



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

CIVIC AND SOCIAL BONDS FORTIFY COMMUNITIES, BUT MILLIONS OF AMERICANS LACK CONNECTIONS THAT COULD BOLSTER PANDEMIC RECOVERY

A new Impact Genome/AP-NORC Poll shows that millions of people living in America lack key social bonds in their personal and professional life, face barriers to accessing important services and institutions, or aren't meaningfully engaged in their community. COVID-19 has more often led to a decrease rather than increase in social capital on these measures, too. The study assesses people's levels of social capital—the value they derive from personal relationships, connections to different types of people, engagement with and trust in institutions, and engagement in their community. Specifically, it measures social capital by exploring the public's trusted personal and professional networks, their civic engagement, and their experiences navigating essential resources and institutions. Evidence shows that social capital can play a major role in economic recovery and promoting social mobility, particularly after major shocks like the pandemic.¹

In their personal lives, 18%, or about 46 million adults, have just one or no trustworthy person outside their household on whom they can rely for things like help when they are sick or looking after a child in an emergency. Differences in the size of trusted networks are especially acute by income, race and ethnicity, and education: white, college-educated, and wealthier



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Three Things You Should Know

About the Impact Genome/AP-NORC Social Capital Study

Among All Adults in America:

- 1) 18%—or 46 million adults—have just one or no trustworthy person they can approach for emergencies like help when they are sick or someone to watch a child.
- 2) 20% have no one in their life who could help them with things like writing a resume, giving advice on workplace challenges, or making job referrals.
- 3) 62% who could not access a needed service like government benefits or the legal system cite not knowing if they were eligible or where to go for help.

¹ Bartscher, A. K., Seitz, S., Slotwinski, M., Siegloch, S., & Wehrhöfer, N. (2020). Social capital and the spread of Covid-19: Insights from European countries.

adults are more likely to have more people they can rely on for personal support. Americans overall are more likely to report a decline rather than an increase because of COVID-19 in the number of people they could trust and how often they asked for help, though most saw no change.

On the professional front, 20%, or 49 million Americans, have no contact in their trusted network who can help draft a resume, connect with a potential employer, or provide advice with workplace challenges. White adults and more educated Americans have larger trusted professional networks. COVID-19 caused more adults to lose rather than gain social capital in their professional lives as well, though again, most saw no change.

When people build trusting relationships with others from a different ethnic or class background it can improve social cohesion, or the perceptions of connectedness, as well as trust in the larger community.² And, more diverse workplaces are associated with better financial performance.³ The poll finds roughly half (52%) of Americans with at least one trustworthy person outside their home report racial or ethnic diversity in their personal networks, and half (50%) with at least one trustworthy person they rely on for career help say the same for professional networks. Those with a larger trusted network are also more likely to report racial or ethnic diversity in their personal or professional network. White adults are more likely to report homogenous circles in both the personal and professional realms. However, Americans with some support system report economic diversity, with 69% trusting at least one person of a different economic background in their personal circles, and 61% in their trusted professional networks.

About a third (30%) of Americans have engaged with government services like unemployment, cash assistance, food assistance, or Social Security in the past year, and interactions with government benefit systems have increased because of COVID-19. Most Americans were able to access the essential services they needed in the last year, but Black Americans were more likely than whites (25% versus 10%) to face barriers. The most common barrier to access among all Americans was knowledge: 62% cite not knowing if they were eligible for services or not knowing where to go for help. Using the legal system posed the highest barriers to Americans; about a third could not access supports. For educational institutions and government benefits, about a quarter of those seeking services say they could not get what they needed.

Social capital can be measured not just in the ability to access needed services, but also having someone to help navigate these institutions. With the serious health and economic challenges presented by COVID-19, about a third of those who interacted with any type of essential service received help from someone outside their household. Among those who received assistance, the vast majority reported that support was helpful and gave them a deeper understanding of the systems and how to navigate them.

When it comes to civic engagement, more than half of Americans say they volunteered or donated money to a civic cause (54%) in the last year, while just under half (48%) engaged with a formal civic group like a religious institution, school or community group, service group, or participated in a political cause in the same period. Still, a higher rate of all adults say they became less, rather than more involved with at least one civic institution (42% versus 21%), and a larger share of Americans

² Hewstone, M. (2015). Consequences of diversity for social cohesion and prejudice: The missing dimension of intergroup contact. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(2), 417-438.

³ Hunt, V., Layton, D., & Prince, S. (2015). Diversity matters. *McKinsey & Company*, 1(1), 15-29.

gave less time, money, or other resources than gave more (35% versus 23%) as a consequence of the pandemic.

Other key findings include:

- 16% of Americans have fewer people they can trust with personal matters because of COVID-19, and 27% asked for less help than before the pandemic.
- Black (30%) and Hispanic (25%) Americans are more likely than whites (14%) to report having just one or no trusted person to turn to for help with a minor emergency.
- 36% of those with incomes below the Federal Poverty Level⁴ have no one to turn to for help, compared to 14% of those above 200% of FPL (about \$52,200 for a family of four).
- 15% of Americans have fewer people they can trust for career support now as well, and 24% asked for less help professionally because of the pandemic.
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of those without a college degree say they have no one to help with things like writing a resume or giving advice on workplace challenges, compared to 14% of those with a college degree.
- Roughly three in ten (29%) of those with at least one trusted professional contact report rarely or never receiving professional support when they asked.
- Women are more likely than men (59% versus 49%) and those above 200% FPL are more likely than those below the FPL (60% versus 33%) to be civically engaged in the past year.
- Those living below the poverty line were especially likely to decrease their civic engagement in the past year (44%) compared to those above the poverty line (34%).
- Black (76%) and Hispanic (69%) Americans were less likely than whites (86%) to have their needs met by important institutions in the last year.
- Those who are highly engaged in their communities are more than four times more likely than those with no community engagement to have people in their trusted networks who are community members or neighbors (43% versus 10%).

⁴The U.S. federal poverty level (FPL) is a measure of income the U.S. government uses to determine who is eligible for subsidies, benefits, and other government programs. Many of these programs use the FPL or up to 200% of the FPL to determine eligibility. FPL is determined using a combination of household income and the number of members of the household. For a family of four, the FPL is \$32,190 in Alaska, \$29,620 in Hawaii; and \$25,750 in all other states. Calculations in this report are based on 2019 income.

SOCIAL CAPITAL CAN BUFFER THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC, BUT MILLIONS OF AMERICANS ARE DISCONNECTED FROM COMMUNITIES AND HAVE FEW TRUSTED PEOPLE TO CALL ON FOR HELP.

Social capital describes the extent to which people are connected with each other and their communities, as well as the resources they get from these relationships that help them meet their needs, achieve their goals, and navigate systems and institutions in our society.

