



The Associated Press-NORC  
Center for Public Affairs Research

# NEW YEAR, SAME PRIORITIES: THE PUBLIC'S AGENDA FOR 2018

Health care, taxes, immigration, the environment, and education top a long and diverse list of the American public's policy priorities for the coming year. The public would like to see Washington expend considerable effort dealing with their top concerns for the country. But, even as Republicans control the White House and both houses of Congress, Americans have little confidence that much progress will be made on these important problems.

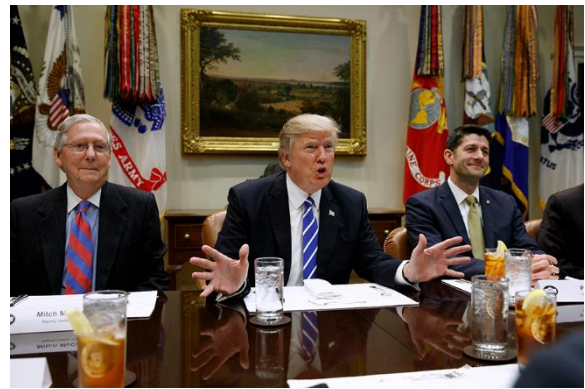
In a recent poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, Americans offer a varied catalog of problems for the government to address next year, including concerns that range from racism to terrorism to unemployment. In order to explore the public's agenda for the next year, the poll accepted up to five volunteered issues from each respondent.

There are substantial partisan differences on several high-profile problems, including the importance of the environment, immigration, education, and terrorism.

Republicans tend to express more optimism about how things are going in the United States and the state of its politics and government than Democrats. Closer to home, both Democrats and Republicans are more optimistic than pessimistic about the circumstances of their own state and their local community.

However, less than 10 percent say President Donald Trump has succeeded in making the country more united. In addition, 43 percent say the country's best days are in the future, while 55 percent think the good times are in the past.

In the year since Trump was elected, few Americans think he has been successful in fulfilling his campaign promises. And while various economic indicators suggest an improved economy, most Americans do not regard either their own circumstances or the country's as having improved under Trump's stewardship.



© 2017 AP Photo/Evan Vucci

## Three Things You Should Know

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

Among Americans age 18 and older:

1. Nearly half would like the government to address the issue of health care in the coming year, but few express much confidence in the ability of the government to make progress on this problem.
2. Forty-five percent say President Trump has not kept his campaign promises, 30 percent say he tried but failed, and 23 percent say he has fulfilled his campaign promises.
3. Americans express more optimism than pessimism when it comes to assessing the way things are going in their local community and in their state. They are more pessimistic when it comes to the state of politics in this country and the way things are going in the United States generally.

The nationwide poll was conducted November 30–December 4, 2017, 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 1,444 adults.

Key findings from the poll include:

- Though Republicans and Democrats disagree on the importance of many of the country's leading priorities, health care is the top issue for Democrats, named by 54 percent. For Republicans, health care (41 percent) is a close second after immigration (42 percent). Only 20 percent of Democrats listed immigration as one of their top five concerns.
- There is not much confidence that progress will be made in dealing with these problems in the next year. Doubt about the government's ability to address the major issues facing the country has increased since Trump's election.
- After 10 months in office, 23 percent of Americans say Trump has been able to fulfill his campaign promises, and 30 percent say he has tried but has been unable. However, 45 percent of the public, including 69 percent of Democrats and 12 percent of Republicans, say Trump has not kept the pledges he made during the campaign. The poll was conducted before Trump delivered on his promise to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the U.S. Embassy there.
- A year ago in his victory speech, Trump vowed to unite the country. Only 9 percent of Americans think he has been successful in bringing the country together, while 67 percent say the United States has become more divided and another 23 percent say there has been no change.
- While many measures indicate an improved economy over the past 10 months, most people do not regard their personal situation or the country as a whole as having improved. Twenty percent say they and their family are better off under Trump's watch, but 46 percent feel there has been no change and 33 percent say their circumstances have deteriorated. About half the public say the country has become worse off since Trump was inaugurated in January. Only 25 percent consider the country better off, and 21 percent do not see any difference.

