



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

2020: THE PUBLIC'S PRIORITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Health care, immigration, the environment, education, and the economy top a wide-ranging list of the American public's policy priorities for the coming year, but there is little confidence that much progress will be made on these important problems. Republicans remain more positive about the state of the country and where it's heading than Democrats.

In order to explore the public's agenda for 2020, a recent poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research accepted from each respondent up to five volunteered issues they want to see the government address.

Health care has returned to its position as the single top issue for the public. Immigration was tied with health care for the top spot on the public's agenda for 2019, but this year its importance has dropped substantially. Few Americans have much confidence in the government's ability to make progress on either health care or immigration.

Overall, 31% mentioned foreign policy issues other than immigration, including national security, war, and terrorism. The survey was conducted before the escalation of tensions between the United States and Iran in January 2020.

There are substantial partisan differences on several high-profile problems, including the importance of education, trade, and drugs. 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.



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Three Things You Should Know

About The AP-NORC Poll on the Public's Priorities and Expectations Among Americans Age 18 and Older:

- 1) For the past four years, more than 40% have named health care as one of their top concerns.
- 2) Thirty-five percent want the government to deal with the issue of immigration in 2020, down from 49% in 2019.
- 3) Most Americans are dissatisfied with how things are going in the country and the state of politics, while there is less discontent with conditions in their state or local community.

The nationwide poll was conducted December 5-9, 2019, 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 1,053 adults. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

Other findings from the poll include:

- Fifty-one percent of Republicans mentioned immigration as one of their top five problems, down from 65% last year. Among Democrats, the number mentioning immigration dropped to 29% compared with 37% last year.
- Most Americans have little or no confidence that Washington will make progress on any of the country's top problems.
- Thirty-seven percent of Americans think 2020 will be a better year than 2019, and 13% think it will be a worse year. Fifty percent do not expect much difference between 2019 and 2020. Republicans are more optimistic about the coming year than Democrats: 50% of Republicans expect 2020 to be an improvement over 2019, while only 33% of Democrats agree.
- Fifty percent think the country's best days are in the future, while 49% say they are behind us, basically the same breakdown as last year. However, Republicans have become less positive about the future, and Democrats are more optimistic.
- Sixty percent of Republicans say the national economy will improve in the next year, and 54% think their own finances will get better. In contrast, only 11% of Democrats think the national economy will get stronger over the next year, and just 28% expect their own finances to improve.

