

# MOST AMERICANS AGREE THAT NURSES AND AIDES ARE UNDERPAID, WHILE FEW SUPPORT USING FEDERAL DOLLARS TO INCREASE PAY FOR DOCTORS.

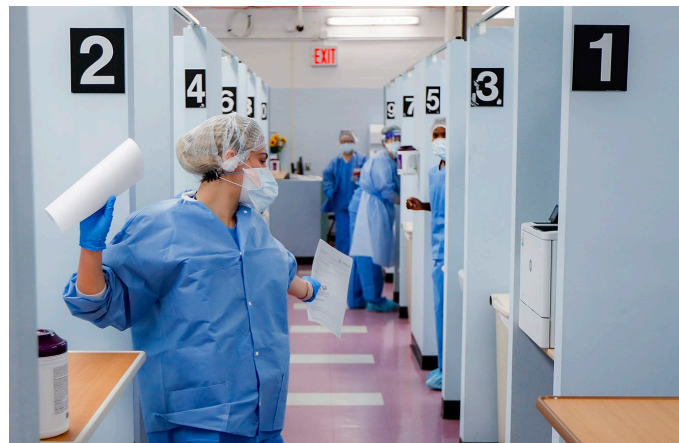
Large majorities of both Democrats and Republicans believe that nurses and health care aides are underpaid, while many Americans say doctors, physical therapists, and pharmacists are paid about right, according to a new UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll.

Most Americans trust doctors to do what is right for them and their families. A slim majority (54%), support funding to increase the number of doctors, and only 17% favor using federal funds to increase doctors' pay.

The bipartisan consensus around health care workers' pay provides insights into the types of policies that could gain broad public support. The survey results show that reforms that increase pay for nurses and health care aides or lower the salaries of executives are likely to appeal to both Democrats and Republicans.

The poll also finds that there have been no significant partisan shifts in attitudes toward health care policies since the pandemic, and Democrats are still significantly more likely than Republicans to support the Affordable Care Act (ACA), a single payer health care system, and a public option.

Most Americans believe that the ACA had no effect on the pay of doctors or nurses, but about a third think the law created a windfall for hospital and



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## Three Things You Should Know About the UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll Among American Adults:

- 1) About 6 in 10 say nurses and health care aides are underpaid, while about 7 in 10 believe hospital and insurance executives are overpaid.
- 2) Only 17% support increasing doctors' pay with government funding, but 54% support funding to increase the number of doctors.
- 3) Supporters of the ACA are more likely than those who oppose it to favor government funding for increasing doctors' salaries (23% vs. 13%) and increasing the number of doctors (73% vs. 42%).

insurance executives. About 70% say both hospital and insurance executives are overpaid, and three-fourths of the public do not trust hospital executives to do what is right for them and their families.

Support for various health care reforms is related to views toward doctors, even controlling for political partisanship. For example, those who favor the ACA are more likely to support government funding to increase the number of doctors and boost their pay. In addition, Americans who favor a single payer health care system are more likely than those who do not to back the reform to support increasing the number of doctors.

The nationwide poll was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research from June 10 to June 14, 2021, using AmeriSpeak®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,071 adults. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.2 percentage points.

Other key findings of the study include:

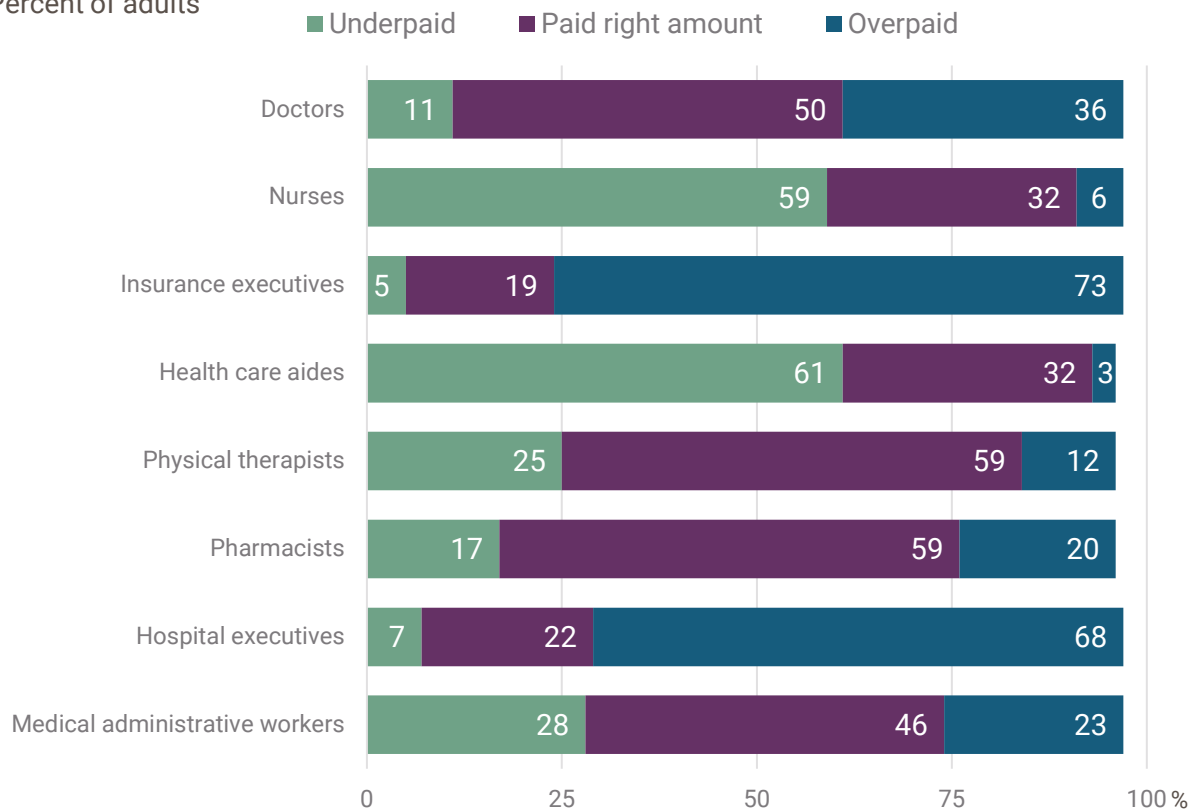
- Most Americans support increased government funding for lowering out-of-pocket costs for patients (74%) and for expanding government health insurance coverage for low-income people (59%); however, Democrats are more supportive of these policies than are Republicans.
- Views on doctors' pay are not tied to partisanship, with 37% of Democrats and 36% of Republicans saying doctors are overpaid.
- Majorities of Americans do not think the ACA had any effect on the salaries of health care workers such as doctors (54%) and nurses (61%). Fifty-three percent say it had no effect on hospital executives' pay, but 32% say the ACA led it to increase.
- Sixty-nine percent of those who support a public option favor increasing the number of doctors, compared to 40% of those who oppose a public option.
- Seventy-two percent of the public supports allowing the federal government and private insurance to negotiate for lower prescription drug prices.

## **MOST REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS BELIEVE NURSES AND HEALTH CARE AIDES ARE UNDERPAID WHILE DOCTORS, PHYSICAL THERAPISTS, AND PHARMACISTS ARE PAID ABOUT RIGHT.**

Although the public tends to believe doctors are paid the right amount, most Americans say that nurses and health care aides are underpaid. Majorities report that physical therapists and pharmacists are paid the right amount, and about 7 in 10 say insurance and hospital executives are overpaid.

## Would you say each of the following is overpaid, underpaid, or paid the right amount:

Percent of adults



**Question:** Thinking about the different types of health care professionals, would you say each of the following is overpaid, underpaid, or gets paid the right amount?

**Source:** UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted June 10-14, 2021 with 1,071 adults nationwide



APNORC.org

Most of the public has a realistic sense of what different health care professionals make on average and still say some are underpaid while others make too much. For example, 7 in 10 believe nurses make between \$50,000 and \$125,000 per year, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics<sup>1</sup> reports the mean salary for registered nurses is about \$80,000.

When it comes to pay for health care workers, there is general agreement on both sides of the aisle. Republicans and Democrats both believe that nurses and health care aides are underpaid while doctors are paid about the right.