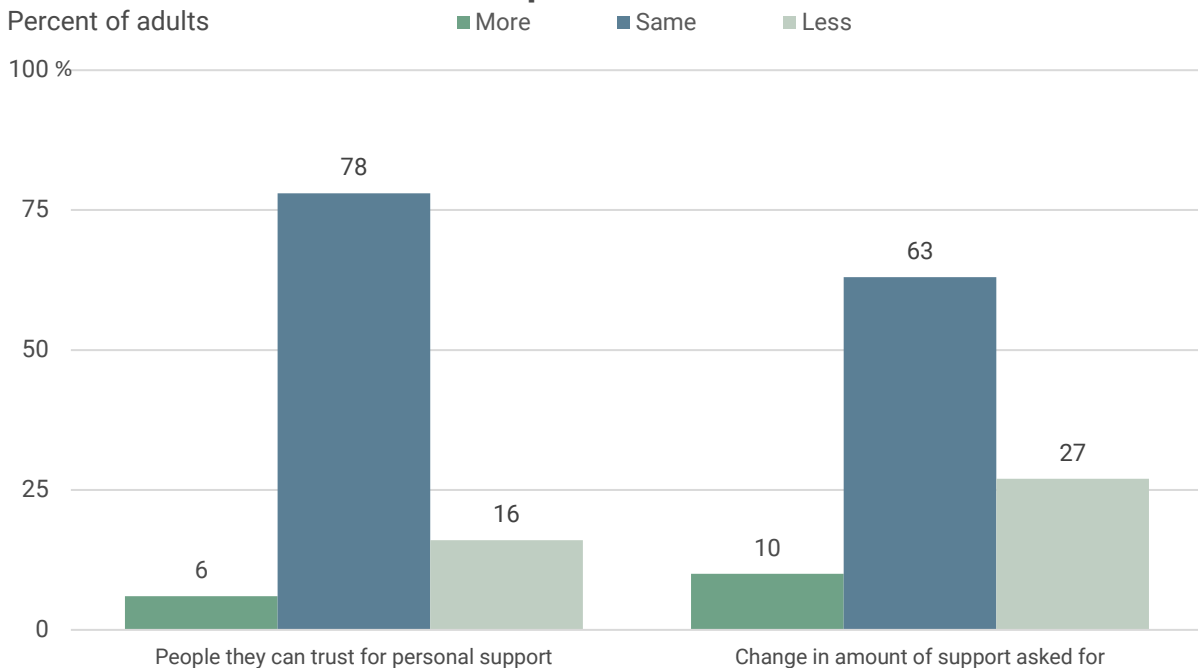
Social capital is a critical lever in social and economic mobility, particularly during an economic recovery post-pandemic, because people can use connections to produce information, emotional and financial support, and new opportunities. Yet in the last year, social capital has declined for millions of Americans. Sixteen percent, or 41 million Americans, have fewer people they can trust for personal support, and 15%, or 39 million, have fewer they can trust for professional support because of the pandemic; 15%, or 38 million, Americans needed support from critical services or institutions but could not get it; and 34%, or 86 million, Americans did not participate in any civic activities in the last year.



BOTH PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL DECLINED FOR MORE THAN IT INCREASED IN THE WAKE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

Social networks can quicken recovery after an economic shock, but more people say they have fewer rather than more people they can trust for personal support compared to before the pandemic. Sixteen percent of the public has fewer people they can trust, while 6% has more. A majority, though, has about the same number of people they trust. Similarly, a majority is asking for the same amount of support as before the pandemic, but a greater share are asking for less compared to more.

Social capital in the form of support in one's personal life was more likely to decline rather than increase because of the pandemic.



Question: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, how has the number of people you can trust for personal support changed? How has the amount of personal support you asked for changed because of COVID-19?

Source: Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

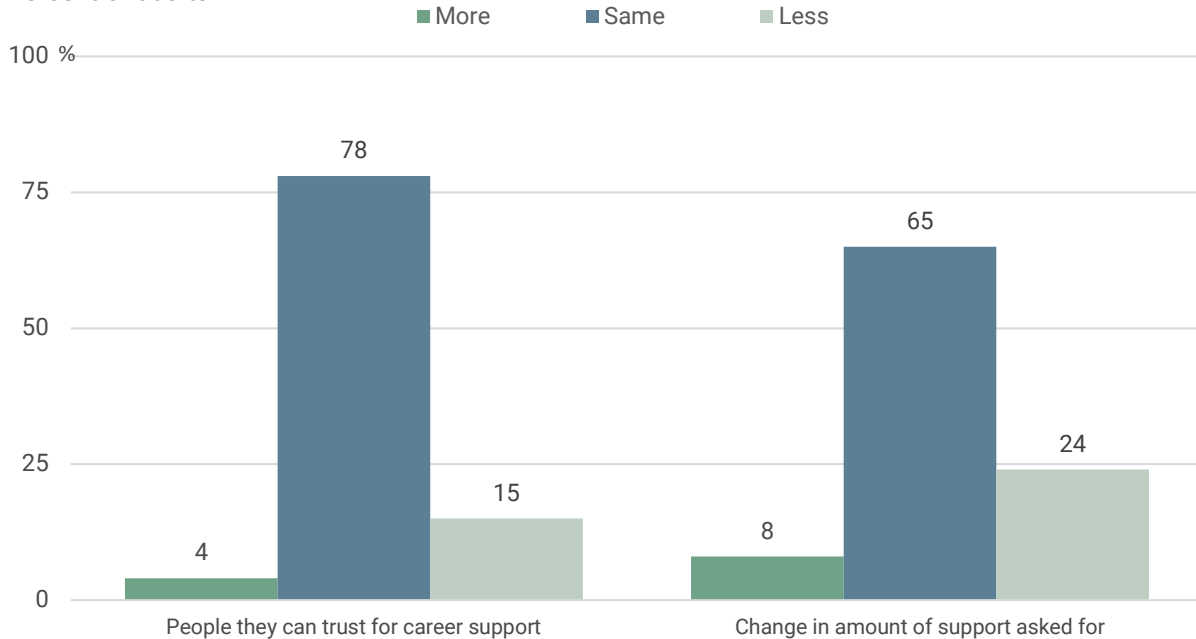
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Looking at career support, similarly, a larger share of the public says they have fewer people rather than more people they can trust with help in their work life because of COVID-19. And again, 24% report asking for less support than before the pandemic. But for most, things have not changed.

More Americans lost rather than gained social capital in their professional lives because of COVID-19, though most saw no change.

Percent of adults



Question: How has the number of people, who you can trust for support with your job or career, changed because of COVID-19?
How has the amount of support you asked for, for your job or career, changed because of COVID-19?