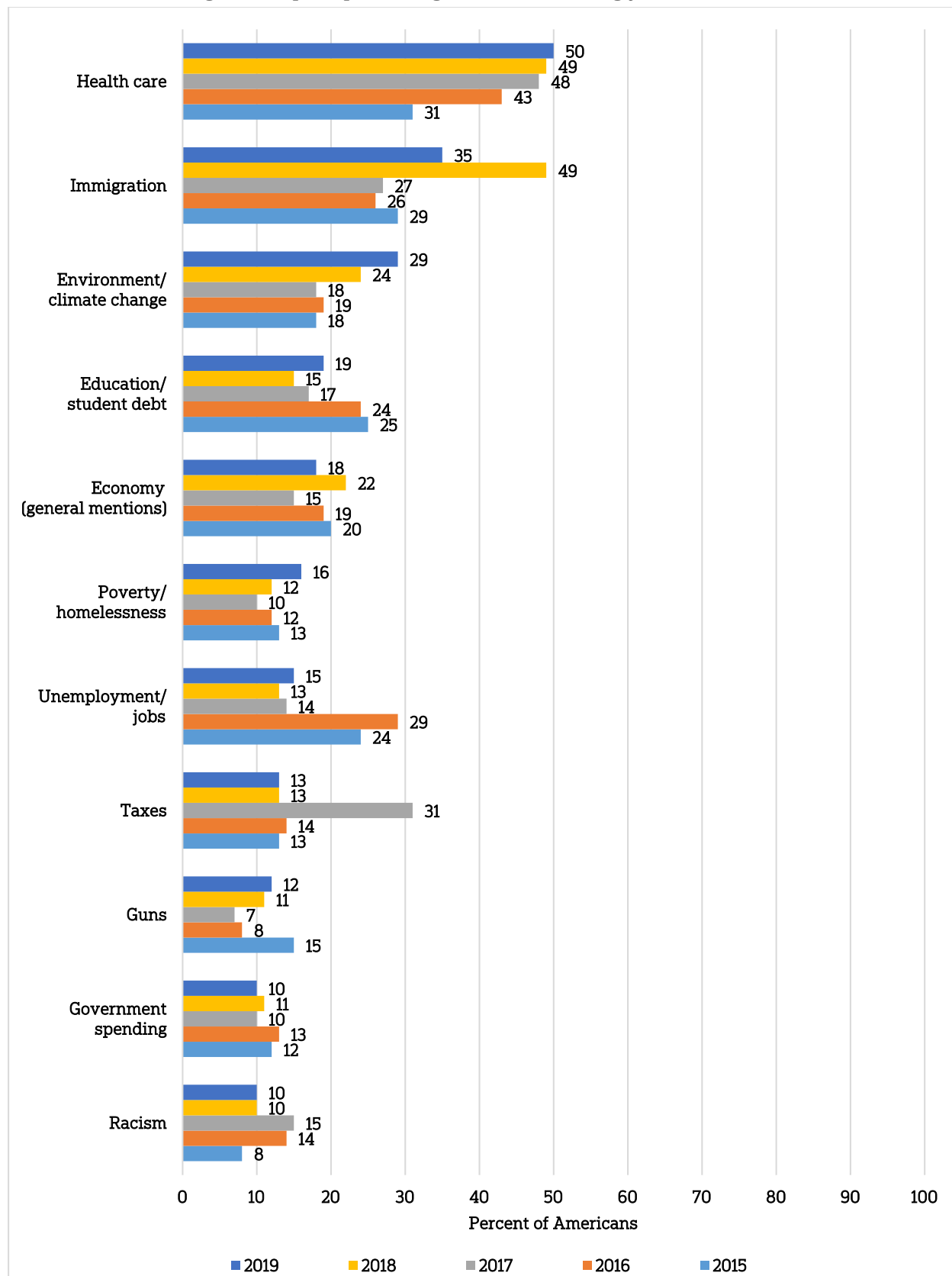
DOMESTIC ISSUES DOMINATE THE PUBLIC'S AGENDA FOR 2020.

The public was asked about problems facing the United States and the world today, and which problems they would like the government to work on in 2020. Among all policy areas, domestic issues continue to be cited as Americans' most pressing policy concerns.

Looking at specific issues, 50% of Americans cite health care as one of their top policy concerns, about the same as the 49% and 48% who mentioned it as a priority for 2019 and 2018, respectively.

Immigration, the second most cited issue, is mentioned by 35%, down from 49% last year. Climate change and the environment (29%), education (19%), and the economy in general (18%) round out the top five issues.

