



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

YOUNG AMERICANS' VIEWS ON THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Although most young Americans ages 13-29 believe in the value and impact of higher education, nearly half say a high school diploma prepares people well for success in today's economy, according to a new study by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. A majority of young people also express concern about the affordability of higher education and must take on debt to finance it. Over three-quarters believe the problem of higher education affordability is extremely or very serious, and a majority on both sides of the aisle support forgiving student loan debt for less affluent Americans.

This study explores young Americans' views about the value and cost of higher education and how well they are being prepared for success both in and out of college. It also examines how teens and young adults view proposals to make higher education more affordable, and how well schools deal with the challenges facing students today. It paints a complex picture of how teens ages 13-17 and young adults ages 18-29 evaluate the costs and benefits of higher education, and shows generational differences in the expectations of teens and experiences of young adults.

The survey reveals that 61% of teens plan to attend and 42% of young adults have attended or are attending a four-year college. To do so, 77% of teens and 55% of young adults plan to or have already taken out loans. Many young people are concerned about student loan debt (47%), but even more are concerned about making enough money to earn a good living (62%). Still, on balance, only 22% think there are more disadvantages than advantages of attending a four-year college. Most say college offers more advantages or as many advantages as disadvantages (32% and 45%, respectively).



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Three Things You Should Know

From The AP-NORC Higher Education Study
Among Young People:

- 1) Although a majority of young Americans feel that a postgraduate degree (66%), four-year college (60%) or vocational school (60%) are good ways to be prepared in today's economy, nearly half say the same of an associate's degree (47%) or a high school diploma (45%).
- 2) 77% of teens with plans to attend college say they plan to take out loans to do so.
- 3) 79% of young Democrats and 52% of young Republicans support forgiving student loan debt for less affluent Americans.

Both teens and young adults describe parents that prioritized education and helped them throughout their educational careers. Seventy-six percent of all young Americans say their parents placed a lot of emphasis on a good education, and 50% say they feel or felt pressure from their parents to attend a college or university. More than half report getting help from their parents in researching college options (57%) and filling out college applications (57%). Among teens, 70% say their parents have indicated they will help pay for college tuition. But among young adults, just 52% report getting this help.

Young Americans support a number of measures to make higher education more affordable, including allowing student loans to be refinanced, loan forgiveness for those in public service, loan forgiveness for those in households making less than \$100,000, making community college tuition free, and making all public college tuition free. While support is highest among young Democrats, a majority of young Republicans support policies to refinance or forgive student loan debt.

This nationwide poll was conducted by The AP-NORC Center from August 7 to September 9, 2019, using TrueNorth®, which combines a sample from AmeriSpeak, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago, with a non-probability panel sample. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 2,573 young Americans, including 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29. The margin of sampling error is +/- 3.7 percentage points.

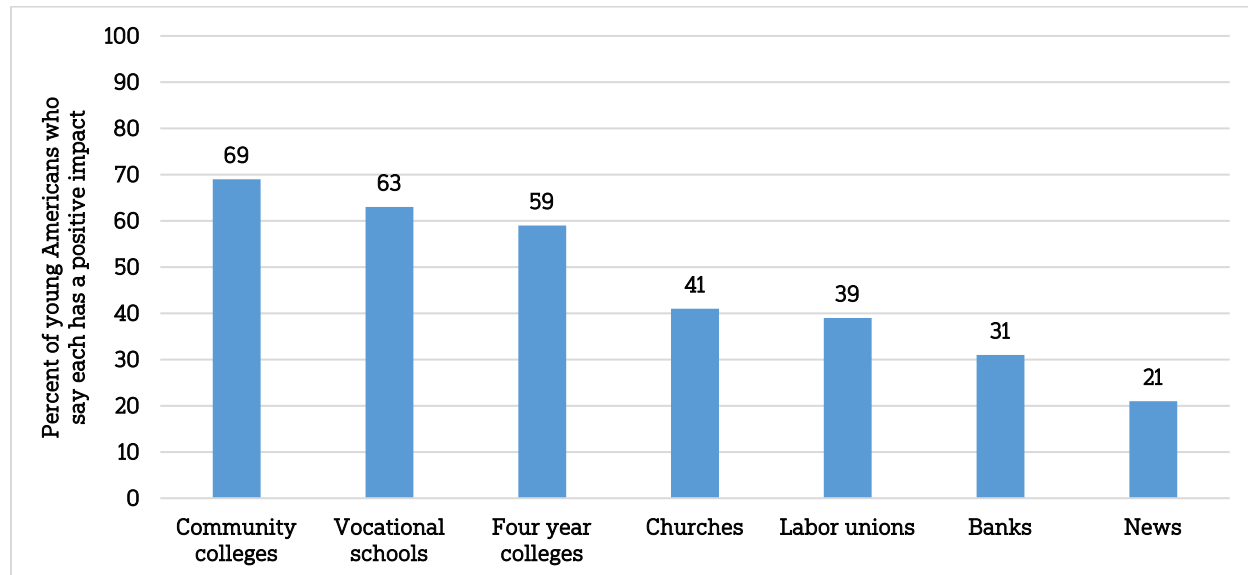
Among the key findings from the report:

- Forty-eight percent of young Americans plan to attend, are currently attending, or have attended a four-year college. In comparison, 27% say the same about community college, vocational school, or trade school.
- More affluent young Americans are also more likely to attend or plan to attend a four-year college. Fifty-three percent of young Americans in households making between \$50,000 and \$100,000 a year attended or plan to attend a four-year college, compared to 38% of young Americans in households making less than \$50,000 and 73% of those in households making more than \$100,000.
- Those in households making more than \$100,000 are more likely than those in households earning less to say they will get or have had help from their parents in paying for college tuition, filling out financial aid forms, and researching college options.
- Among young Americans who attended or plan to attend a four-year college, 67% have taken out or plan to take out a loan.
- Roughly a third say colleges and high schools do a good job addressing mental health needs of their students (33% and 30%), and about four in 10 say they do a good job dealing with sexual assault (37% and 36%).

YOUNG ADULTS SEE MULTIPLE PATHS TO SUCCESS IN TODAY'S ECONOMY.

Both teens and young adults feel that higher education has a positive impact on the way things are going in the country today, especially in comparison to other institutions such as trade unions, banks, and churches.

A majority of teens and young adults say post-secondary education has a positive impact on the country.