Source: Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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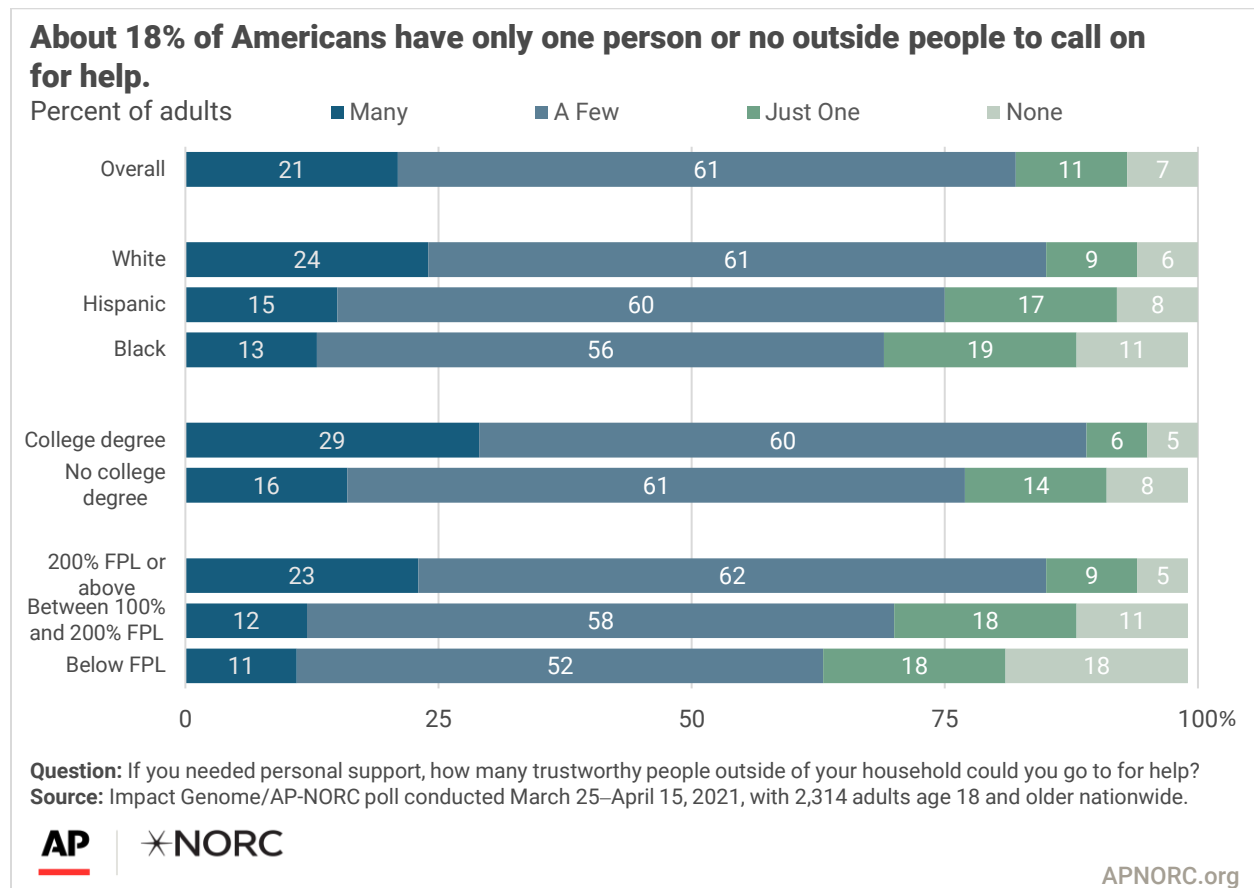
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However, those below the poverty line are more likely than those above to say they have fewer people they can trust for career support because of the pandemic (27% vs. 14%).

MOST AMERICANS' TRUSTED PERSONAL SUPPORT NETWORKS ARE SMALL AND CLOSE KNIT, BUT LOWER INCOME AMERICANS HAD FEWER TRUSTED PEOPLE TO CALL ON FOR SUPPORT.

While 81% of adults have at least a few trustworthy people outside their household they could turn to for help, 18% – 46 million adults – only have one person or no one they can approach for personal help.

White, college educated, and wealthier adults are more likely to have larger personal networks. While 14% of white adults say they only have one or no one to turn to for help, this number jumps to 25% among Hispanic adults and 30% for Black adults. Eleven percent of college educated Americans turn to one or no one, whereas 22% of adults without a college degree say the same. Those with incomes at or above 200% of the FPL have more people they can turn to for help compared to those living below the poverty threshold or below 200% FPL.

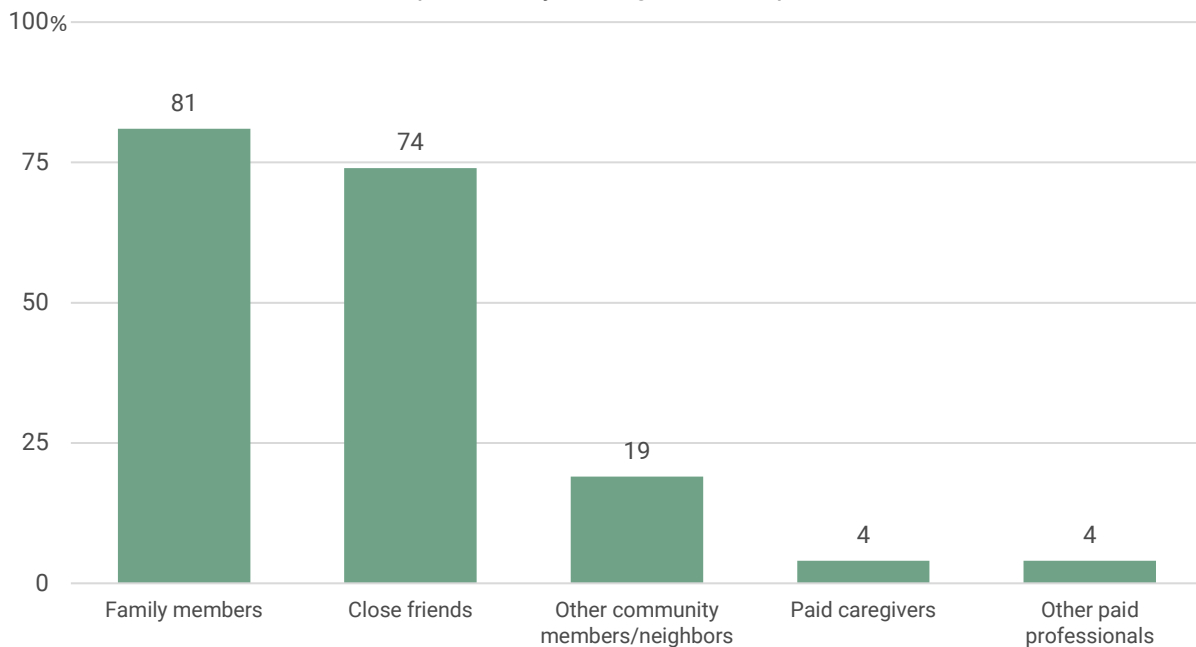


Among adults with at least one person outside their household they can turn to for help, a majority rely on family or close friends. Fewer rely on other community members or neighbors, paid caregivers, or other paid professionals. Those who are highly engaged in their communities are more than four times more likely than those with no community engagement to have people in their trusted networks who are community members or neighbors (43% vs. 10%), and more than twice as likely compared to those with low community engagement (18%). Among those who are moderately engaged, 29% report that they rely on community members or neighbors.⁵

⁵ If respondents said they had engaged or participated in five or more of the activities in Q30 and Q32, then respondents were classified as “high engagement.” If respondents engaged or participated in three or four of the activities in Q30 and Q32, then respondents were classified as “moderate engagement.” Those who participated in one or two of the activities were classified as “low engagement.”

A majority of adults rely on family or close friends for help.