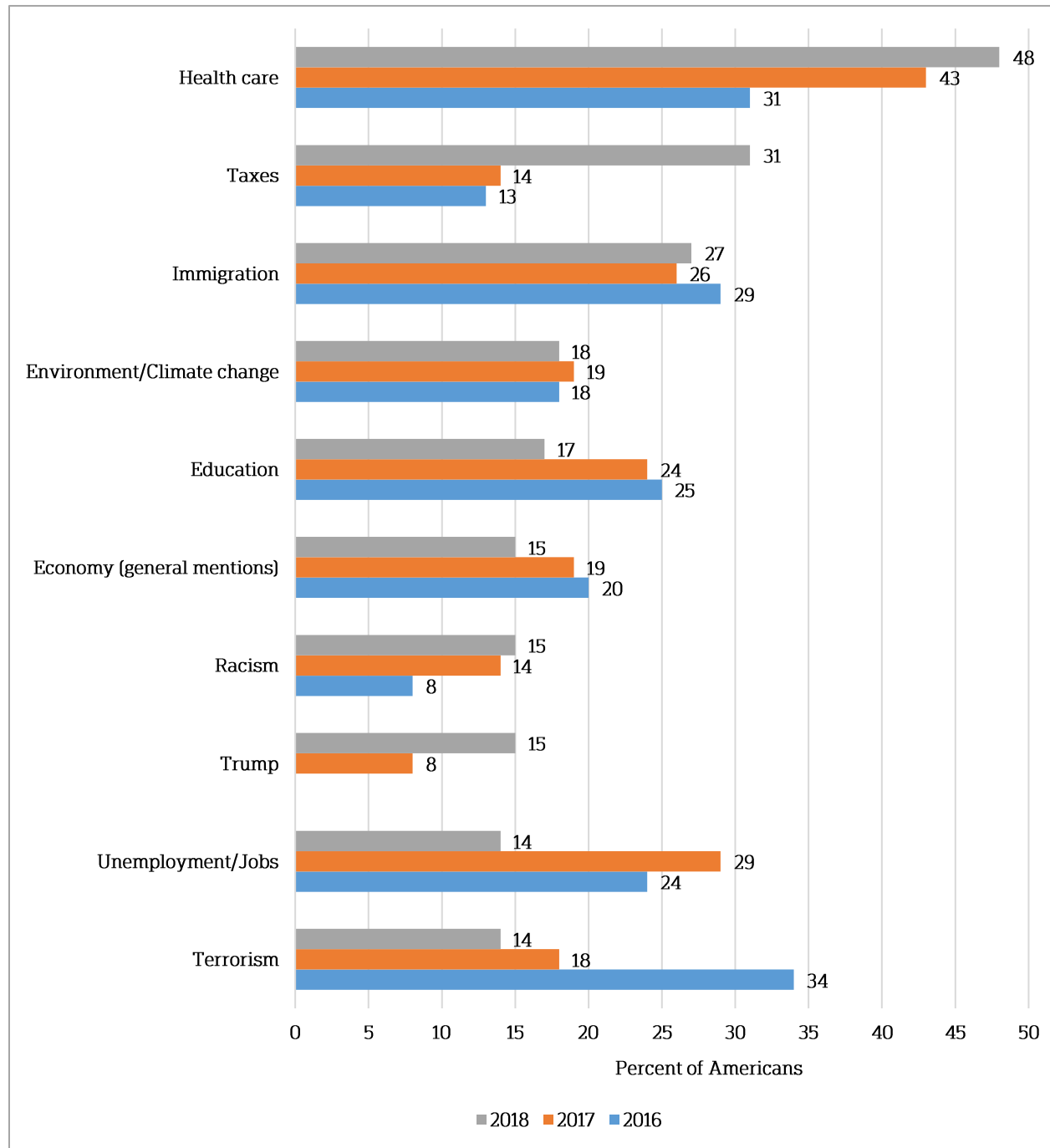
## **HEALTH CARE CONTINUES TO TOP THE LIST OF CONCERNS.**

As was the case for the past two years, Americans' priorities for the coming year tend to be home-grown in nature. The public was asked which problems facing the United States and the world should be addressed by the government in 2018. Up to five volunteered responses were permitted.

Domestic issues, such as health care, education, the environment, and racism are cited by 85 percent of Americans. Economic issues, including unemployment, taxes, and government spending are among the top priorities of 65 percent of the public. An additional 8 percent mentioned personal financial topics, like wage increases and housing costs. Political matters, including Trump and smaller government, are named by 34 percent.