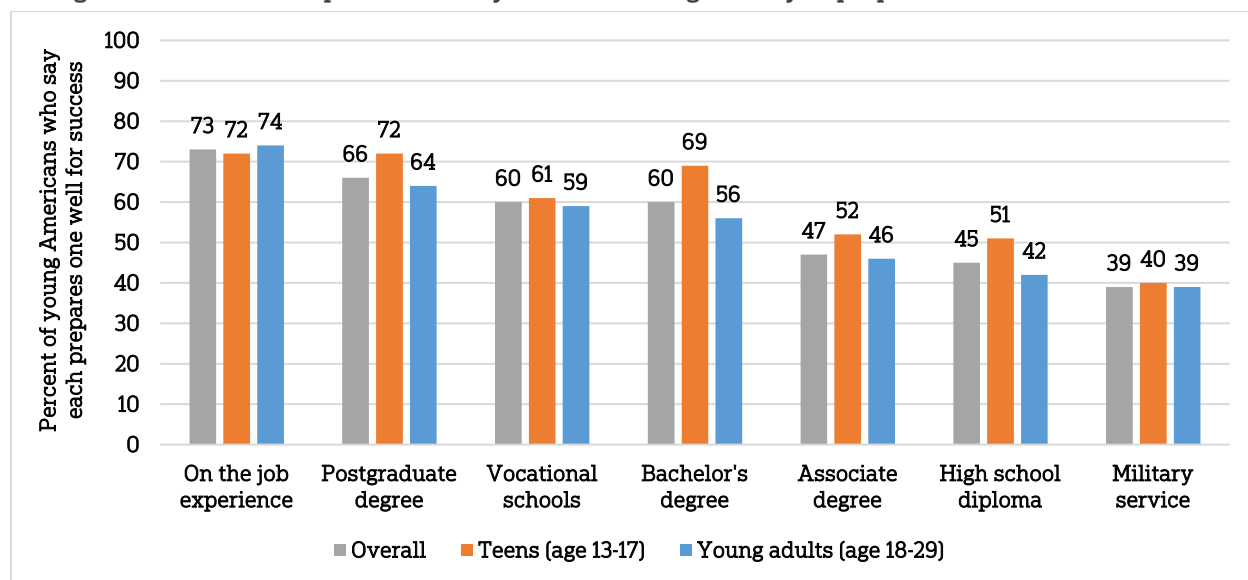
Question: Overall, do you think each of the following has a positive impact, a negative impact or neither a positive nor negative impact on the way things are going in this country today?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Household income is associated with how young Americans see the impact of post-secondary education. Young Americans in households making less than \$50,000 a year are more likely to feel positively about community college than those in households making more than that (74% vs. 64%).

Overall, young Americans feel that higher education is a good way to prepare someone for success in today's economy. While most agree that on-the-job experience is the best way to prepare for success, a majority agree that postgraduate degrees, vocational schools, and bachelor's degrees also prepare people well. Nearly half say the same about an associate degree or high school diploma.

Young adults and teens generally hold similar feelings on how well each of these prepares one for success, but teens are more optimistic about the impact of a bachelor's degree.

Young Americans believe post-secondary education is a good way to prepare for success.



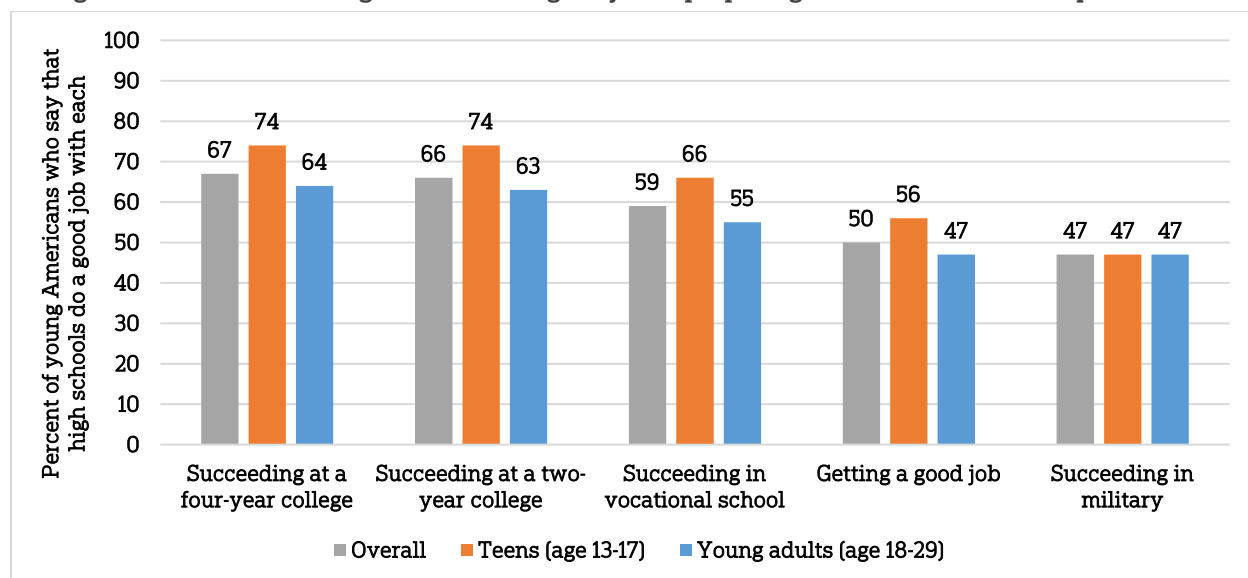
Question: In general, how well do you think each of the following prepares someone for success in today's economy?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Differences emerge by race and ethnicity. While a majority of young black Americans (56%) and young Hispanic Americans (51%) feel that completing a high school diploma is enough to prepare for success, only 41% of young white Americans feel the same way. Young Hispanic Americans are more likely to feel that an associate degree is a good way to prepare for success than young white Americans (55% vs. 45%). In contrast, young white Americans are more likely than young Hispanic Americans to feel that completing a vocational or trade school is a good way to prepare (65% vs. 52%).

Young Democrats are more likely to feel that a bachelor's degree is a good way to prepare for success than Republicans and independents (66% vs. 56% and 52%).

Although less than half of young Americans think that a high school diploma is enough to prepare for success, a majority do feel that the high schools they attend or attended are doing a good job providing students with the knowledge and skills they need for many post-high school pathways, including a four-year college, a two-year college, and vocational schools. Half say that high schools do well in giving students the skills they need to get a good job. Fewer say the same about succeeding in the military.

Teens are more likely to say that their high school has done a good job giving them the tools they need to succeed at four-year colleges, two-year colleges, and vocational schools. They are also more likely to say that high school will prepare them to get a good job.

Young Americans feel that high schools do a good job in preparing them for their next steps in life.

Question: How would you rate the job your high school is doing/did in providing students with the knowledge and skills they would need to do each of the following?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Young Republicans are more likely to feel that high school does well preparing students for getting a good job (59%) than Democrats (47%) and independents (44%).

While a majority of young Americans feel that high school does a good job preparing them for success at a four-year college, more affluent young Americans are more likely to say this. Seventy-nine percent of young Americans in households making more than \$100,000 a year feel this way, compared to 69% of those in households making between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 63% of those in households making less than \$50,000.