Percent of adults with at least one person they could go to for help

**Question:** How would you classify the trustworthy people/person outside of your household that you could go to for help?**Source:** Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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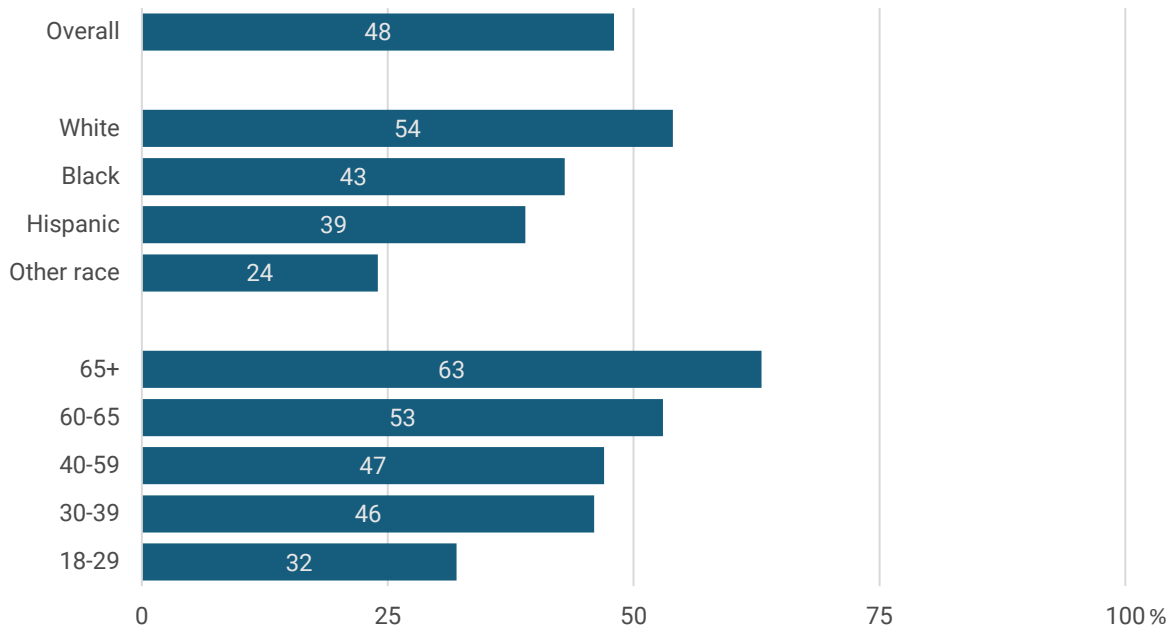
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Roughly half report diversity in their trusted personal networks, but diversity is less common among white adults and older generations. Overall, 52% report that at least one individual in their trusted personal network is of a different race or ethnic background than themselves, while 48% have nobody in their personal network who is from a different racial or ethnic background.⁶ White adults are more likely to have a personal network made up of people from a similar racial background, compared to Hispanic, Black, and individuals of another race. Older generations are more likely to have trusted networks of people of the same race compared to younger generations.

⁶ If respondents said they had many or a few people outside their household they could turn to for help and that most, some, or just one person in their personal network was of a different race/ethnic background, they were classified as having at least one in their personal network who was a different race/ethnic background than themselves. Alternatively, if respondents said they had just one person outside their household they could turn to for help and that one person was of a different race/ethnic background, that respondent was also classified as having at least one person in their personal network who was a different race/ethnic background than themselves.

Many Americans say their trusted personal networks are homogenous.

Percent of adults who say no one in their personal networks is of a different race or ethnic background than themselves



Questions: How many of the people outside of your household that you trust for personal support are of a different race or ethnic background than yourself?

Is the person you can trust for personal support of a different race or ethnic background than yourself?

Source: Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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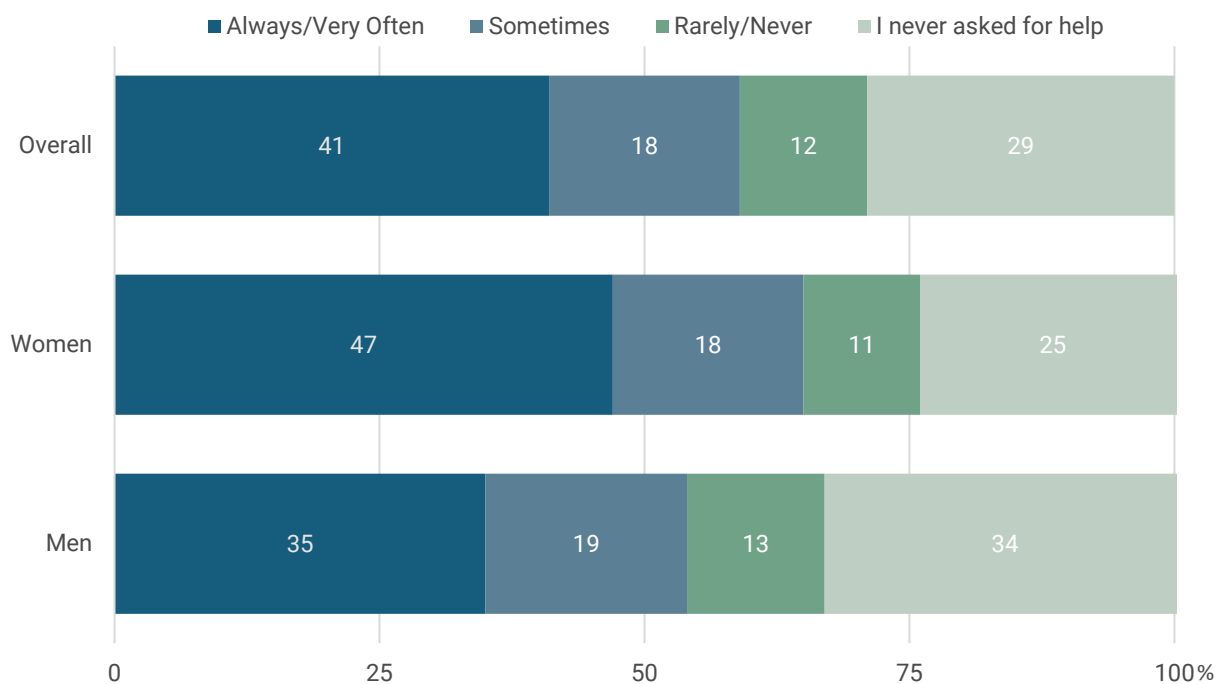
However, a majority of Americans report that at least one person in their trusted personal network is of a different economic background than themselves (69%).⁷ Nineteen percent of Hispanic adults say most or all of their personal networks are of a different economic background than themselves, compared to 10% of white adults and 11% of Black adults.

Regarding the dependability of these personal support networks, 41% of adults report always or very often receiving help when they asked in the past 12 months, while 18% report only sometimes and 12% say they rarely or never got help. Twenty-nine percent say they never asked anyone in their network for personal support since the start of the pandemic. Men are less likely to ask for help from their personal networks than women.

⁷ If respondents said they had many or a few people outside their household they could turn to for help and that most, some, or just one person in their personal network was of a different economic background, they were classified as having at least one in their personal network who was of a different economic background than themselves. Alternatively, if respondents said they had just one person outside their household they could turn to for help and that one person was of a different economic background, that respondent was also classified as having at least one person in their personal network who was of a different economic background than themselves.

Men are less likely to ask for help from their trusted personal networks.