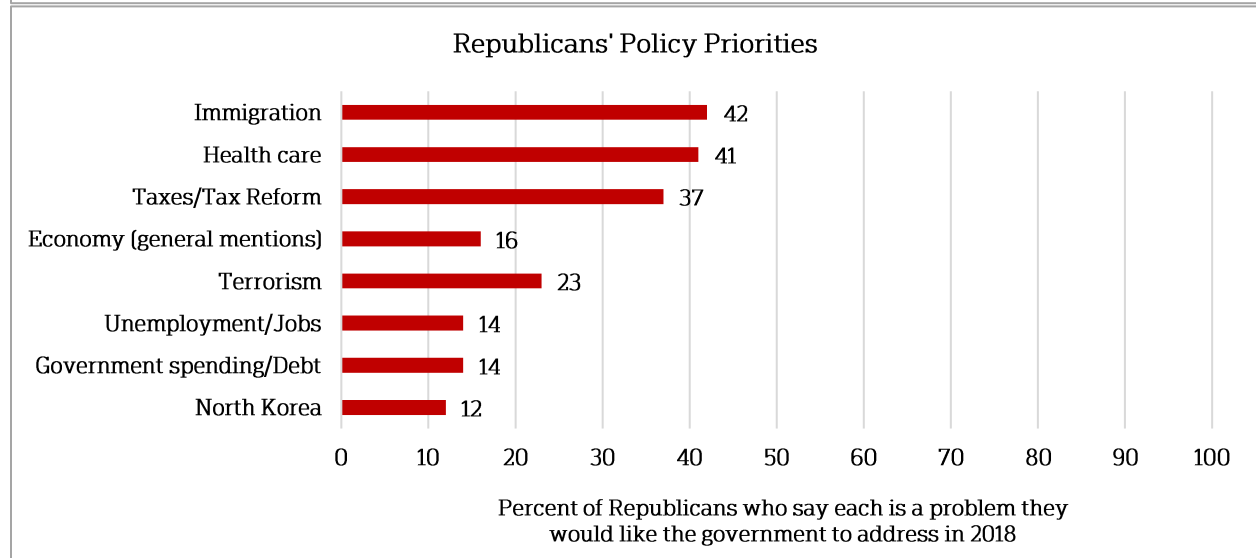
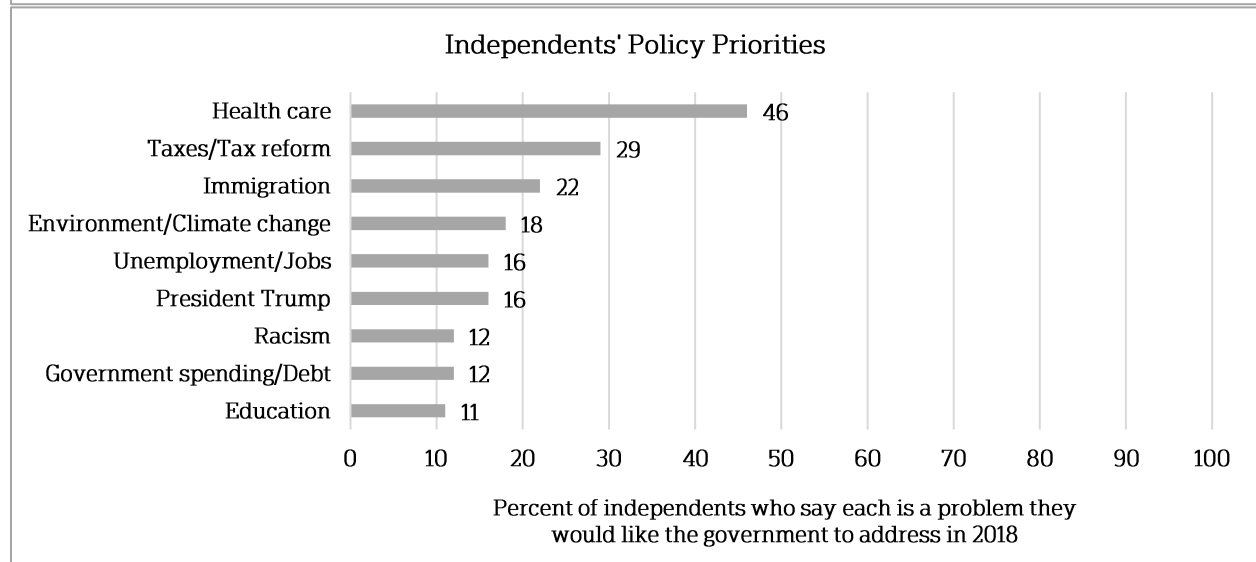
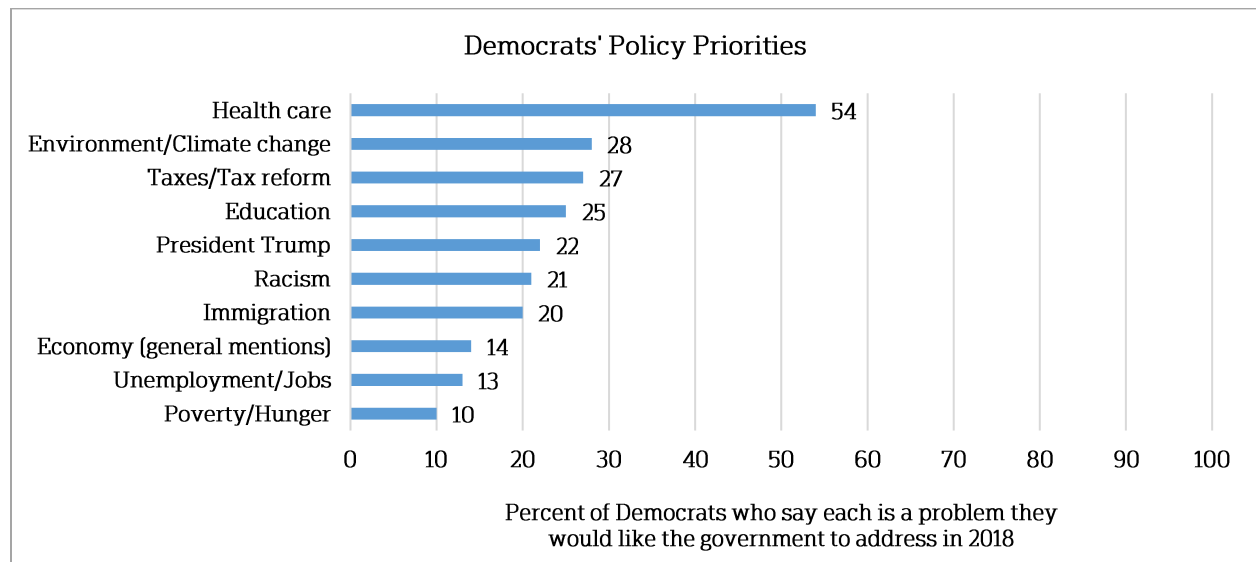
Foreign policy issues were important to 58 percent of Americans. The most frequently cited problems in this category were immigration, terrorism, and North Korea.