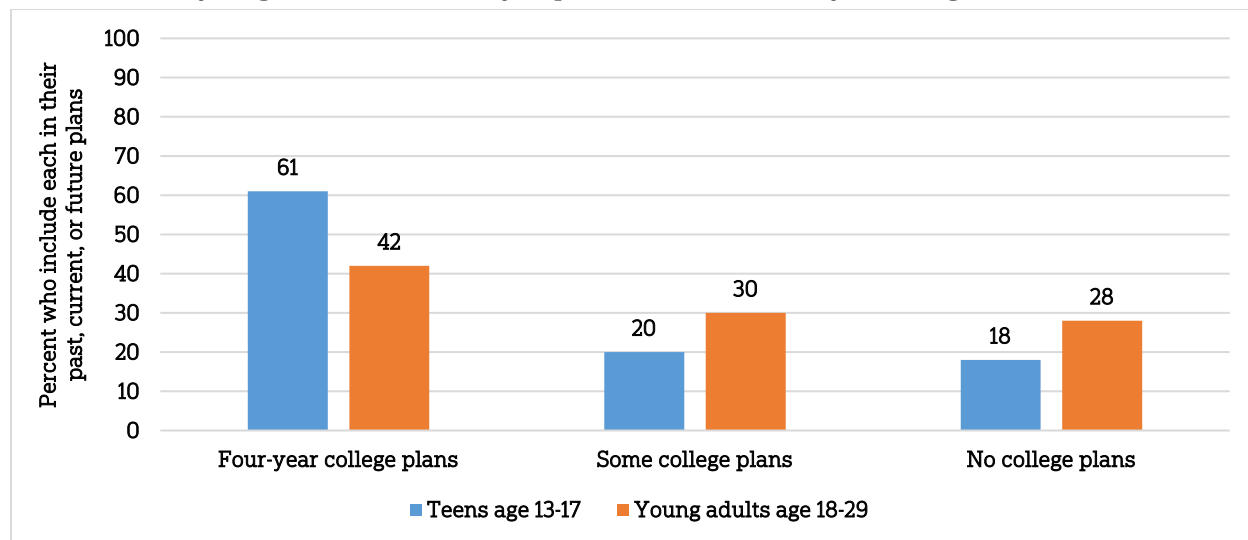
PARENTS EMPHASIZE OBTAINING A GOOD EDUCATION AND PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN OBTAINING IT.

Young Americans place a lot of emphasis on post-secondary education – overall, 75% plan to, are currently or have attended some form of secondary education. For 48%, that means a four-year college. Twenty-seven percent say the same about community college, vocational school, or trade school. Only 25% don't plan to nor have attended any form of college.¹

There are important generational differences when it comes to attending or planning to attend post-secondary education. While 61% of teens have plans to attend a four-year college, just 42% of young adults include a four-year college in their past, current, or future plans. In contrast, while just 20% of teens say they have community college, vocational school, or trade school in their future plans, 30% of young adults say these options are in their past, current, or future plans.

¹ In this study, respondents are split into three categories based on what they say their past, current, and future plans are regarding higher education. Young Americans who indicated that they plan to attend, are attending, or have attended a four-year college make up one group. A second group consists of those not in the four-year college group but who say the same about community college, vocational school, or trade school. The third group indicate neither. For the rest of the study, references to young Americans with four-year college plans, some college plans, or no college plans will correspond to these categories. We will refer to them as whether they “attend or plan to attend” college.

Most teens and young adults have already or plan to enroll in a four-year college.

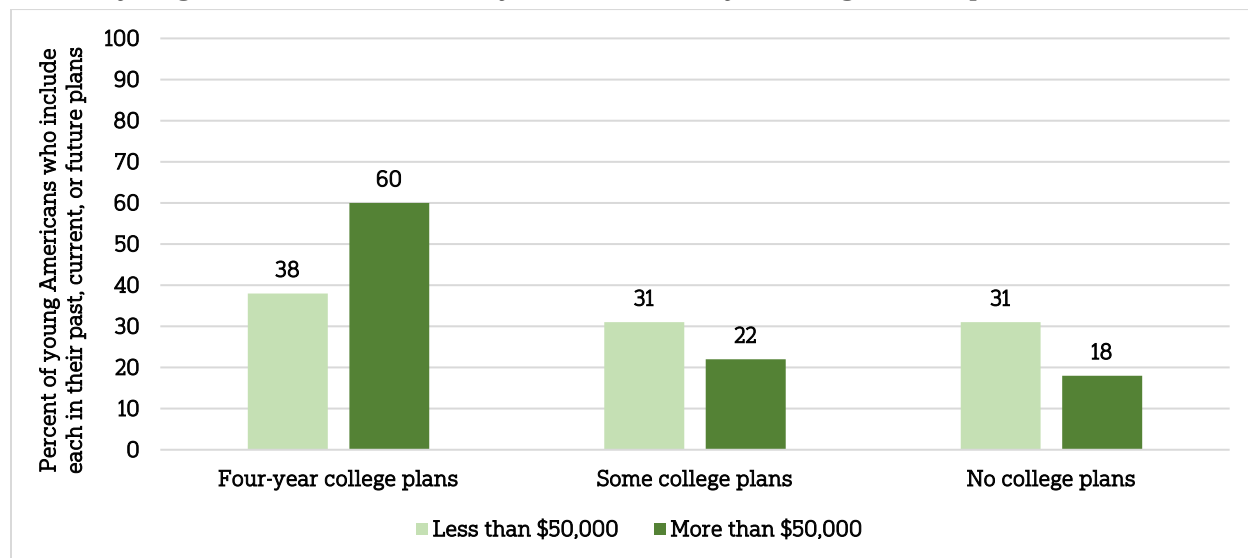


Question: Which of the following are you [planning to do after you leave high school/doing now]? /What is the highest level of school you have completed?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Young Democrats are more likely than Republicans or independents to say they attend or plan to attend a four-year college (55% vs. 48% and 33%, respectively). In contrast, Republicans and independents are more likely to say they aren't attending nor plan to attend any form of college (24% and 40%) than Democrats (19%).

More affluent young Americans are also more likely to attend or plan to attend a four-year college. In contrast, less affluent young Americans are more likely to either say they have plans to attend community college, vocational school, or trade school, or say they have no college plans at all.