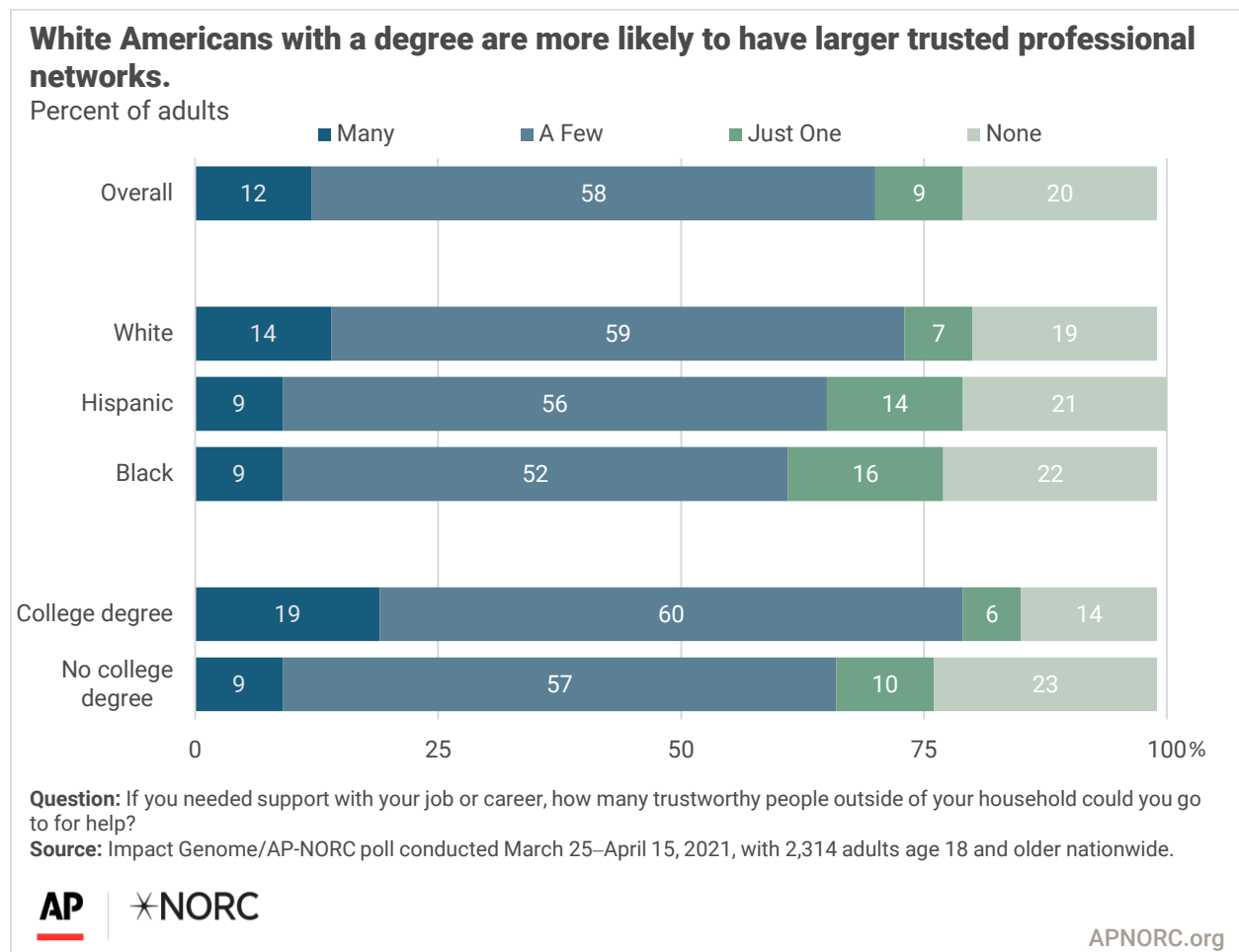
Percent of adults with at least one person they could go to for help

**Question:** How often did you get personal support from your network when you asked for it in the past 12 months?**Source:** Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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AS THE JOB MARKET STABILIZES, ABOUT 49 MILLION AMERICANS HAVE NO ONE TO HELP SUPPORT THEIR CAREERS – PEOPLE OF COLOR AND THOSE WITHOUT A DEGREE HAVE SMALLER TRUSTED PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS.

Seventy-nine percent of Americans have at least one trustworthy person outside their household that could provide support with their job or career like help writing a resume, getting advice on how to navigate a professional challenge, or getting connected with someone to get a job interview, but 20%, or 49 million Americans, say they do not have anyone to help them. Black and Hispanic adults are more likely to have only one person or no one to help with their job or career compared to white adults. Adults without a college education are also more likely to report smaller trusted professional networks compared to college educated Americans.



Most of those with at least one trusted professional contact feel that individual is in a position to advance their career (59%), but nearly a quarter (23%) do not believe their network can assist with better job prospects and 17% are unsure.⁸

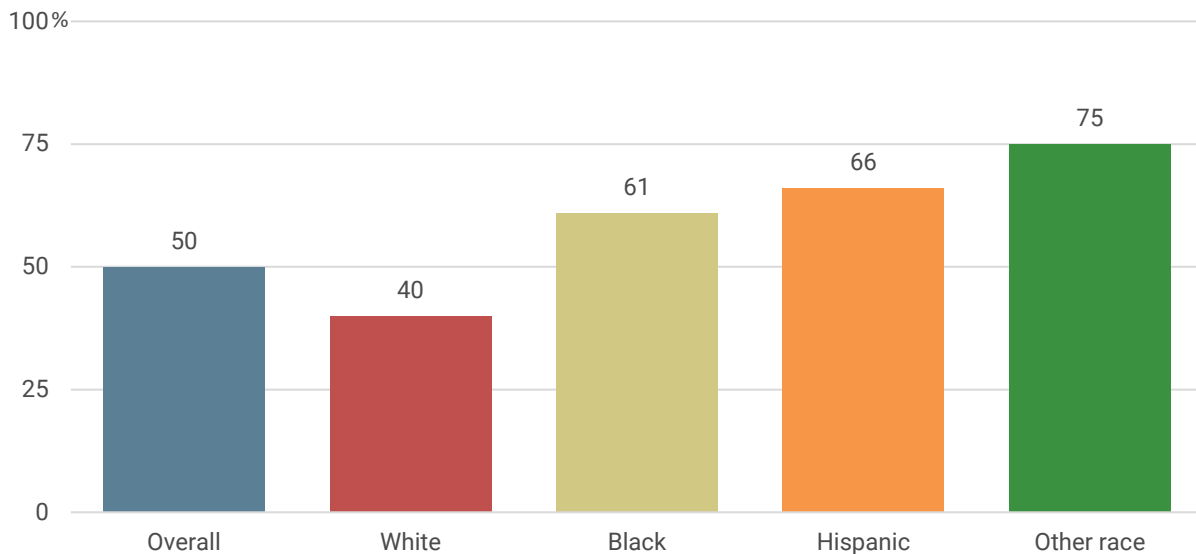
⁸ If respondents said they had many or a few people outside their household who could support their job or career and that most, some, or just one in their personal network was in a position to help advance their career, they were classified as having at least one in their personal network who could advance their career. Alternatively, if respondents said they had just one person outside their household who could support their job or career and that one person could advance their career, that respondent was also classified as having at least one person in their personal network who could advance their career.

Fifty percent of adults have at least one person in their trusted professional network that is a different race or ethnic background than themselves, with white adults less likely to report diversity (40%) compared to Black or Hispanic adults (61% and 66%, respectively).

A majority (61%) of adults with at least one person they trust professionally report at least one person being of a different economic class, while 27% say their network is from the same economic background.⁹

White adults are more likely to have trusted professional networks of people with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Percent of adults with at least one person in their professional network of a different race or ethnic background



Questions: How many of these people, who you trust for support with your job or career, are of a different race or ethnic background than yourself?

Is this person you trust for support with your job or career of a different race or ethnic background than yourself?

Source: Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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Thinking about the reliability of those networks, 47% did not ask for any help with their job or career in the past 12 months. But among those who did, 39% report they always or very often received help from their professional network when they asked. Thirty-two percent report getting help sometimes, and 29% report rarely or never receiving help when they asked.