**Domestic and economic issues 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 2018? 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 Nov. 30-Dec. 4, 2017, with 1,444 adults nationwide.

The top issue for both Democrats and independents is health care, while Republicans place it a close second behind immigration. There are other differences in their policy agendas. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to mention as top issues the environment and climate change, education, and racism. On the other hand, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to cite terrorism as being a top policy concern.

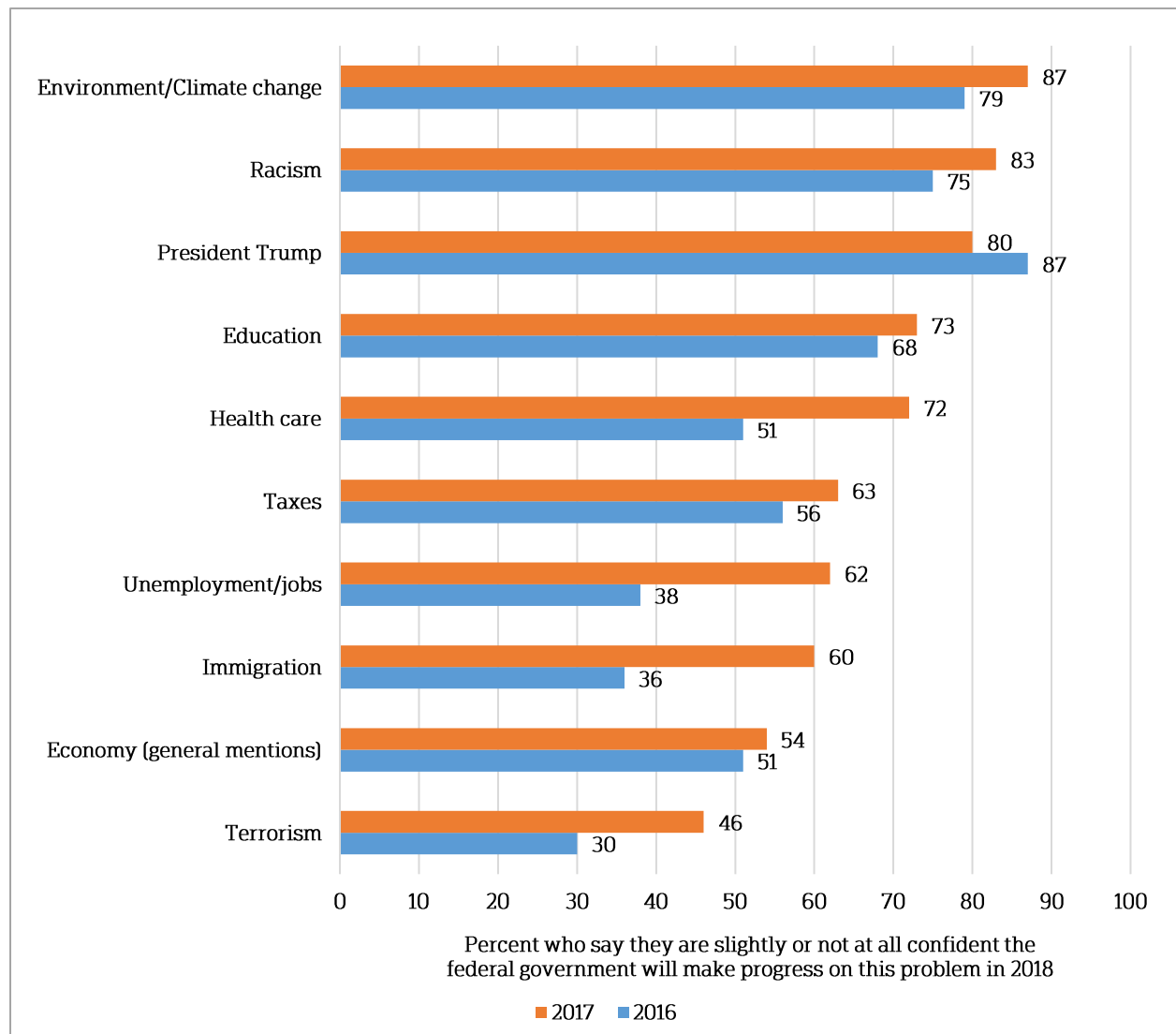


**Question:** Thinking about the problems facing the United States and the world today, which problems would you like the government to be working on in the year 2018? Please list up to five problems. [Percentages above among those who provided at least one problem. Issues mentioned by 10 percent or more are noted above.]  
**Source:** AP-NORC Center poll conducted Nov. 30-Dec. 4, 2017, with 1,444 adults nationwide.