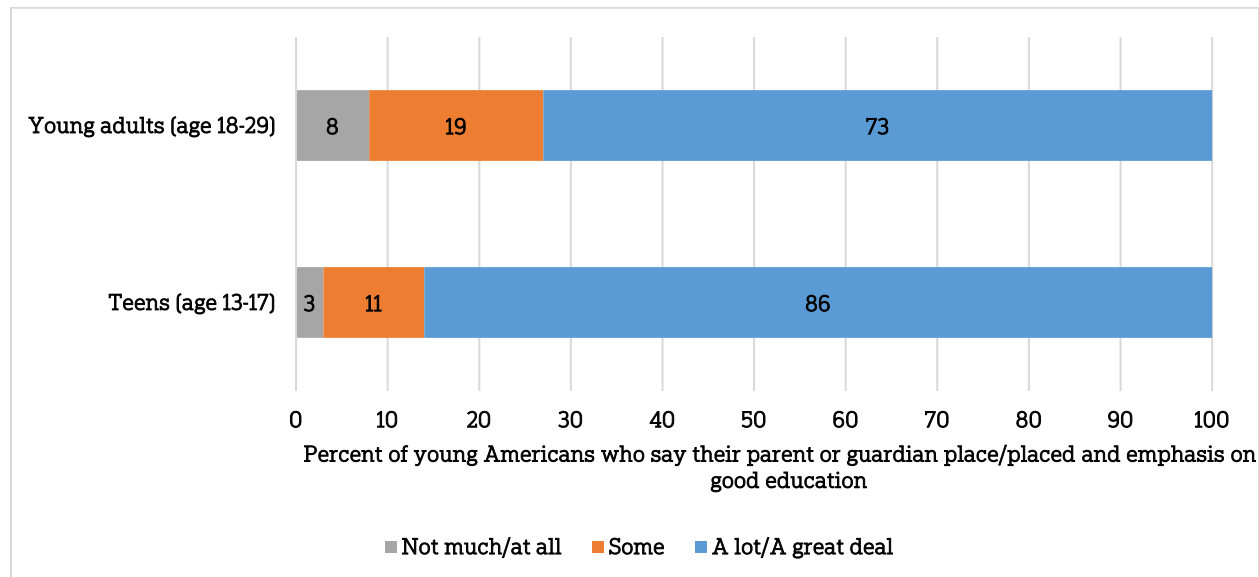
Affluent young Americans are more likely to include a four-year college in their plans.



Question: Which of the following are you [planning to do after you leave high school/doing now]? /What is the highest level of school you have completed?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

The vast majority of teens and young adults report that their parents or guardians place a strong emphasis on obtaining a good education.

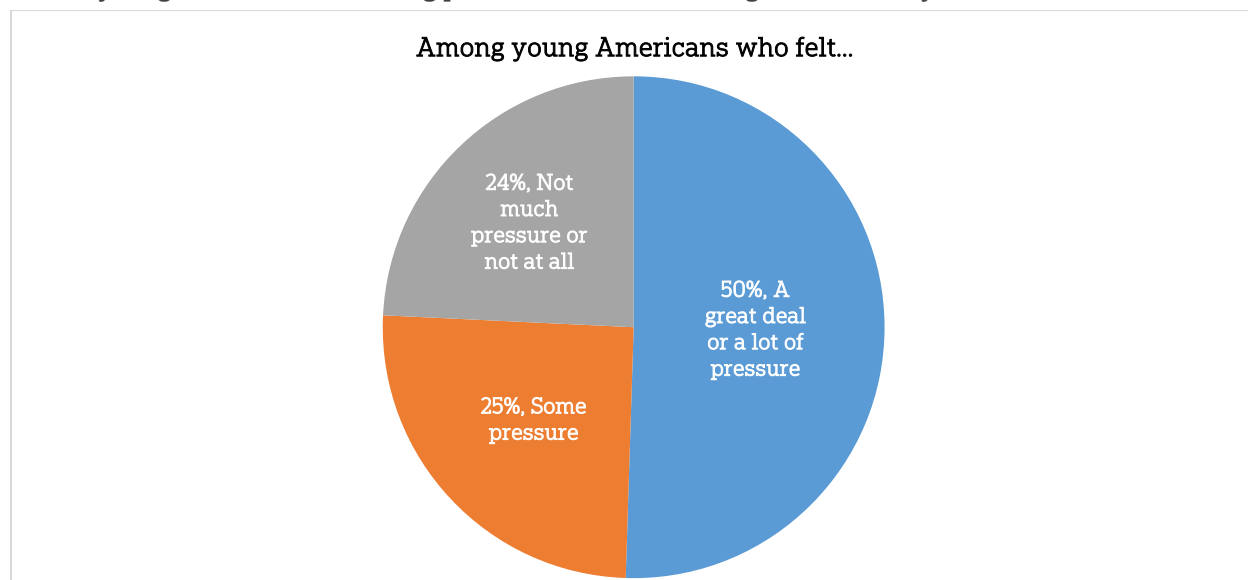
About three out of four young Americans think their parents place or placed an emphasis on education.



Question: How much emphasis [does/did] your parent or guardian place on the importance of a good education?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

As part of this emphasis on good education, both young adults and teens report pressure to attend college. Half of young Americans say their parent or guardian places or placed a great deal or a lot of pressure to go to college.

Half of young Americans felt strong pressure to attend a college or university.

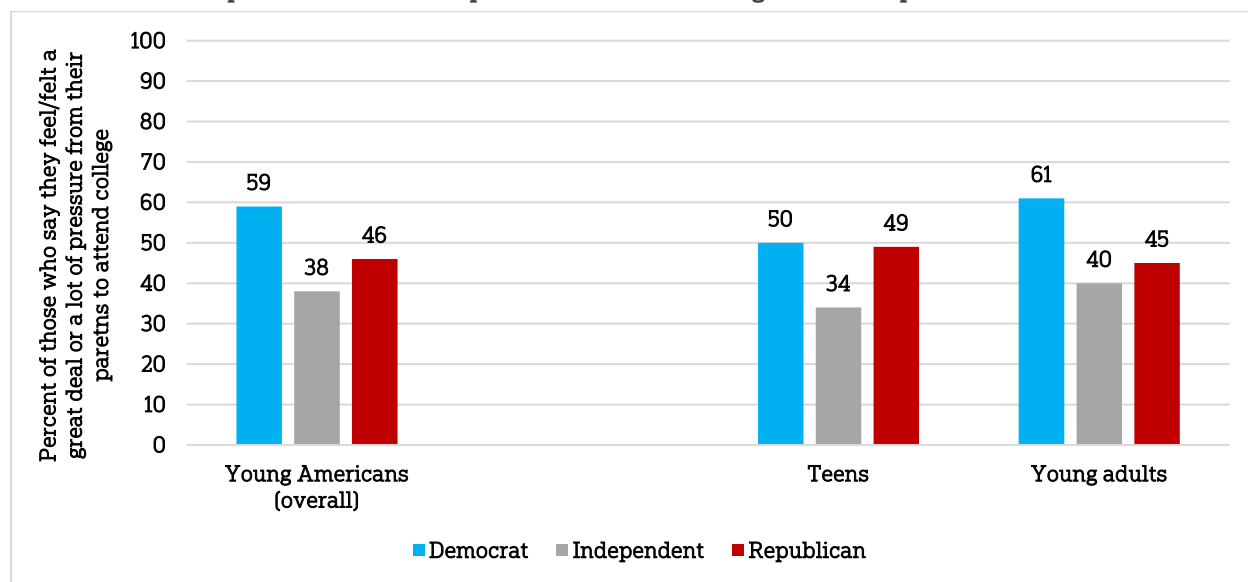


Question: How much pressure [do/did] you feel from your parent or guardian to attend a college or university?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Partisan differences in pressure emerge. Among all young adults, Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to say they feel or felt a great deal or a lot of pressure from their parents to attend college. Young Republicans were more likely to say so than independents.