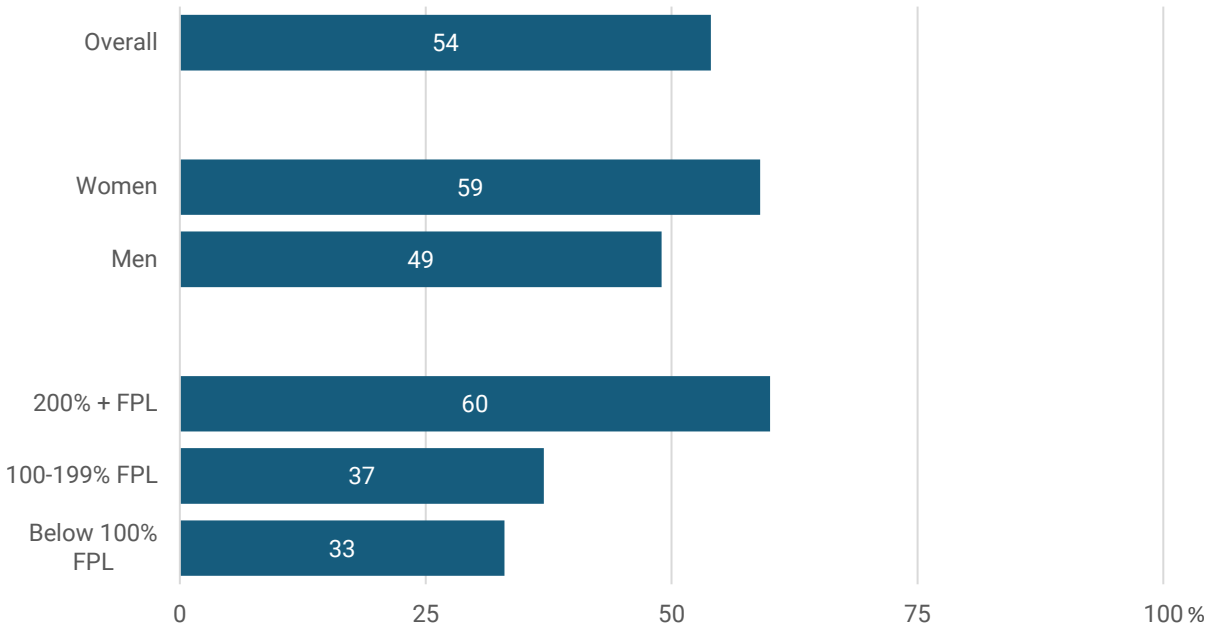
⁹ If respondents said they had many or a few people outside their household who could support their job or career and that most, some, or just one in their personal network was of a different race/ethnic or economic background than themselves, they were classified as having at least one in their personal network who are of a different race/ethnic or economic background than themselves. Alternatively, if respondents said they had just one person outside their household who could support their job or career and that one person was a different race/ethnic or economic background than themselves, that respondent was also classified as having at least one person in their personal network of a different race/ethnic or economic background.

MOST AMERICANS SAY THEY WERE CIVICALLY ENGAGED OVER THE LAST YEAR - BUT MANY ALSO SAY THEY REDUCED THEIR GIVING OR PARTICIPATION BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC.

Fifty-four percent of Americans have volunteered, donated money, or been civically engaged in some way over the last year. Women were more likely than men (59% versus 49%) to be more civically engaged. Additionally, Americans with higher family income were more likely to be able to give time or money, or be more civically engaged in the past year.

Women and wealthier Americans were more likely to be civically engaged in the last year.

Percent of adults who say they donated time, money, non-monetary items, or were civically engaged



Question: Which of the following is true for you over the past 12 months? Respondent would have selected at least one of the following options: volunteered; donated money to social causes; donated other non-monetary resources; or been civically engaged in other ways.

Source: Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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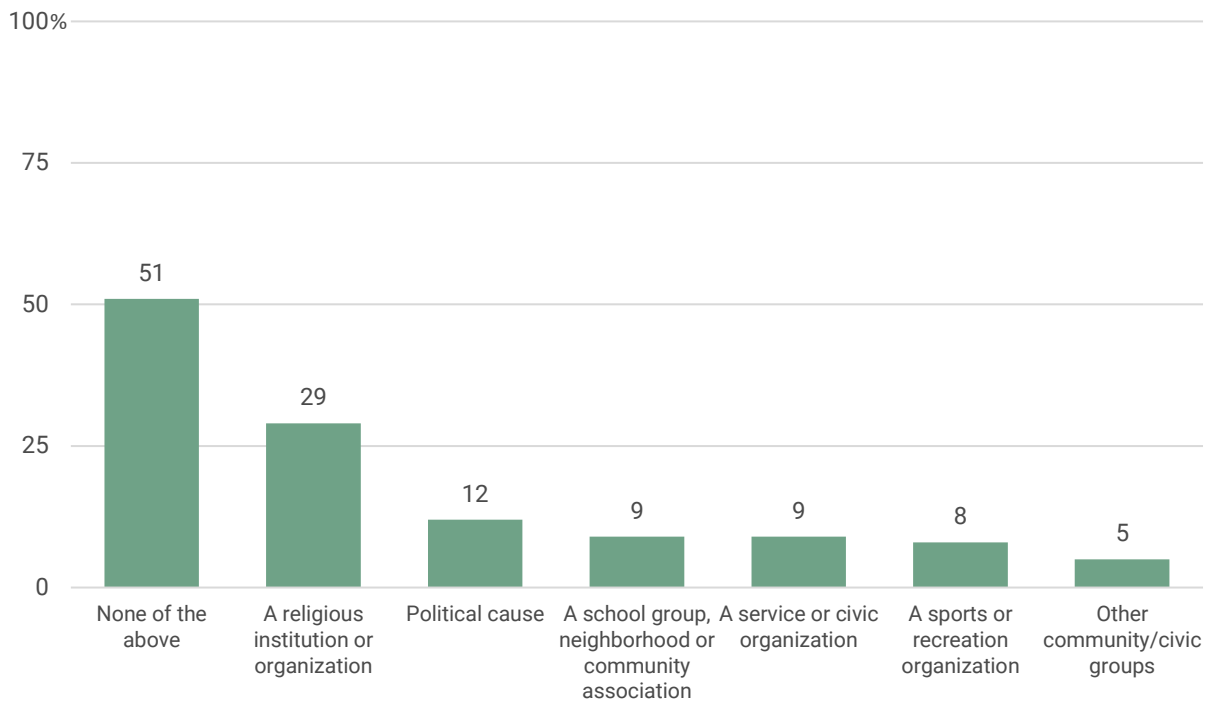
About a third (35%) of Americans gave less support to civic causes because of the COVID pandemic, as compared to the 23% who say they gave more. Those with lower incomes, Black and Hispanic adults and women were more likely to say they gave less because of the pandemic.

More than half (52%) of Americans did not participate in any formal civic groups in the last 12 months – although three in ten maintained ties to a religious institution and 12% participated in a political cause.

Forty-two percent of all Americans say they became less involved with any formal civic institutions because of the pandemic, while 21% say they became more involved because of the pandemic. Black and Hispanic adults as well as those with incomes between 100-199% FPL were more likely to decrease participation.

A majority of Americans did not participate in any civic groups in the last year.