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

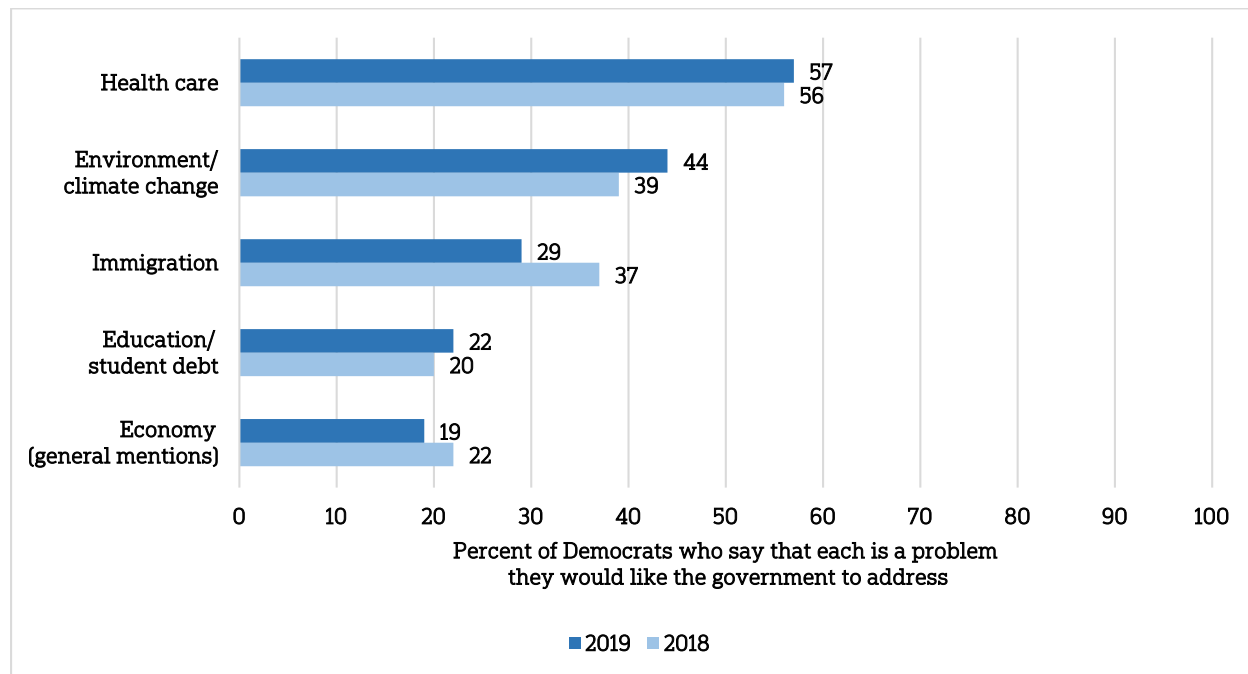


Question: Thinking about the problems facing the United States and the world today, which problems would you like the government to be working on in the year 2016/2017/2018/2019/2020? Please list up to five problems. [Percentages above among those who provided at least one problem. Problems named by at least 10% in 2019 are shown above.]

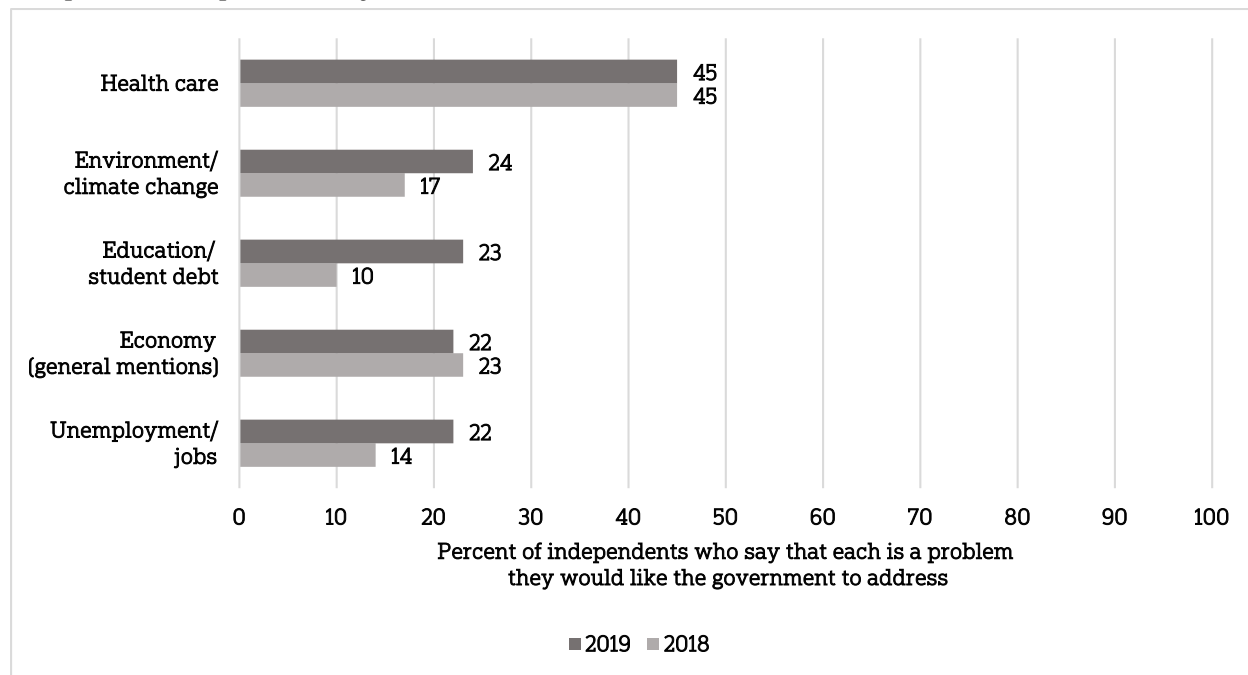
Source: AP-NORC polls, the latest conducted December 5-9, 2019, with 1,053 adults nationwide.