There are also partisan differences among teens and among young adults, specifically. Among teens, Democrats and Republicans are more likely to feel pressure from their parents compared to independents. Among young adults, however, Democrats are more likely than either Republicans or independents.

Democrats and Republicans feel more pressure to attend college than independents.

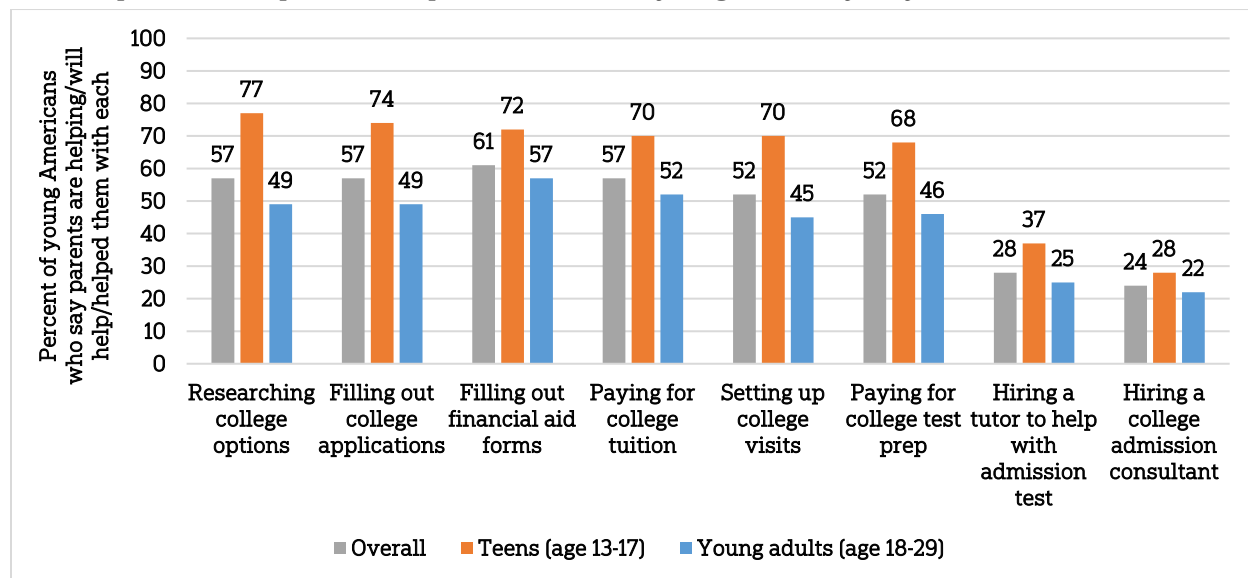


Question: How much pressure [do/did] you feel from your parent or guardian to attend a college or university?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Overall, young Americans say their parents or guardians play an active role in preparing them for college. More than half say their parents are helping or helped them fill out financial aid forms, research college options, fill out applications, pay for college tuition, and set up college visits. Fewer say their parent or guardian is helping or helped them hire a tutor for assistance with admissions tests or a college admissions consultant.

Differences emerge in what teens say of their parents' plans to help and what young adults report experiencing in their college preparations. For example, 77% of teens say they are getting help from their parent or guardian researching college options, compared to 49% of young adults who say they did receive help in this way. Differences also emerge on paying for college, filling out college applications, filling out financial aid forms, setting up college visits, and paying for college test prep.

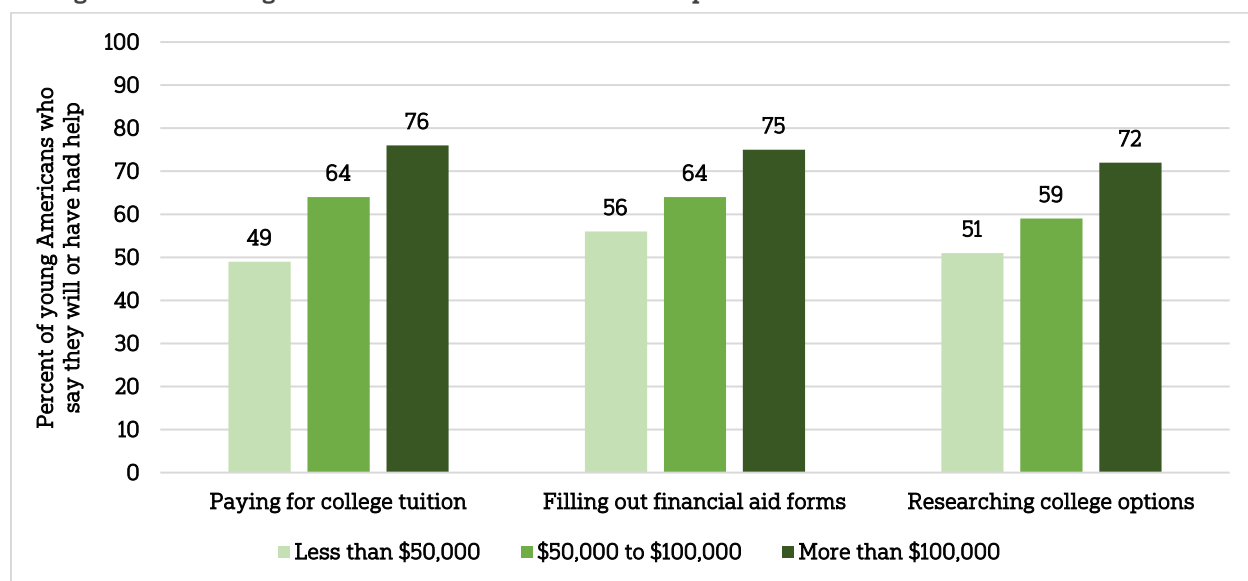
Teens expect more help from their parents than what young adults say they received.



Question: At any point, has your parent or guardian helped you, or indicated that they will help you, with each of the following, or not?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

More affluent young Americans are more likely to report having help from their parents or guardians. Seventy-one percent of those with an income of \$100,000 or more say their parents will help or did help them setting up college visits, compared to 54% of those with an income between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and 46% of those with an income of less than \$50,000. The same is true when it comes to paying for college tuition, college admission prep, and filling out college applications and financial aid forms.

Young adults from higher-income households have more parental assistance.