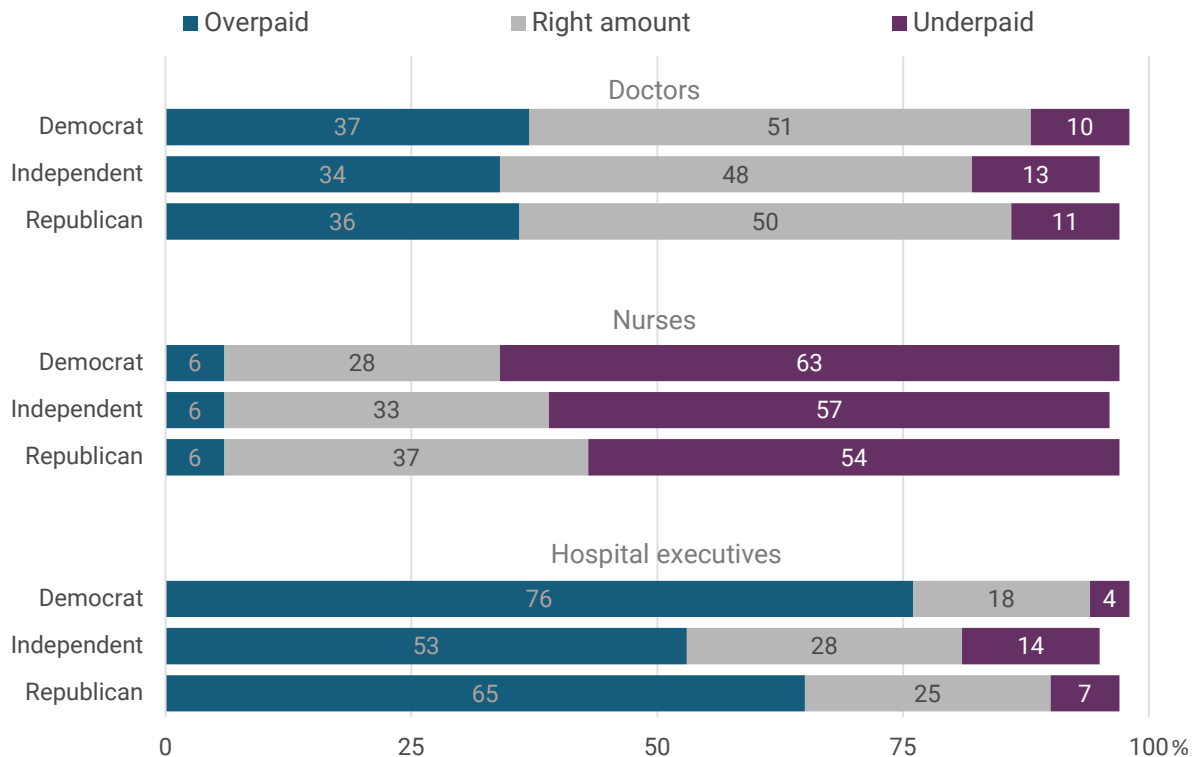
Moreover, only 17% of Americans favor using government funds to increase pay for doctors, and that support is similarly low among Democrats (20%), independents (17%), and Republicans (15%).

Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans report that insurance and hospital executives are overpaid, though Democrats are more likely to report they are overpaid.

<sup>1</sup>Taken from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2020 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates. [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_nat.htm#29-0000](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#29-0000)

### Partisans agree on health care workers' pay.

Percent of adults



**Question:** Thinking about the different types of health care professionals, would you say each of the following is overpaid, underpaid, or gets paid the right amount?

**Source:** UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted June 10-14, 2021 with 1,071 adults nationwide



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There are few differences across ages, genders, race/ethnicities, and income levels in Americans' attitudes toward the pay of most health care workers.