The public would like to see a substantial amount of attention given by Washington to the issues they consider most important. As found the last two years, 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.

At the same time, there is little confidence that progress will be made in fixing any of these problems. The public's pessimism on several issues has grown since Trump was elected last year.

**There is growing doubt in the government's ability to make progress on many of their policy priorities.**



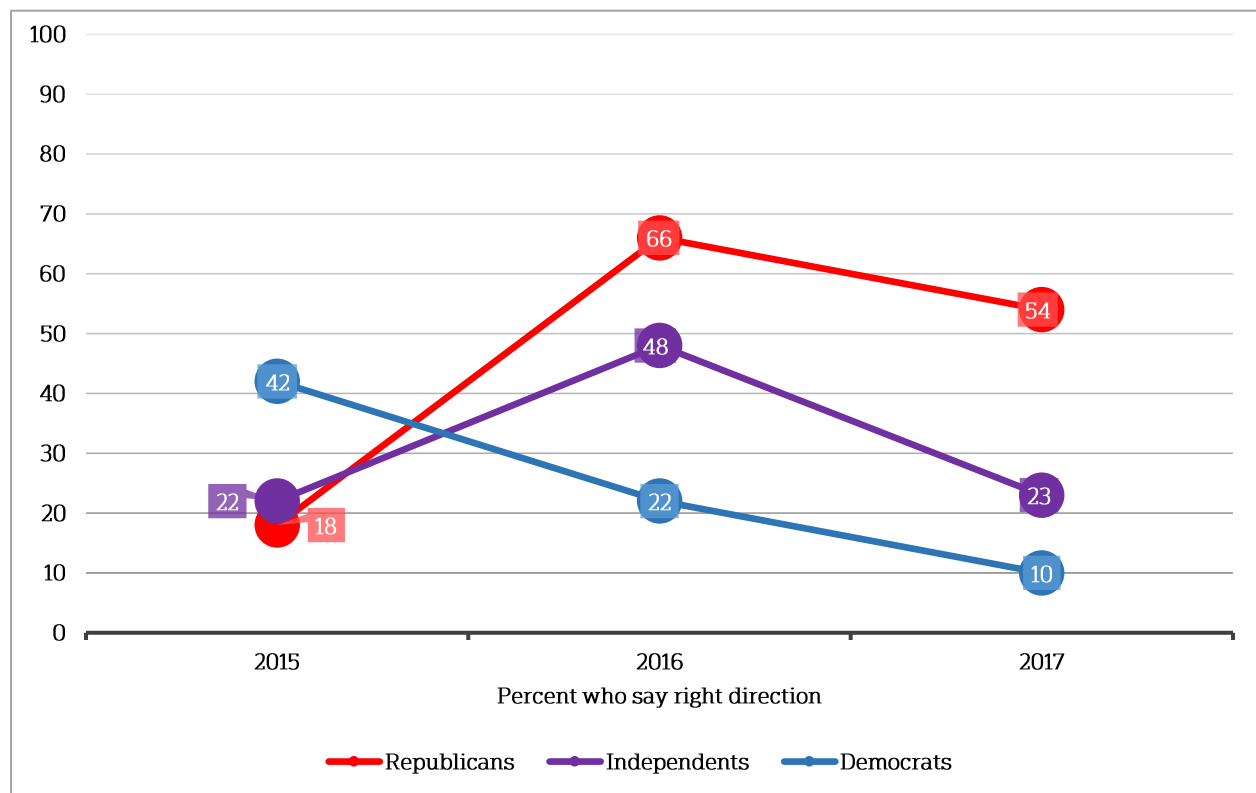
Question: How confident are you in the ability of the federal government to make progress on this problem in 2018? [Asked for each verbatim problem cited. Ten most-cited problems shown above.]  
 Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted Nov. 30-Dec.4, 2017, with 1,444 adults nationwide.

## AMERICANS ARE DIVIDED ALONG PARTISAN LINES IN EVALUATIONS OF THE COUNTRY AND THE PRESIDENT.

Most Americans continue to regard the country as headed in the wrong direction, and even more say this now than a year ago. After Trump's victory in November 2016, 42 percent said the country was moving in the right direction, up from 30 percent the year before. Now, the public's view is just about the same as it was in 2015: 28 percent say it is going in the right direction, while 71 percent see it as heading the wrong way.

While most Republicans say the country is moving in the right direction, it's down from the drastic improvement following last year's election. The opinion of Democrats took a nosedive after Trump's election, and a year later, even fewer Democrats regard the country as being on the right path.