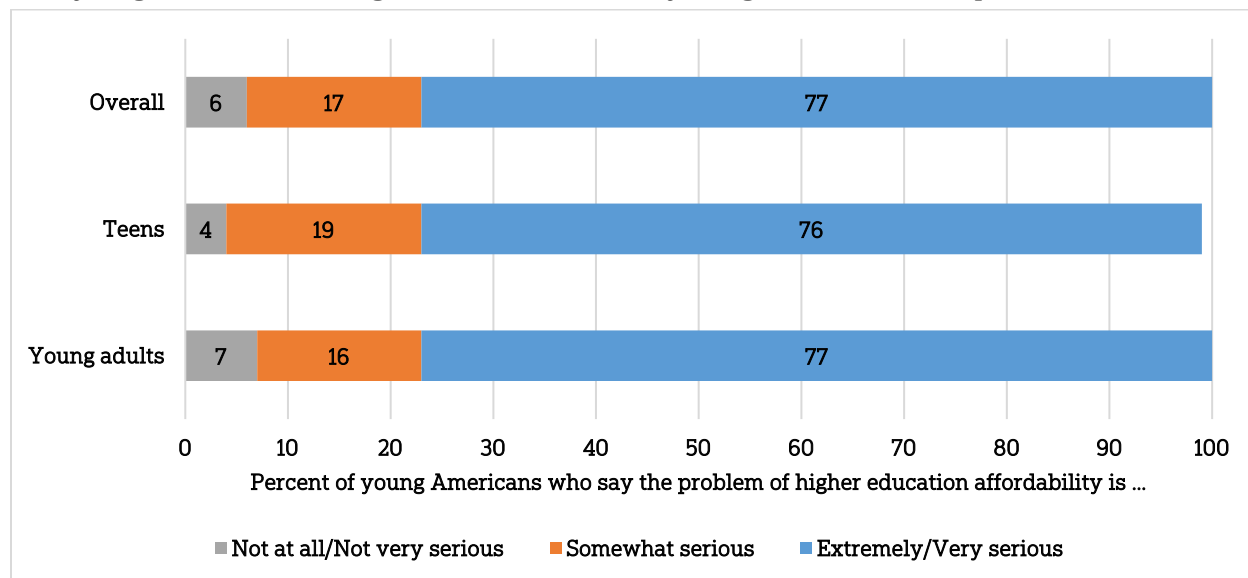


Question: At any point, has your parent or guardian helped you, or indicated that they will help you, with each of the following, or not?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

YOUNG AMERICANS ARE CONCERNED WITH THE COST OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ARE OPEN TO SOLUTIONS TO MAKE IT MORE AFFORDABLE.

A majority of young Americans say that the problem of higher education affordability is extremely or very serious.

Both young adults and teens agree that the affordability of higher education is a problem.



Question: How serious a problem is the affordability of higher education in this country?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Majorities of young adults across party lines think higher education affordability is a serious problem, but young Democrats are more likely than young Republicans and independents to believe that (86% vs. 71% and 67%).

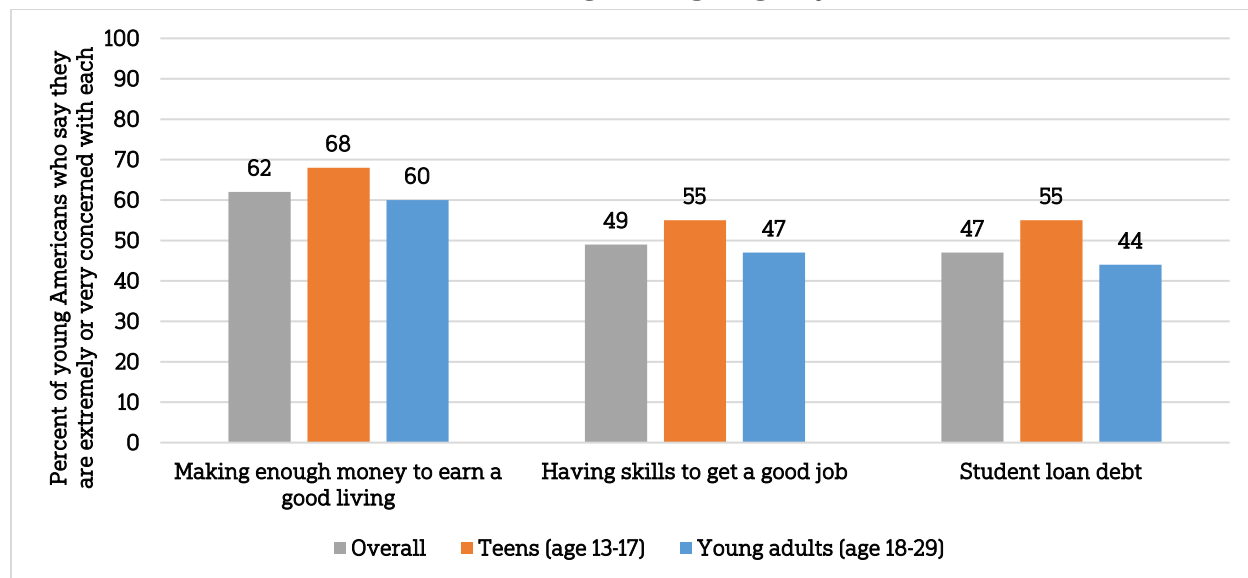
More than six in 10 young Americans who attended or plan to attend some form of college expect to or have taken out loans to pay for it. While 55% of young adults say they have taken out or are taking out loans to pay for any higher education, 77% of teens with plans to attend college say they plan to take out loans to do so.

Although those with four-year college plans are particularly likely to take out loans (67%), more than half of those with other college plans also expect to do so (54%).

Young Americans are even more concerned about making enough money to earn a good living. Overall, 62% say they are very or extremely concerned about earning a good living, compared to 47% who say the same about student loan debt. Forty-nine percent are also concerned about having the skills needed to get a job.

Teens are more likely than young adults to worry about student loan debt and having the skills to get a good job.

Teens are worried about student loans and being able to get a good job.



