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NORC
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The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

AMERICANS' PRIORITIES FOR 2017

Health care, unemployment, immigration, and education top a lengthy and varied list of the American public's policy priorities for the coming year. The public is eager for Washington to expend a significant amount of effort dealing with their top concerns for the country. However, although Republicans will control the White House and both houses of Congress, Americans have little confidence that much headway will be made on these important problems.

A recent poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research reveals a diverse collection of issues that Americans want President-elect Donald Trump and his new administration to address in 2017, including problems that range from terrorism to taxes to race relations. In order to explore the public's agenda for the next year, the poll accepted up to five volunteered issues from each respondent.

Republicans and Democrats agree on the number one top priority: health care. But there are substantial partisan differences on several high-profile problems, including the importance of the environment, immigration, education, and terrorism. The nationwide poll was conducted December 14-19, 2016, 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 1,017 adults.

Key findings from the poll include:

- The top issue for Republicans (47 percent), Democrats (40 percent), and independents (43 percent) is health care.
- Unemployment is mentioned by 37 percent of Republicans, 25 percent of Democrats, and 26 percent of independents. The economy, in general, was mentioned by roughly a fifth, regardless of party.



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Three Things You Should Know

About the AP-NORC Poll on Americans' Priorities for 2017. Among all American adults...

- 1) The public has a variety of policy priorities. Republicans, Democrats, and independents prioritize many issues differently, but health care is a top priority for all.
- 2) While desiring a sizeable amount of government attention for the most important problems, most lack confidence in Washington's ability to make progress this year.
- 3) In a turnaround from the end of 2015, most Republicans now consider the country to be on the right course, while Democrats have become more pessimistic.

- While there is partisan agreement on some of the country's leading priorities, Republicans and Democrats disagree on the importance of other issues. For example, the second most common response from Republicans is immigration, named by 40 percent. In contrast, only 15 percent of Democrats listed immigration as one of their top five concerns.
- Coming up with a solution to the public's priorities should be given a substantial amount of effort by the government, according to most Americans. However, the poll did not investigate what people specifically want to see accomplished for any of these problems. It is likely that, while health care is the top issue for both Democrats and Republicans, each group would prefer different resolutions.
- Few expect much will be accomplished to solve these problems in the next year. The public views some problems as more difficult to deal with than others. Americans have little confidence in the government's ability to address poverty, racism, and the environment. There is more optimism for progress to be made on unemployment, immigration, and terrorism.
- Fewer Americans regard the country as heading in the wrong direction than a year ago, although it remains a majority. In 2015, 69 percent said the country was on the wrong course and 30 percent said it was headed in the right direction. Now, 56 percent consider the country heading in the wrong direction and 42 percent say it is on the right track.
- Republicans and Democrats have both had an about-face regarding the direction of the country. In the wake of Trump's election as president, 66 percent of Republicans say the country is headed in the right direction, up from 18 percent last year. Only 22 percent of Democrats now regard the country as being on the right course, down from 42 percent last year.

AMERICANS MOST OFTEN CITE DOMESTIC ISSUES AS THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS FACING THE COUNTRY IN 2017, WITH HEALTH CARE TOPPING THE LIST OF CONCERNS.

Most Americans continue to say the country is headed in the wrong direction, though fewer say so than a year ago. In December 2015, 69 percent said the country was headed in the wrong direction compared to just 30 percent who said it was headed in the right direction.¹ This year, 56 percent say it is headed in the wrong direction while 42 percent now say it is headed in the right direction. A majority of Republicans say the country is headed in the right direction (66 percent). Just 48 percent of independents and 22 percent of Democrats say the same. A year ago, Democrats were more likely than independents or Republicans to say the country was headed in the right direction (42 percent vs. 22 percent and 18 percent, respectively).