### Reduced numbers see the country as headed in the right direction.

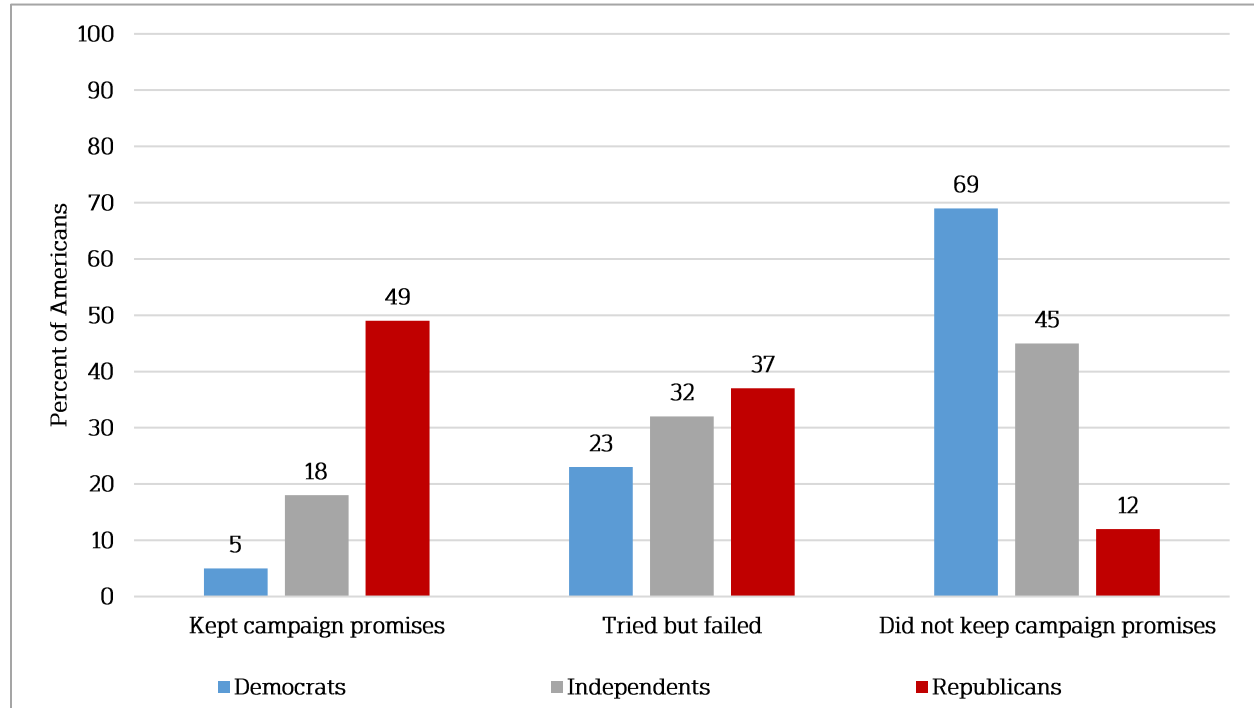


**Question:** Generally speaking, would you say things in this country are heading in the right direction or the wrong direction?

**Source:** AP-NORC Center poll conducted Nov. 30-Dec. 4, 2017, with 1,444 adults nationwide.

Less than a quarter of Americans say Trump has kept the promises he made while running for president, although another 30 percent say he tried to keep those promises but was unsuccessful. Forty-five percent of all Americans (but only 12 percent of Republicans) say he has not kept his campaign promises at all.

**Most Republicans think Trump kept, or at least tried to keep, his campaign promises. Democrats mostly think he either tried and failed or did not keep them.**



**Question:** Do you think Donald Trump has kept the promises he made while running for president, tried but failed to keep his promises, or not kept his promises?

