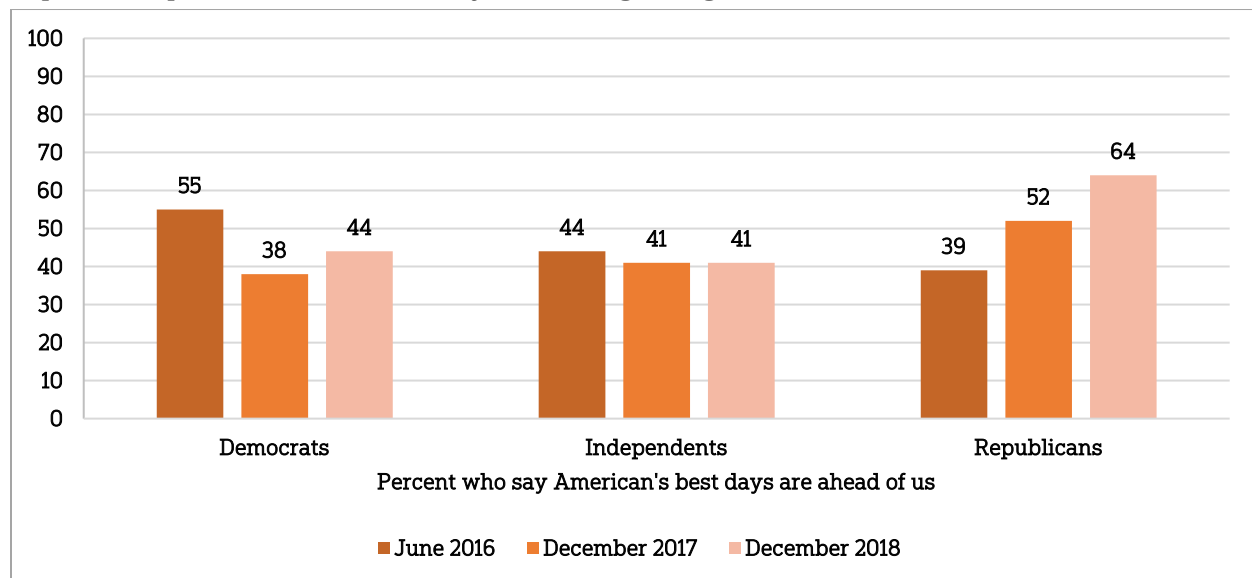
Republicans have positive expectations about the country and the economy.



Question: In the next year, do you think each of the following will get better, get worse, or stay about the same?
 Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 13-16, 2018, with 1,067 adults nationwide.

Overall, 51 percent of individuals say that America's best days are ahead of it, while 48 percent of Americans believe America has already had its best days. Republicans tend to be much more optimistic than Democrats about the future of the country. Sixty-four percent of Republicans believe America's best days are ahead of it, compared to only 45 percent of Democrats.

Republicans' optimism has increased since the summer before the 2016 presidential election. In June 2016, only 39 percent of Republicans said the best days were yet to come. A year after Trump's election, 52 percent said the best days were in the future, and now 64 percent believe the best days for America are ahead.

Republican optimism about the country's future is growing.

Question: In general, do you think America's best days are ahead of us or behind us?

Source: AP-NORC Center Poll conducted on December 13-16, 2018, with 1,067 adults.

The opposite is the case for Democrats. In June 2016, when Hillary Clinton was expected to win the presidential election, 55 percent of Democrats said the best days were in the future. Now, 54 percent of Democrats say the country's best days are in the past.

Republicans are more likely to say 2019 will be a better year than 2018 (50 percent), compared to Democrats (27 percent) and independents (37 percent). Forty-nine percent of Democrats and 50 percent of independents believe the years will be much the same.

Young people are very optimistic about 2019. Fifty-eight percent of those age 18 to 29 believe that 2019 will be a better year, compared to only 32 percent of those age 30 and older. Those age 30 and older are much more likely to be indifferent about 2019. Forty-nine percent say 2019 will be about the same as 2018, compared to only 29 percent of those age 18-29. Overall, less than 1 in 5 believe 2019 will be a worse year than 2018.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from The Associated Press and NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report.

During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between December 13 and 16, 2018, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,067 completed the survey—992 via the web and 75 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. The final stage completion rate is 20.1 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 34.2 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 85.1 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 5.8 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, Census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2018 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

A comprehensive listing of the questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: www.apnorc.org. For more information, email info@apnorc.org.

CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS

From NORC at the University of Chicago

Marjorie Connelly
Will Bonnell
Caroline Smith
Tom Okal
Mariana Meza Hernandez
Dan Malato
Jennifer Benz
Trevor Tompson

From The Associated Press

Emily Swanson
Hannah Fingerhut

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

- The Associated Press (AP) is the world's essential news organization, bringing fast, unbiased news to all media platforms and formats.
- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and non-partisan research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

The founding principles of The AP-NORC Center include a mandate to carefully preserve and protect the scientific integrity and objectivity of NORC and the journalistic independence of AP. All work conducted by the Center conforms to the highest levels of scientific integrity to prevent any real or perceived bias in the research. All of the work of the Center is subject to review by its advisory committee to help ensure it meets these standards. The Center will publicize the results of all studies and make all datasets and study documentation available to scholars and the public.

Learn more at www.apnorc.org