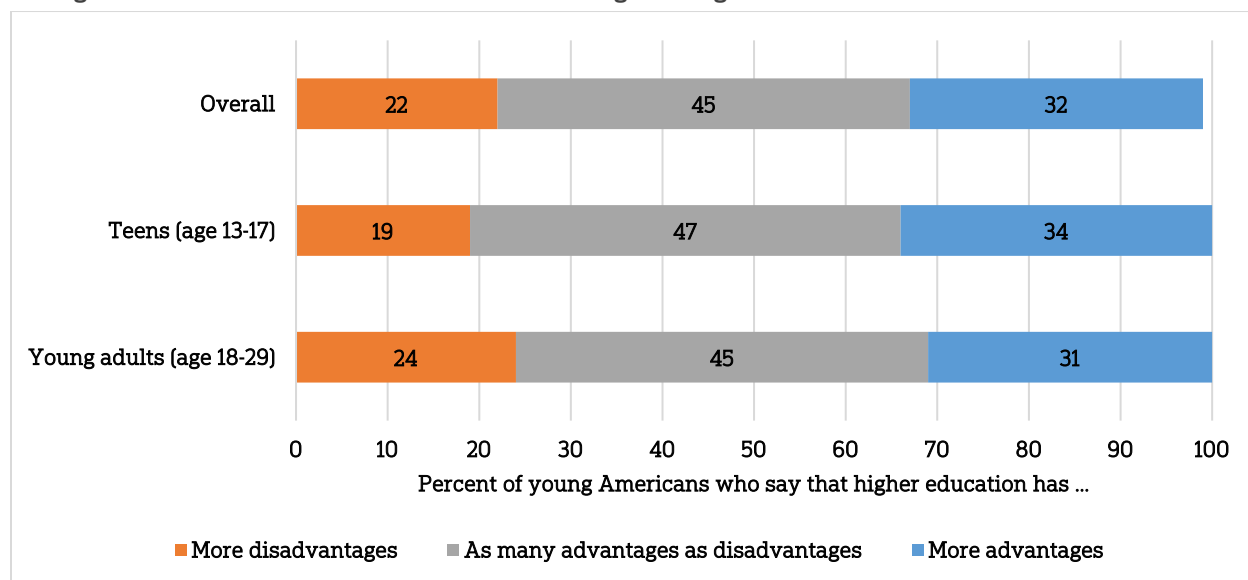
Question: Thinking about your future, how concerned are you about each of the following?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Differences in concerns emerge by gender and partisanship. Young women are more likely to worry about student loan debt than young men (50% vs. 44%). Young Democrats are also more likely to worry about student loan debt than independents and Republicans (53% vs. 42% and 41%, respectively). These young Democrats are also more likely to worry about earning a good living (68% vs. 61% and 55%, respectively).

In spite of the fact that a majority of young Americans say higher education has an affordability problem, that they have or plan to take out loans to pay for higher education, and that they are concerned about paying off student loans, three-quarters of young Americans still say higher education offers at least as many advantages as disadvantages.

Young Americans remain confident in the advantages of higher education.



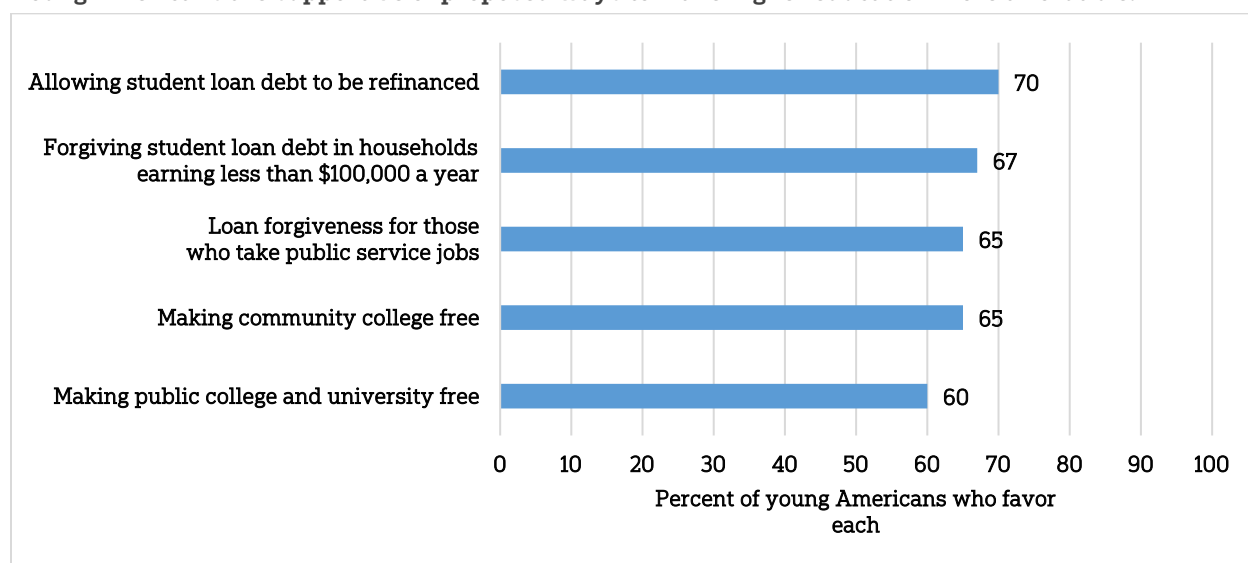
Question: Considering the costs of attending a four-year college versus the benefits of a bachelor’s degree, would you say there are more advantages to attending, more disadvantages, or would you say there are about as many advantages as disadvantages?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Less affluent young Americans in households making less than \$50,000 a year are less likely to feel that higher education offers more advantages than those in households making more in a year (28% vs. 36%).

Young Americans are open to many proposed solutions to make college and higher education more affordable. For example, around two in three young Americans support forgiving student loan debt or allowing it to be refinanced. A similar amount supports making community college free. Teens and young adults feel similarly about these solutions.

Young Americans are supportive of proposed ways to make higher education more affordable.

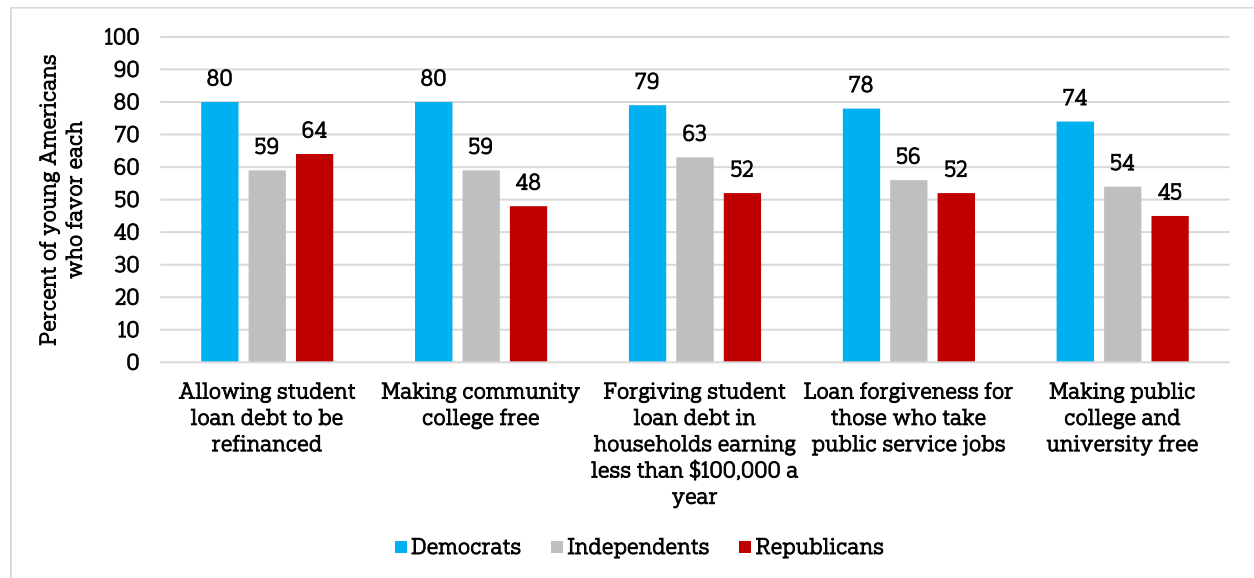


Question: Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose each of the following?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

Overall, young Democrats are more likely to support all of these proposals than young Republicans and independents. While about three in four young Democrats support making public college or community college free, about half of young Republicans agree with either. And while at least half of young Republicans and young independents support loan forgiveness for those in less affluent households or those working in public service, young Democrats are more likely to support both of these policies.