**Source:** AP-NORC Center poll conducted Nov. 30-Dec. 4, 2017, with 1,444 adults nationwide.

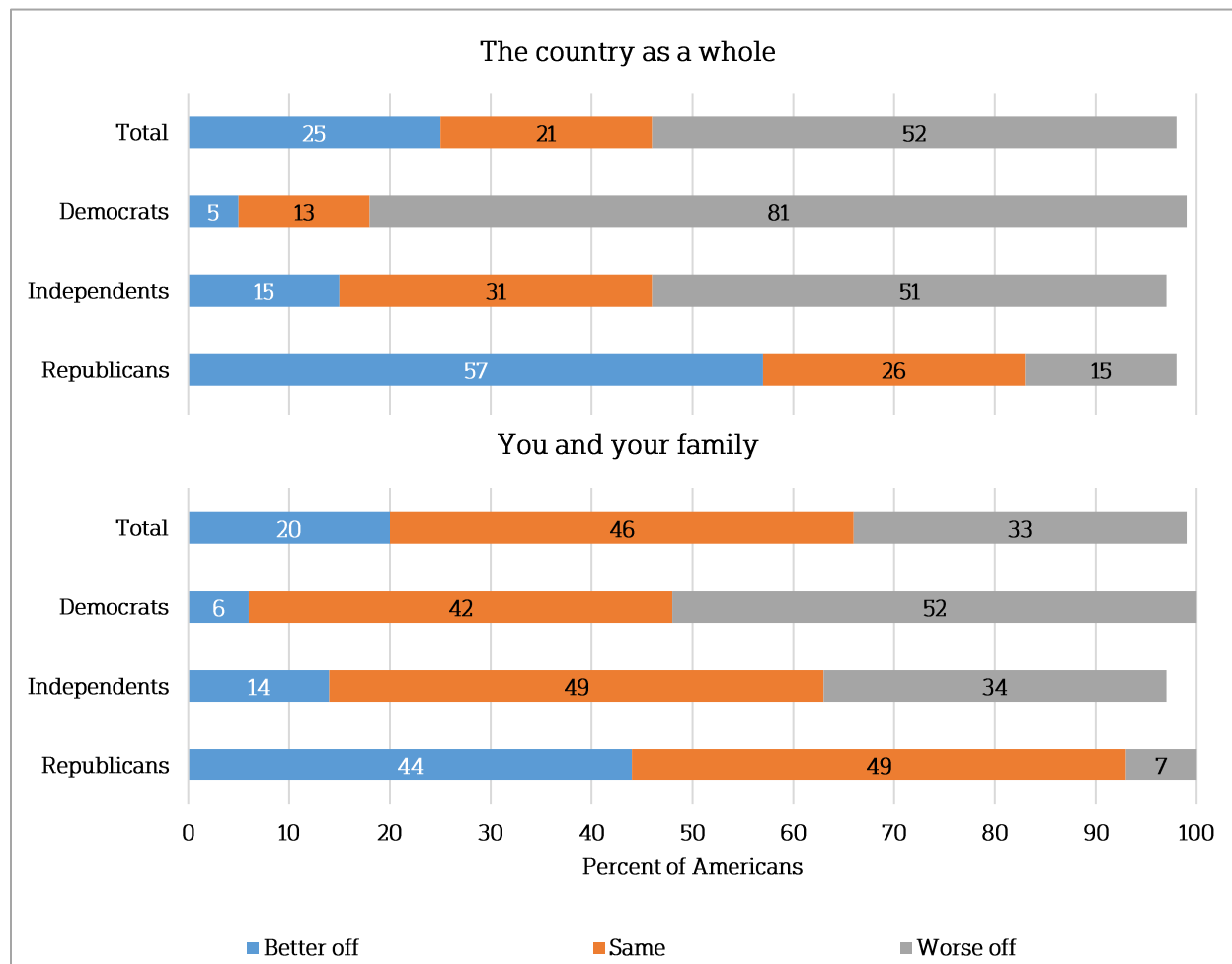
During his victory speech,<sup>1</sup> Trump said that it was “time for us to come together as one united people.” A year later, few Americans think he has been successful so far. Nine percent say Trump’s presidency has made the country more united. Sixty-seven percent say it is more divided, and 23 percent say it is neither more united nor more divided.

Since Trump was inaugurated in January 2017, the nation’s economy has added an average of 174,000 jobs per month, and the unemployment rate has dropped to 4.1 percent.<sup>2</sup> But, most Americans do not perceive an improved economy—either for themselves or the country. When asked if they and their family are better or worse off since Trump became president, less than a quarter of Americans say they are somewhat or much better off. About 3 in 10 say they are somewhat or much worse off, while more than 4 in 10 say there is not much difference. When discussing the country as a whole, 25 percent say it is better off, but 21 percent say there has been no improvement and 52 percent say it has deteriorated.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/us/politics/trump-speech-transcript.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

**Democrats say the country as a whole is worse off since Trump became president; majorities of Republicans disagree.**



Questions: Overall, would you say that the country as a whole is better off or worse off than it was when Donald Trump became president in January, or has there not been much difference?

Overall, would you say that you and your family are better off or worse off than you were when Donald Trump became president in January, or has there not been much difference?

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted Nov. 30-Dec. 4, 2017, with 1,444 adults nationwide.