Health care is a common priority for all Americans, regardless of party identification, which is similar to last year. It is the top issue for both Democrats and independents, and comes second only to immigration for Republicans. While immigration is still among the top issues for Democrats and Republicans, both groups cite it significantly less often than they did the previous year.

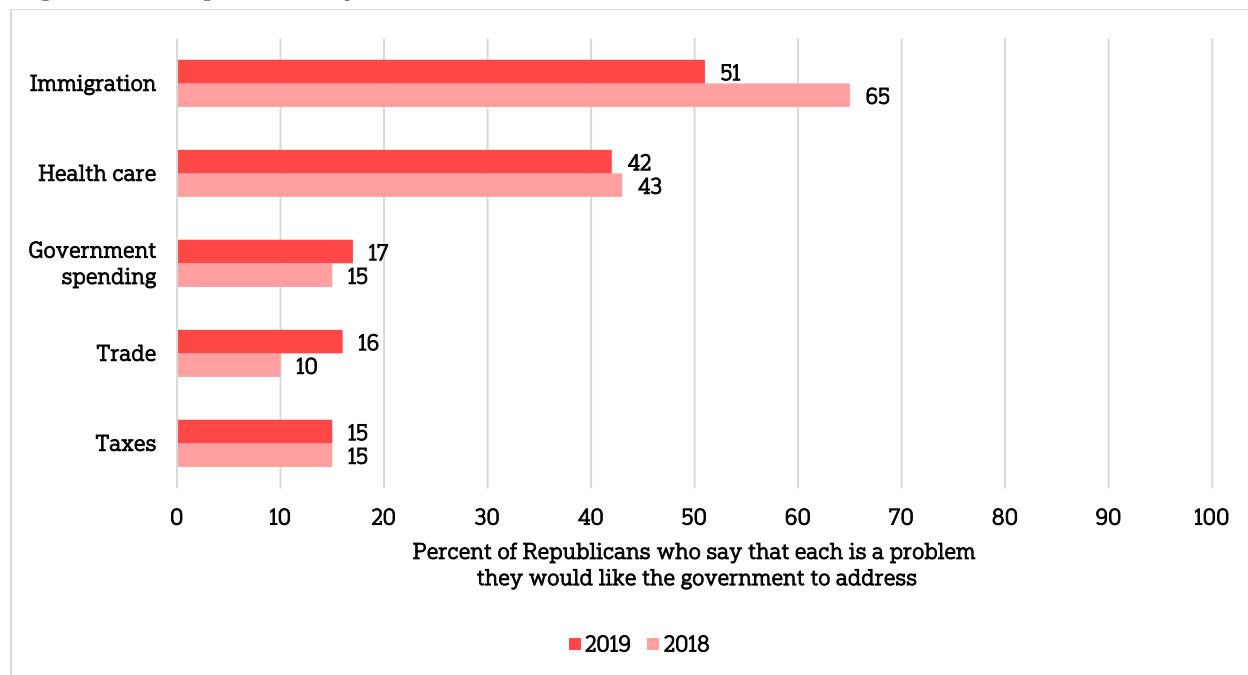
Democrats' Top Five Policy Priorities



Independents' Top Five Policy Priorities



Republicans' Top Five Policy Priorities



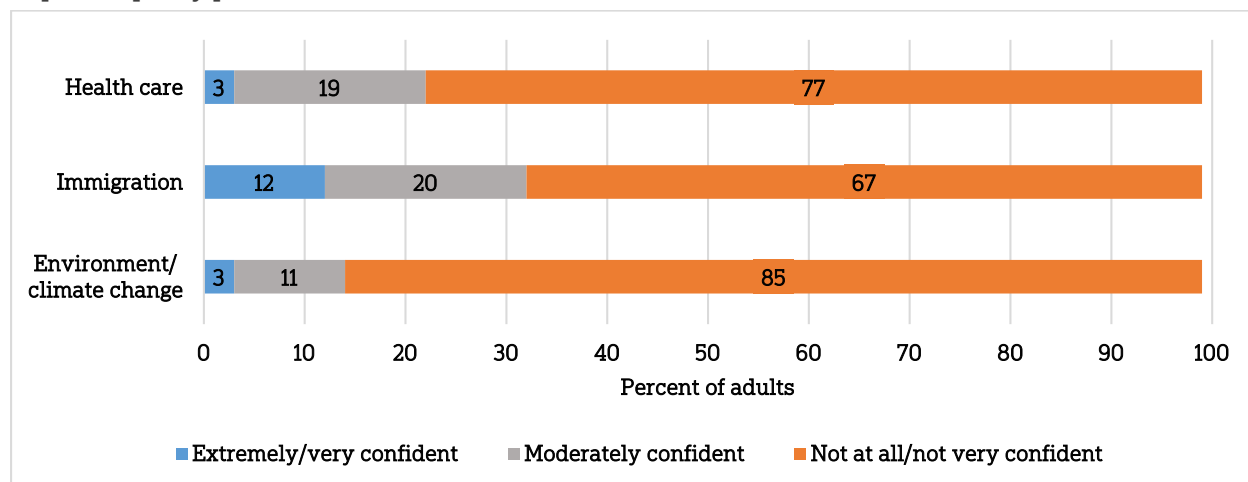
Question: Thinking about the problems facing the United States and the world today, which problems would you like the government to be working on in the year 2019/2020? Please list up to five problems. [Percentages above among those who provided at least one problem.]

Source: AP-NORC polls, the latest conducted December 5-9, 2019, with 1,053 adults nationwide.

FEW ARE CONFIDENT GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE PROGRESS ON THEIR TOP ISSUES IN 2020.

Americans continue to lack confidence that the government will be able to make progress on any of their most important policy problems.