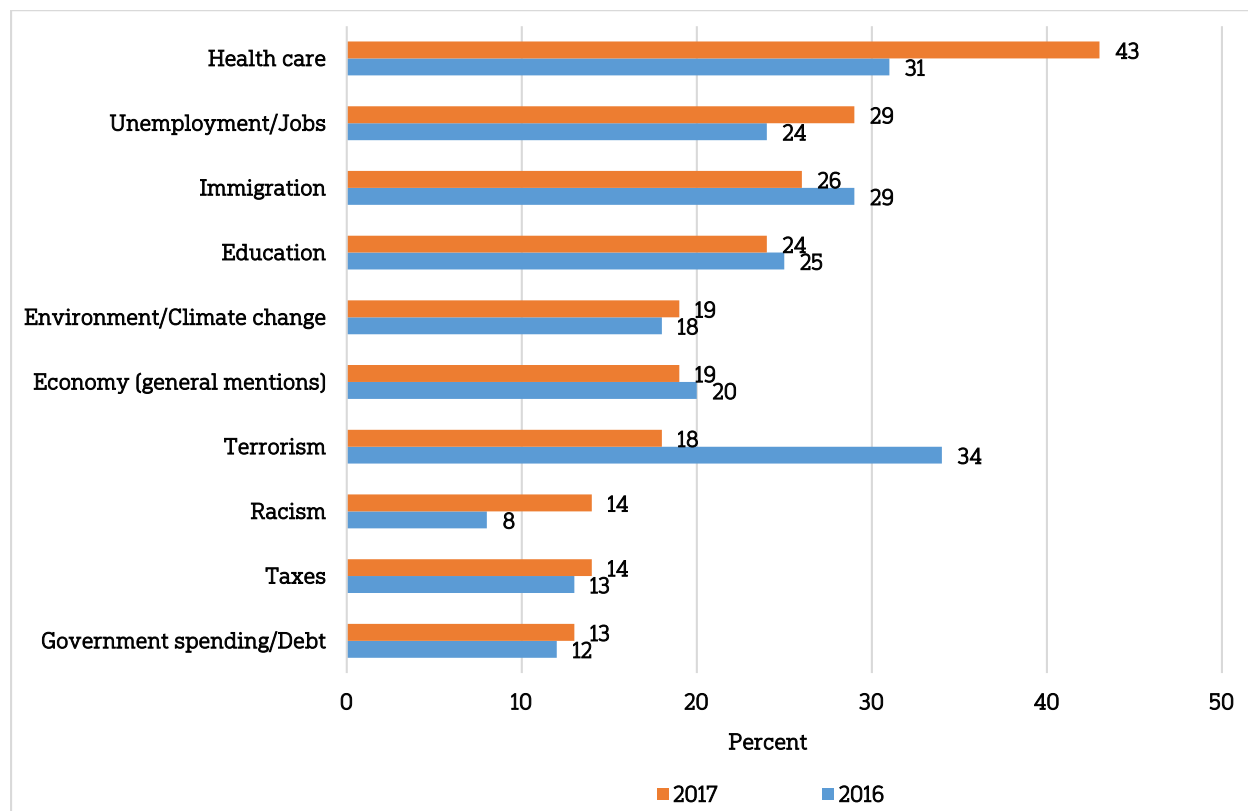
As was the case in 2016, Americans' priorities for the coming year are more often domestic than global in nature. The public was asked which problems facing the United States and the world should be addressed by the government in 2017. Up to five volunteered responses were permitted.

Domestic issues, such as health care, education, the environment, and racism are cited by 86 percent of Americans. Gun issues were cited frequently last year, but fewer cited it as a priority this year.

Political matters, including Trump and smaller government, are named by 26 percent.

¹ http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/American%20Priorities/Topline_Important%20Problems_FINAL.pdf

Domestic issues top the public's agenda for the coming year, with health care as the most frequently mentioned problem.



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 2017? Please list up to five problems. [Percentages above among those who provided at least one problem. Ten most-cited problems in 2017 shown above.]

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted Dec. 14-19, 2016, with 1,017 adults nationwide.