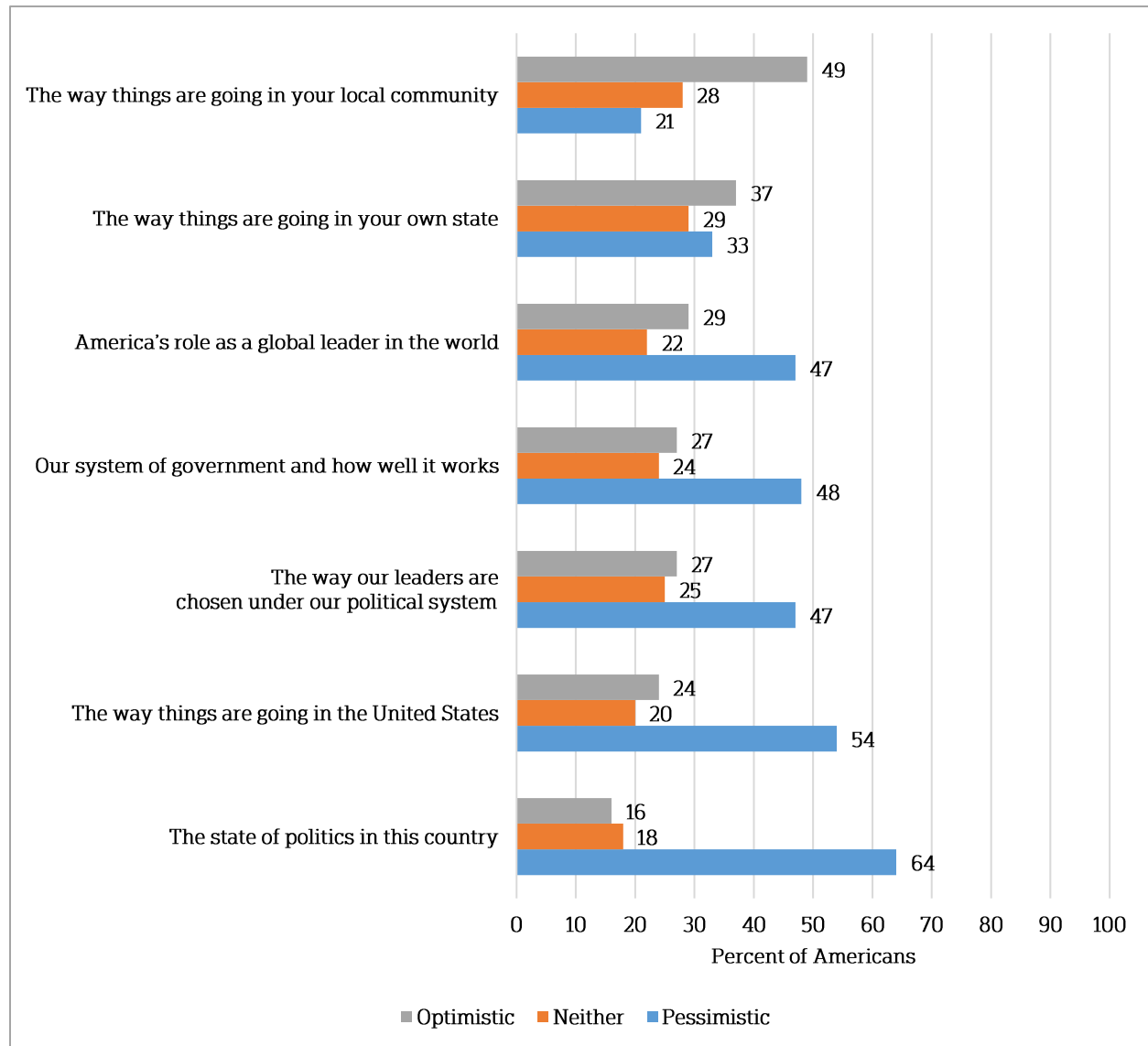
**FEW AMERICANS ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY.**

Forty-nine percent of Americans say they feel very or somewhat optimistic about the way things are going in their local community, and 37 percent feel optimistic about the way things are going in their state.

But when it comes to how things are going on a national level—in politics, with institutions, and in international relations—Americans express higher levels of pessimism than optimism. Sixty-four percent say they are somewhat or very pessimistic about the state of politics in this country, and 54 percent are pessimistic about the way things are going in the United States. Just under half say they are pessimistic about our system of government and how well it works, the way our leaders are chosen under the current system, and America’s role as a global leader in the world.



**Americans express more optimism than pessimism when it comes to their state and local community.**



**Question:** Which comes closest to your feelings about each of the following?  
**Source:** AP-NORC Center poll conducted Nov. 30-Dec. 4, 2017, with 1,444 adults nationwide.

Republicans tend to express more optimistic views than Democrats when it comes to how things are going on a national and international level. Half of Republicans say they are optimistic about America's role as a global leader, compared with 17 percent of Democrats who say the same. Republicans are three times as likely as Democrats to express optimism about the way things are going in the United States (43 percent vs. 13 percent) and about twice as likely to express optimistic views about the way leaders are currently chosen (43 percent vs. 17 percent), our system of government (40 percent vs. 21 percent), and the state of politics in this country (23 percent vs. 10 percent).

Democrats and Republicans do see eye-to-eye on a more micro-level. Similar numbers of Democrats and Republicans express optimism about the way things are going in their own state and local community.

## 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 at the University of Chicago'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 November 30 and December 4, 2017, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. All interviews were conducted in English by professional interviewers who were carefully trained on the specific survey for this study. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,444 completed the survey—1,286 via the web and 158 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 24.5 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 33.7 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 88.8 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 7.3 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 education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2017 Current Population Survey. 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](http://www.apnorc.org). For more information, email [info@apnorc.org](mailto:info@apnorc.org).

## CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS

### From NORC at the University of Chicago

Marjorie Connelly  
Emily Alvarez  
Trevor Tompson  
Jennifer Benz  
Liz Kantor  
Nada Ganesh

### From The Associated Press

Emily Swanson

## **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.

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.