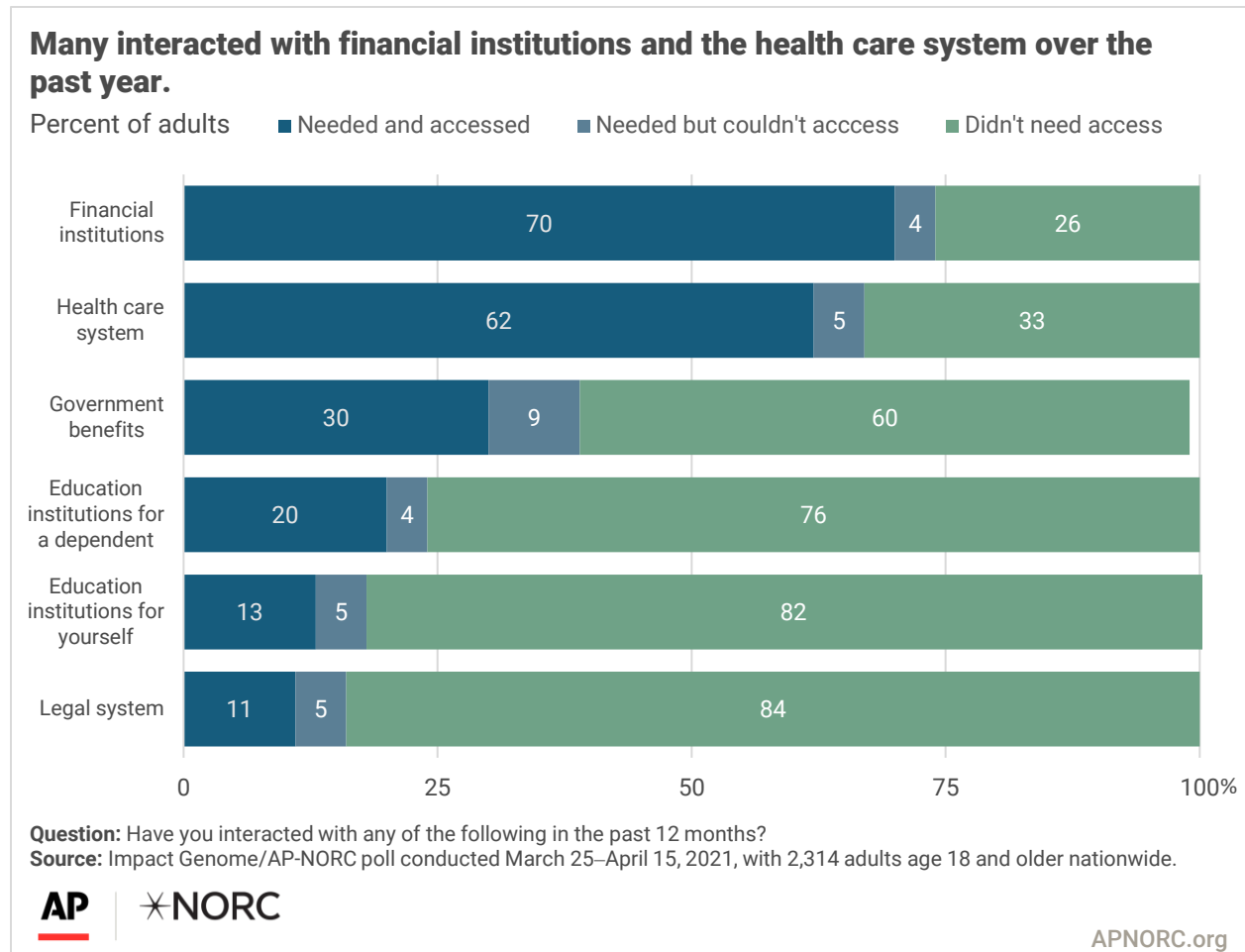
Percent of adults

**Question:** Which of the following have you participated in over the past 12 months?**Source:** Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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MOST PEOPLE INTERACTING WITH ESSENTIAL SERVICES WERE SATISFIED, BUT BLACK AND HISPANIC AMERICANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO REPORT THEIR NEEDS WEREN'T MET.

A majority of Americans interacted with financial institutions and the health care system over the past year. Fewer interacted with government benefit systems, education institutions, or the legal system.

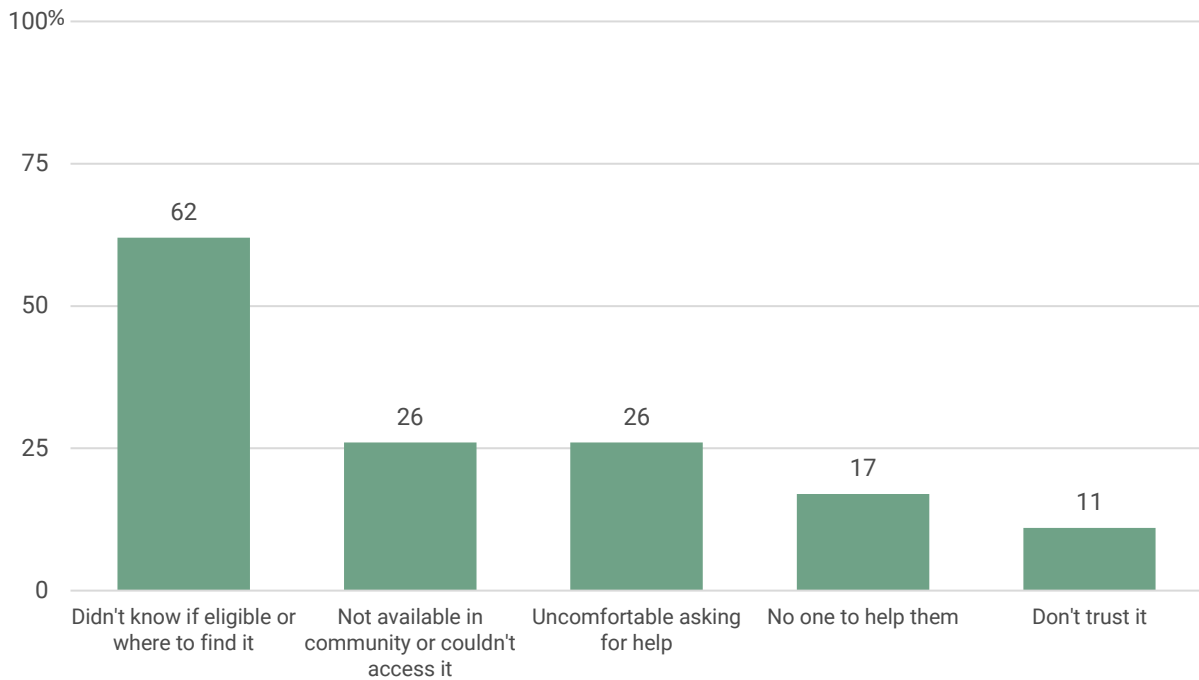


Most who needed these services were able to access them, but there are some small segments of the population who were not able to get help. Black adults are more likely than white adults to cite a service they needed but could not access (25% vs. 10%). No differences emerged in ability to get access when needed based on the number of trustworthy people in the respondent's life, whether or not they were civically engaged, or household income.

Among those who needed a service but couldn't access it, the most common barrier was knowledge – either they didn't know if they were eligible for it or didn't know where to find it. Others cited a lack of availability or discomfort asking for help. Fewer cited not having anyone to help them or a lack of trust in the service.

Lack of knowledge was the most common barrier to access.