Top three policy problems

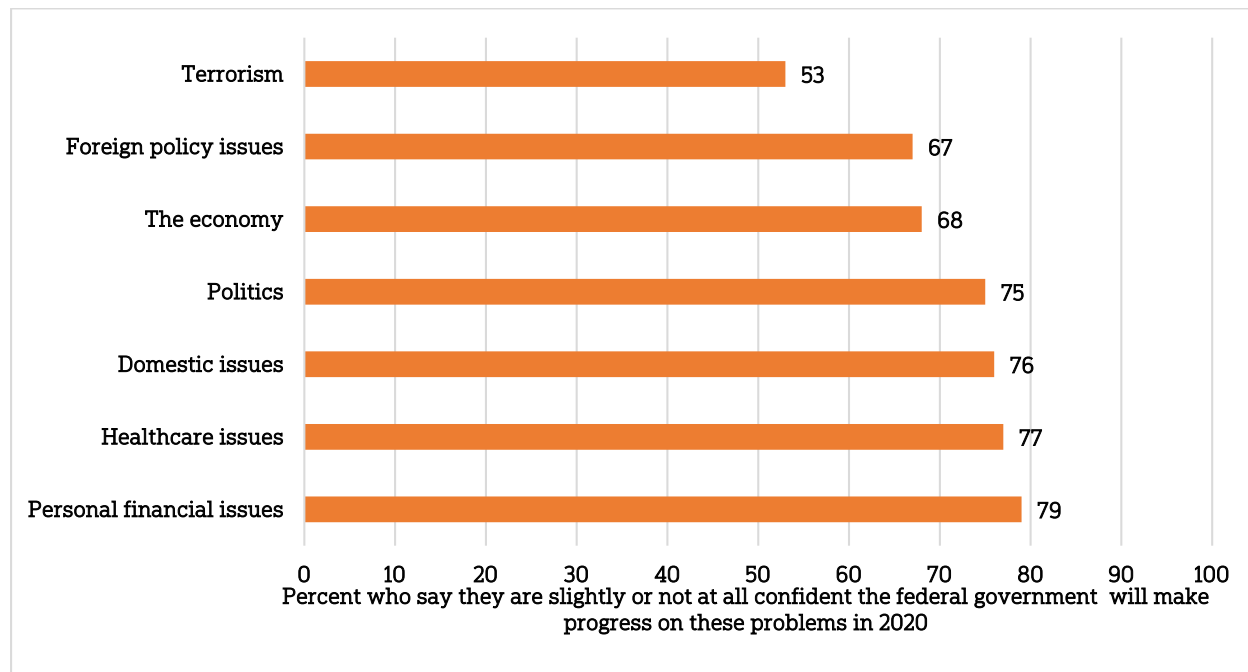


Question: How confident are you in the ability of the federal government to make progress on this problem in 2020?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted December 5-9, 2019, with 1,053 adults nationwide.

Looking more broadly at policy domains, more than 7 in 10 say that they are only slightly or not at all confident that the government will make progress on foreign policy