While Democrats are most supportive, majorities or near-majorities of independents and Republicans support many proposals to make higher education more affordable.



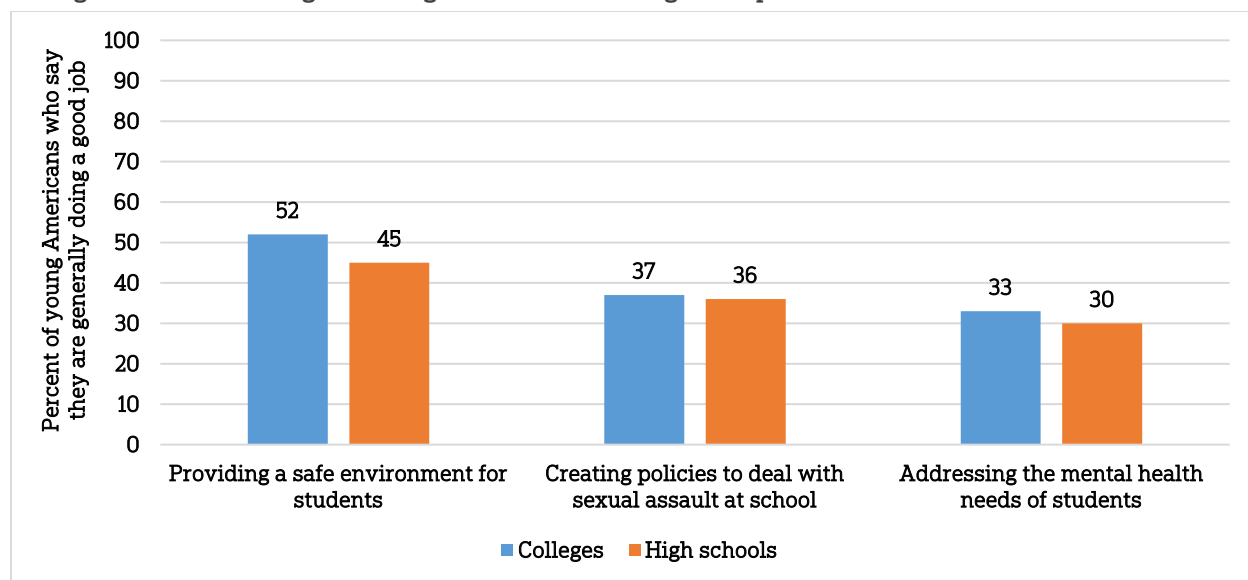
Question: Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose each of the following?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

NEITHER HIGH SCHOOLS NOR COLLEGES RECEIVE HIGH MARKS FOR KEEPING STUDENTS SAFE.

Young Americans rate high schools and colleges poorly in how well they help their students when it comes to addressing mental health needs or sexual assault. Roughly a third say they do a good job. They are somewhat more likely to say colleges and high schools do a good job providing a safe environment.

Young adults think colleges and high schools are failing to keep students safe.



Questions: Do you think colleges and universities are generally doing a good job, a poor job, or neither a good nor poor job at each of the following?

Do you think high schools are generally doing a good job, a poor job, or neither a good nor poor job at each of the following?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted August 7-September 9, 2019, with 769 teens ages 13-17 and 1,804 young adults ages 18-29 nationwide.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Interviews for this survey were completed between August 7 and September 9, 2019, with teens and young adults ages 13-29 representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The survey combined interviews from both probability and nonprobability sample sources. The probability interviews were conducted using AmeriSpeak®, NORC’s probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population, and nonprobability interviews were provided by Dynata, an opt-in panel.

During the initial recruitment phase of the AmeriSpeak 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.

Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,301 completed the survey, comprising 265 teens age 13-17 and 1,036 young adults age 18-29. Interviews were conducted online and over the phone, with 1,288 completing via the web and 13 completing via telephone. Interviews were conducted in English. The final stage completion rate is 26.3%, the weighted household panel response rate is 26.9%, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 85.6%, for a cumulative response rate of 6.1%. The overall margin of sampling error for the AmeriSpeak sample is +/- 5.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Dynata provided 1,272 nonprobability interviews: 504 teens age 13-17 and 768 young adults age 18-29. The Dynata sample was derived based on quotas related to age, race and ethnicity, gender, and education. Interviews were conducted in English and via the web only. For panel recruitment, Dynata uses invitations of all types, including e-mails, phone alerts, banners, and messaging on panel community sites to include people with a diversity of motivations to take part in research. Because nonprobability panels do not start with a frame where there is a known probability of selection, standard measures of sampling error and response rates cannot be calculated.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a raking process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse in the probability sample, as well as any noncoverage or under- and oversampling in both probability and nonprobability samples resulting from the study-specific sample design. Raking variables for both the probability and nonprobability samples included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Population control totals for the raking variables were obtained from the 2018 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults ages 13-29.

In order to incorporate the nonprobability sample with the probability sample, NORC used TrueNorth®, a calibration approach developed at NORC that features small domain estimation methods to account for potential bias associated with the nonprobability sample. The purpose of TrueNorth calibration is to adjust the weights for the nonprobability sample so as to bring weighted distributions of the nonprobability sample in line with the population distribution for characteristics correlated with the survey variables. Such calibration adjustments help to reduce potential bias, yielding more accurate population estimates.

A small domain model was used with the combined samples to generate estimates at the domain level, where the domains were defined by race and ethnicity, age, gender, and education. The dependent variables for the models were key survey variables derived from a random forest model, and the model included covariates and domain-level random effects. The covariates were external data available from other national surveys such as health insurance, internet access, and housing type from the American Community Survey (ACS). The final combined AmeriSpeak and nonprobability sample weights were derived so the weighted estimates of the combined sample was consistent with the small domain model estimates derived for key survey variables.

The overall margin of error for the sample is +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups. Although there is no statistically agreed upon approach for calculating margins of error for nonprobability samples, these margins of error were estimated using a calculation called the root mean squared error, along with other statistical adjustments. A mean square error is a measure of uncertainty that incorporates the variability associated with the estimates, as well as the bias associated with the estimates derived from a nonprobability sample.

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ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

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- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

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