Percent of adults who couldn't access

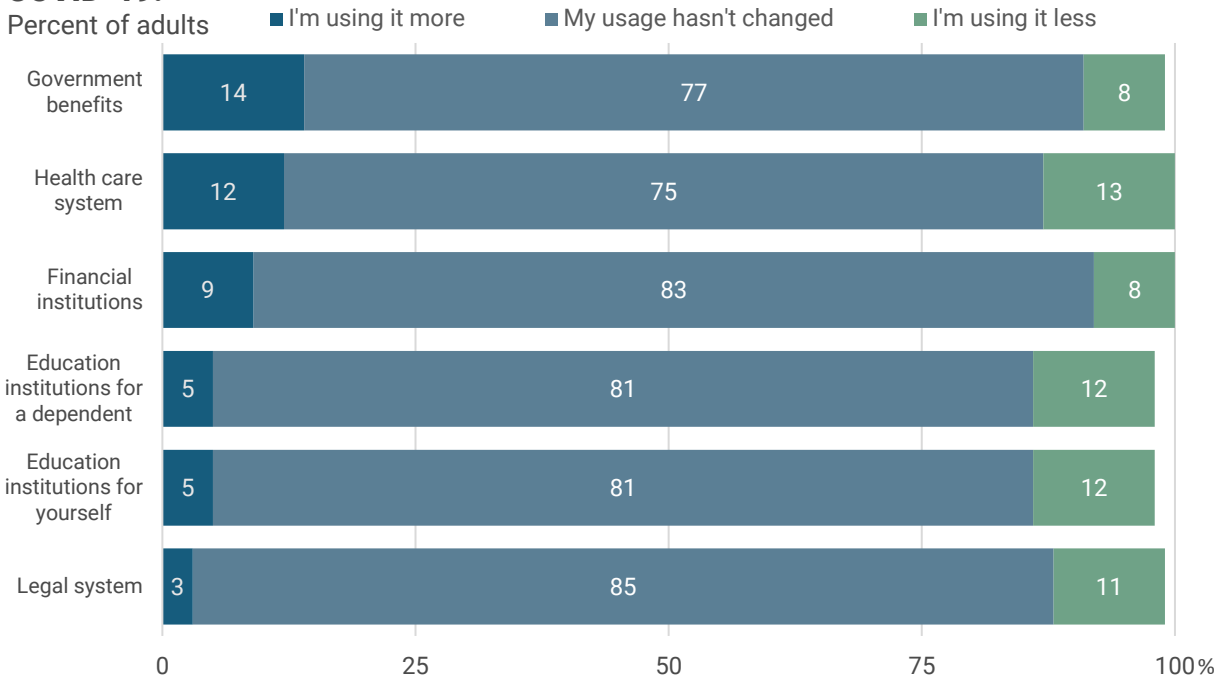
**Question:** Why have you not interacted with this/these in the past 12 months?**Source:** Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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For most Americans, use of these services hasn't changed much because of COVID-19, though 14% or more than 35 million Americans are using government benefits more rather than less.

The majority of the public is using these services the same amount as before COVID-19.



Question: How has your usage of the following changed because of COVID-19?

Source: Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

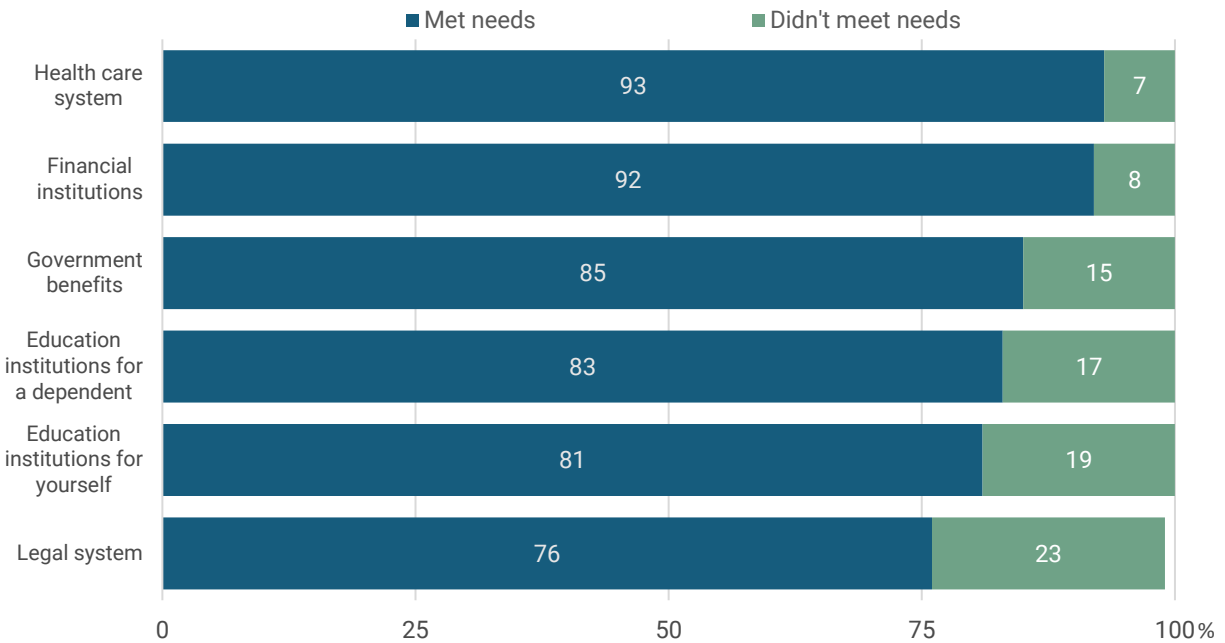
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Among those who interacted with these institutions, the majority felt their needs were met. However, Black (76%) and Hispanic Americans (69%) were less likely than whites (86%) to say their needs were met. Those with higher civic engagement were more likely to report satisfaction compared to those who were not at all engaged. Users of healthcare and financial services are the most likely to be satisfied with their interactions. Fewer, but still a majority, were satisfied with the legal system.

Most users were satisfied, but a quarter of legal system users did not have their needs met.

Percent of those who interacted with each institution on their own or with help



Question: Generally, did this/these meet your needs?

Source: Impact Genome/AP-NORC poll conducted March 25–April 15, 2021, with 2,314 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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People sometimes require help to navigate these systems. Thirty-four percent of those who interacted with any of these services received help from someone outside their household. Overall, people were satisfied with this help – 70% say they would consider asking that person or people for help again in the future. Seventy-seven percent of those who received this help are now better able to understand how to navigate the service, and 81% are more confident about doing so in the future. However, 83% still do not think they could navigate it on their own without any further help from the person they originally asked for help.

Those who are more engaged in their communities tended to navigate these systems without help in the past year. Ninety-two percent of those who were civically engaged, either through volunteer work or donations to social causes or organizations, accessed at least one of these sources compared to 86% of those who were not civically engaged.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study, funded by Impact Genome with support from the MassMutual Foundation, was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak®, NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. 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. Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago, The Associated Press, and Impact Genome collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between March 25 and April 15, 2021, with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 2,314 completed the survey—2,115 via the web and 199 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive (\$2) for completing the survey.

The final stage completion rate is 23.4%, the weighted household panel response rate is 19.5%, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 75%, for a cumulative response rate of 3.4%. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 2.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level including the design effect.

In addition, Black, Hispanic, respondents from households below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and respondents from households between 100%-200% FPL were sampled at a higher rate than their proportion of the population to support analyses.

Subgroup	Number of completed interviews	Margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level including the design effect
Black Americans	633	+/- 6.3 percentage points
Hispanic Americans	624	+/- 6.3 percentage points
Respondents from households below the FPL	521	+/- 4.9 percentage points
Respondents from households between 100% and 200% FPL	749	+/- 6.2 percentage points

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, education, and FPL. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2020 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

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