issues, the economy, or personal financial issues. Apprehension about the government's ability to handle personal financial issues jumped more than 20 points in the last year, from 57% to 79% this 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 2020?

[Asked for each verbatim problem cited. Broad categories of issues are shown above.]

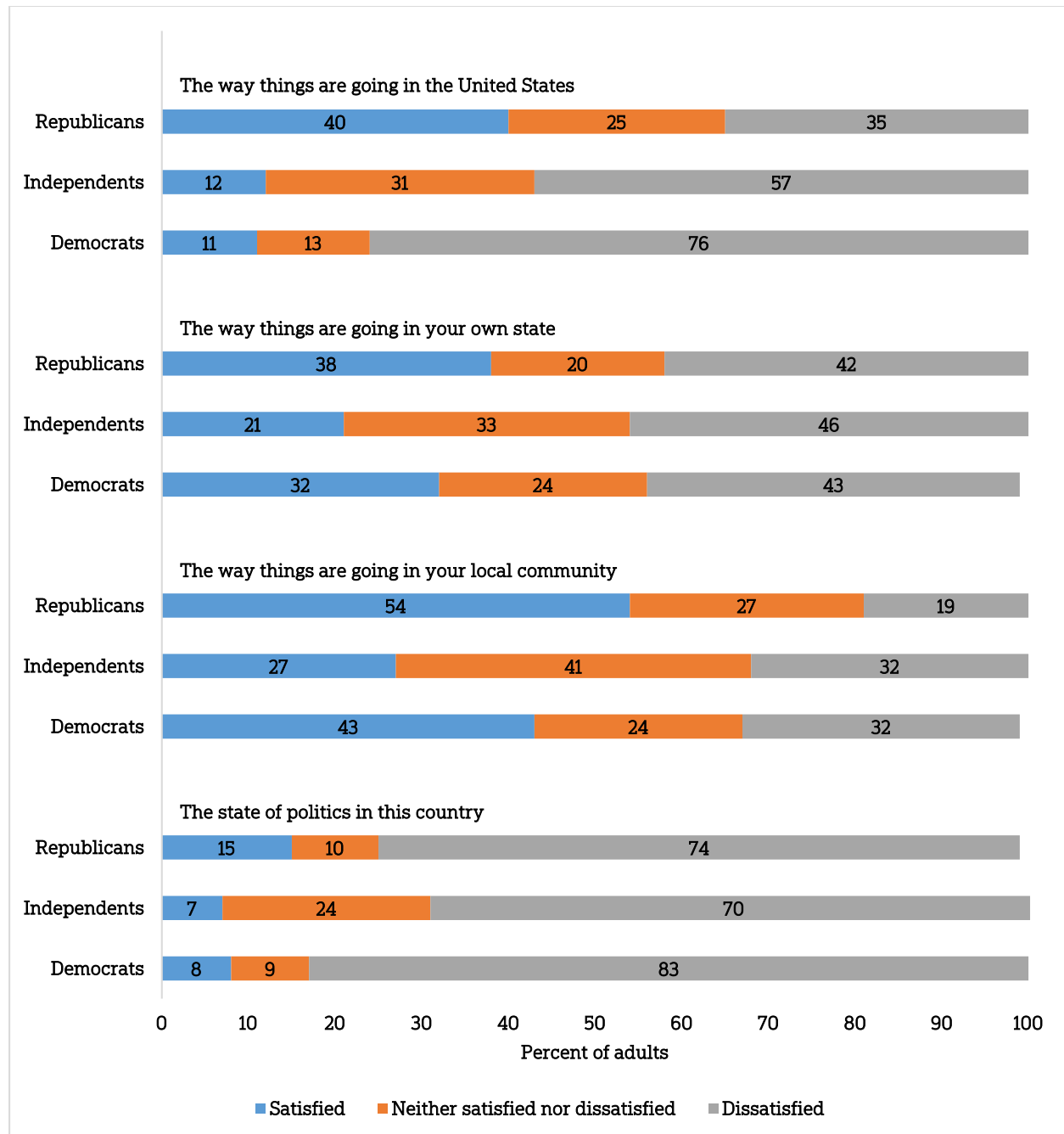
Source: AP-NORC poll conducted December 5-9, 2019, with 1,053 adults nationwide.