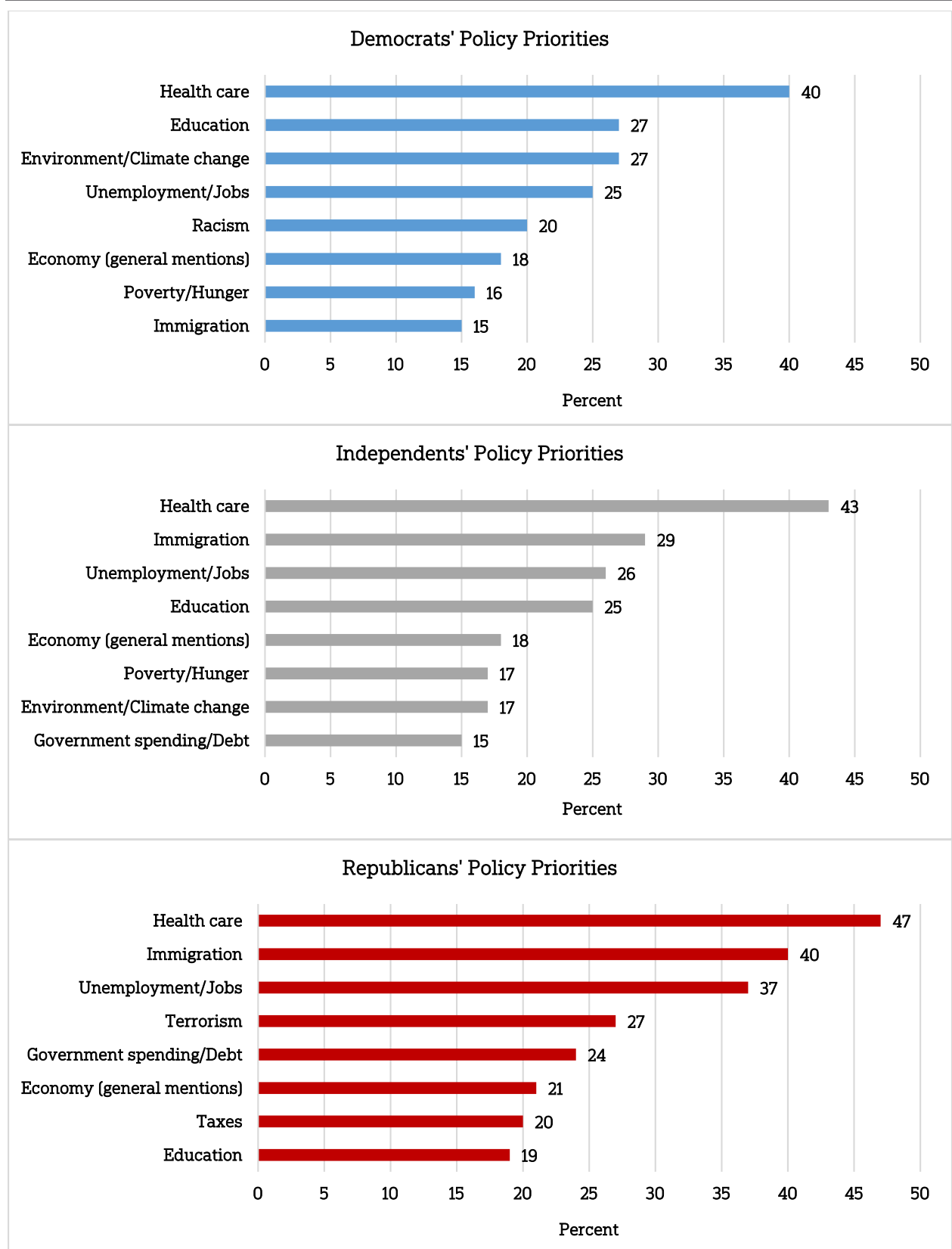
Economic issues, including unemployment, taxes, and government spending are among the top priorities of 67 percent of the public. An additional 13 percent mentioned personal financial topics, like wage increases and housing costs.

Foreign policy issues were important to 56 percent of Americans. The most frequently cited problems in this category were immigration, terrorism, and foreign relations.

While the top issue for both Democrats and Republicans is health care, there are significant differences in the rest of their policy agendas. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to mention as top issues the environment/climate (27 percent vs. 9 percent), racism (20 percent vs. 7 percent), and poverty/hunger (16 percent vs. 5 percent). They are also more likely to mention education (27 percent vs. 19 percent), though that is still a top issue for Republicans.

On the other hand, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to cite as top issues immigration (40 percent vs. 15 percent), terrorism (27 percent vs. 13 percent), government spending (24 percent vs. 5 percent), and taxes (20 percent vs. 10 percent).

The priorities for independents are a mix of the two main parties. On the one hand, immigration ranks as their second most cited priority, but on the other, many also cite the environment/climate change and poverty/hunger. Health care still ranks as the top issue.



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 2017? Please list up to five problems. [Percentages above among those who provided at least one problem. Issues mentioned by more than 15 percent noted above.]