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

Fifty-eight percent of Americans are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country, and 77% say the same about the state of politics in the country. Americans are less negative about the conditions closer to home, with 43% dissatisfied with how things are going in their state and just 27% with the situation in their local community.

While Democrats are equally dissatisfied with the state of politics as they were a year ago, Republicans' and independents' dissatisfaction has grown. Seventy-four percent of Republicans and 70% of independents are dissatisfied, up from 66% and 59% last year.

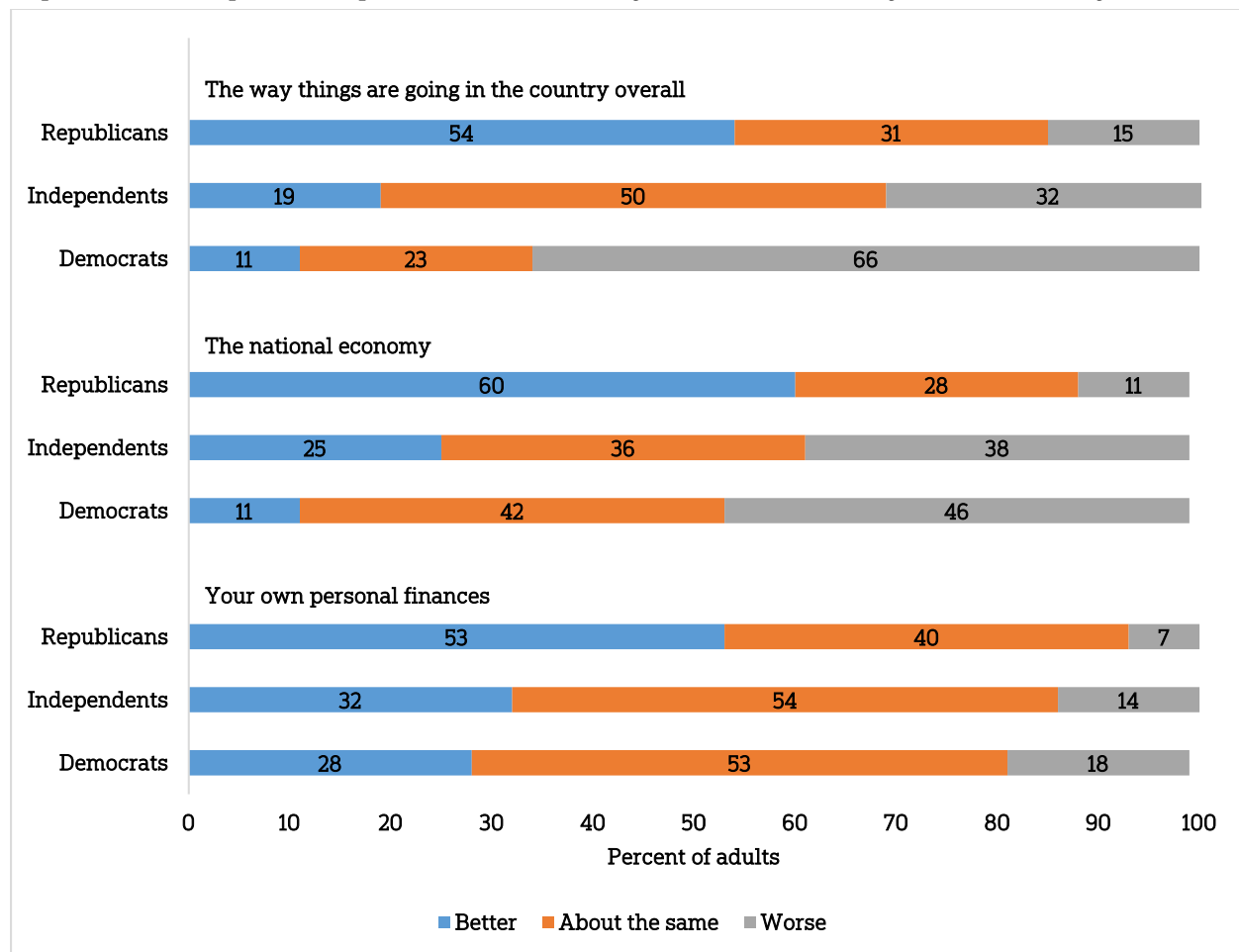
There is widespread dissatisfaction with the state of affairs and politics in the United States



Question: Are you satisfied, dissatisfied, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied about each of the following?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted December 5-9, 2019, with 1,053 adults nationwide.

The majority of Republicans are optimistic that conditions in the country overall, the economy, and their own personal finances will get better in the next year. Democrats and independents largely agree that things will either stay the same or get worse. Both Democrats and independents, however, are more optimistic about the national economy and their own personal finances for 2020 than they were for 2019.

Republicans have positive expectations for the next year 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 poll conducted December 5-9, 2019, with 1,053 adults nationwide.

Overall, 50% of Americans think America's best days are ahead of us, and 49% think they are behind us. In the short-term, 37% think 2020 will be a better year than 2019, 13% think it will be worse, and half say it will be about the same. Republicans are again more optimistic, with 50% saying that 2020 will be better than 2019, compared to 33% of Democrats and 21% of independents. Younger Americans are also more likely than older Americans to say that 2020 will be a better year than 2019; 44% of Americans under age 50 say that 2020 will be better while just 30% of those 50 and over say the same.

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% 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 5 and 9, 2019, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,053 completed the survey—969 via the web and 84 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. The final stage completion rate is 17.9%, the weighted household panel response rate is 24.1%, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 85.6%, for a cumulative response rate of 3.7%. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.0 percentage points at the 95% 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% level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5% (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

For the open-ended question, which asked respondents to name the top problems the government should address in the country in 2020, responses were classified using a supervised machine learning model. Nearly 20,000 responses to the same question from previous AmeriSpeak Omnibus surveys were used to train a support vector machine to classify responses into nearly 70 codes. These codes were validated by a human coder and were then collapsed into more general categories based on topic for reporting.

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.

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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 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.

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