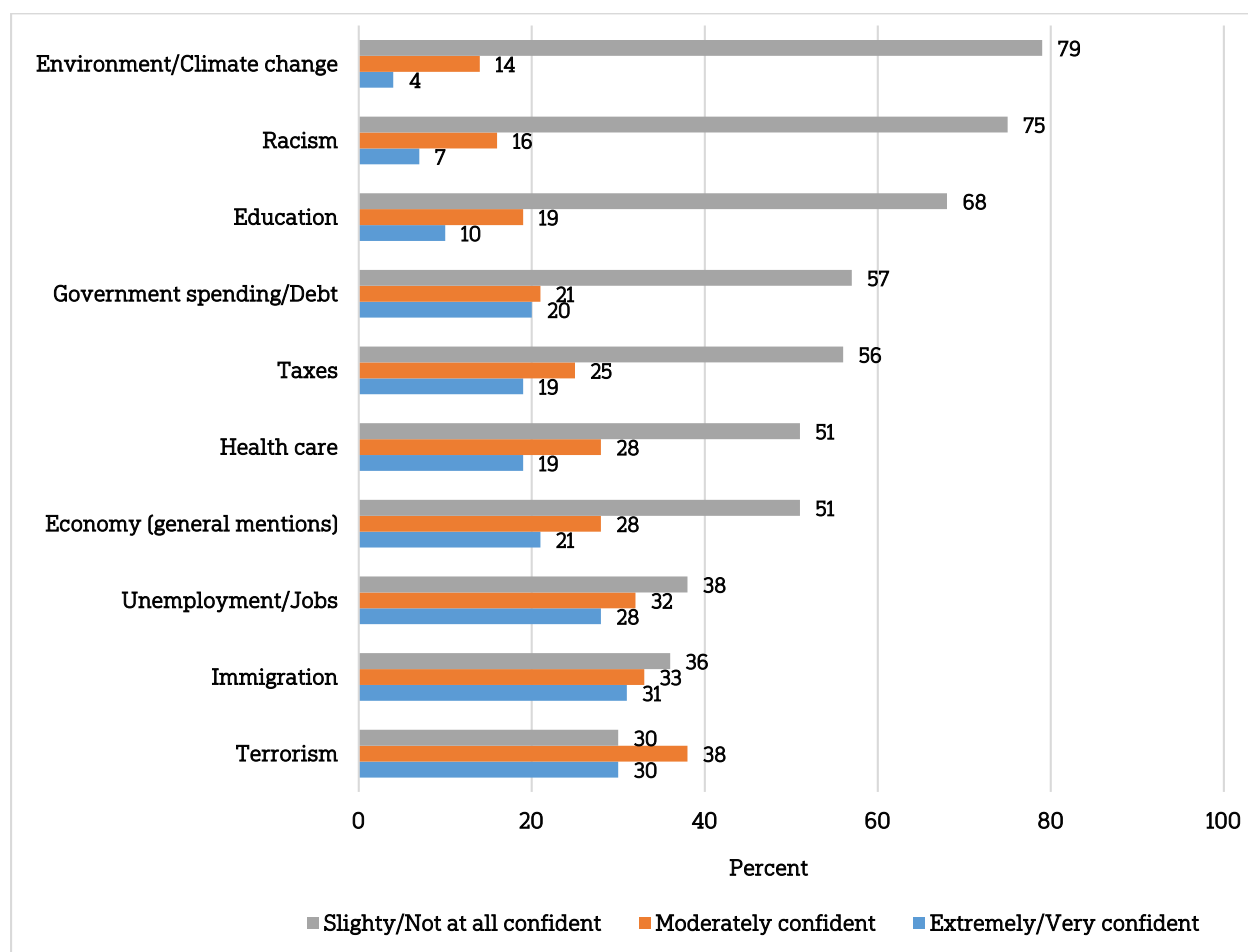
Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted Dec. 14-19, 2016, with 1,017 adults nationwide.

WHILE AMERICANS WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE GOVERNMENT PAY ATTENTION TO THEIR MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS, THEY HAVE LITTLE CONFIDENCE IN WASHINGTON'S ABILITY TO MAKE REAL PROGRESS ON THEM.

The public would like to see a substantial amount of attention given by Washington to the issues they consider most important. Like last year, at least 8 in 10 Americans who mentioned economic, domestic, or foreign policy issues would like to see the government devote a great deal or a lot of effort to solving these problems.

However, there is little confidence that progress will be made in fixing any of these problems. Some are seen as particularly intractable, including poverty, racism, and the environment. More than 7 in 10 Americans say they are slightly confident or not confident at all that the government can make progress on each of these issues. The public is more optimistic about the government's ability to make progress on frequently cited problems like unemployment, immigration, and terrorism. The poll did not ask people what they would like to see accomplished for any of these problems. Presumably, Republicans and Democrats desire different resolutions for the same problems.

Few Americans have confidence in the government's ability to make progress on many of their policy priorities.



Question: How confident are you in the ability of the federal government to make progress on this problem in 2017? [Asked for each verbatim problem cited. Ten most-cited problems shown above.]
 Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted Dec. 14-19, 2016, with 1,017 adults nationwide.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from 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).

Interviews for this survey were conducted between December 14 and 19, 2016, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,017 completed the survey—846 via the web and 171 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 30.5 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 34.3 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 95 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 9.9 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.7 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 household phone status. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

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.

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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 and most respected, independent 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.