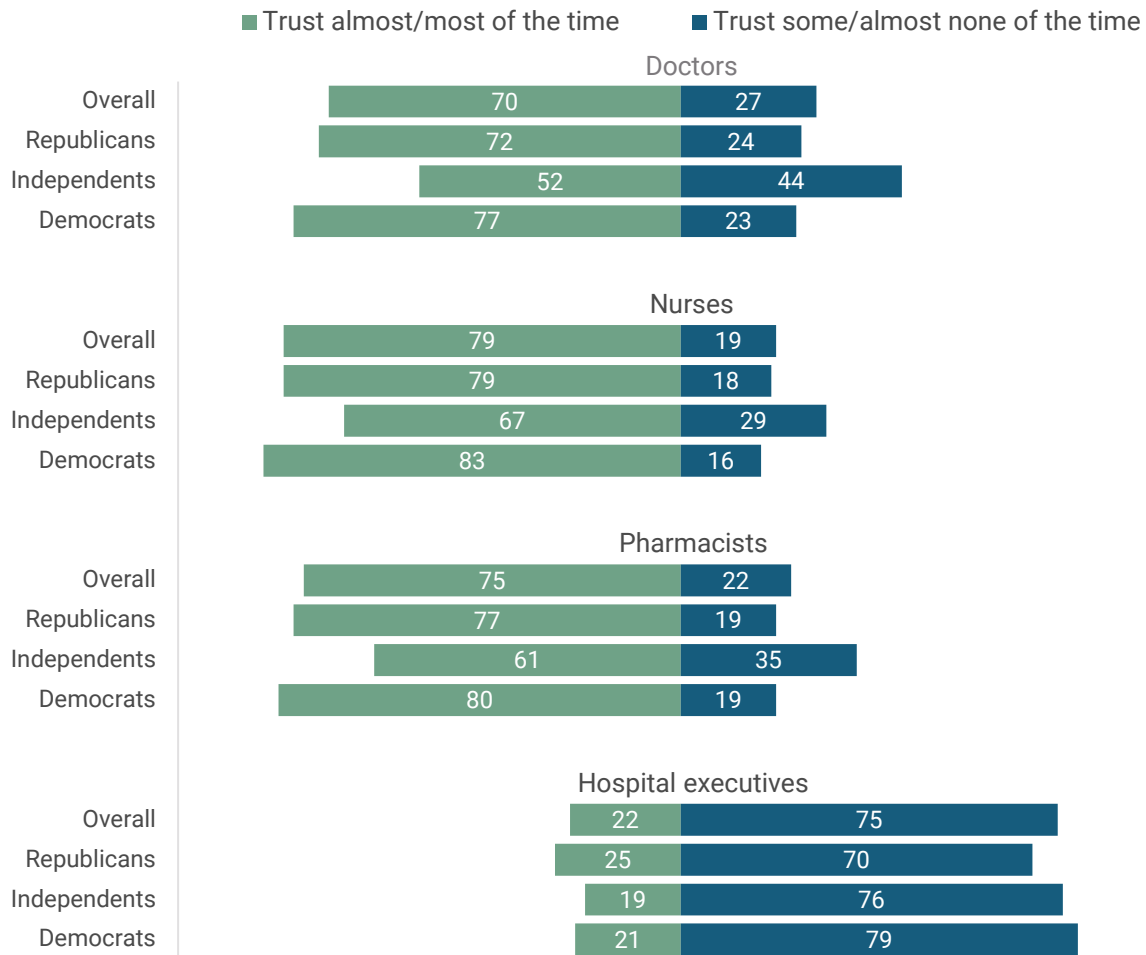
However, college-educated adults are especially likely to say executives are overpaid. Eighty-three percent of adults with a college degree say insurance executives are overpaid versus the 66% of those without a degree who say the same. Seventy-nine percent also say hospital executives are overpaid, but just 61% without a degree say so.

### THE PUBLIC TRUSTS DOCTORS, NURSES, AND PHARMACISTS, BUT NOT HOSPITAL EXECUTIVES.

The vast majority of Americans trust a variety of health care practitioners to do what is right for their families most of the time, but few trust hospital executives. While more than three-fourths trust doctors, nurses, and pharmacists at least most or almost all of the time, only about a fifth say the same of hospital executives.

## Partisanship does not impact level of trust in health care professionals.

Percent of adults



**Question:** How much of the time do you think you can trust the following health care professions to do what is right for you and your family?

**Source:** UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted June 10-14, 2021 with 1,071 adults nationwide



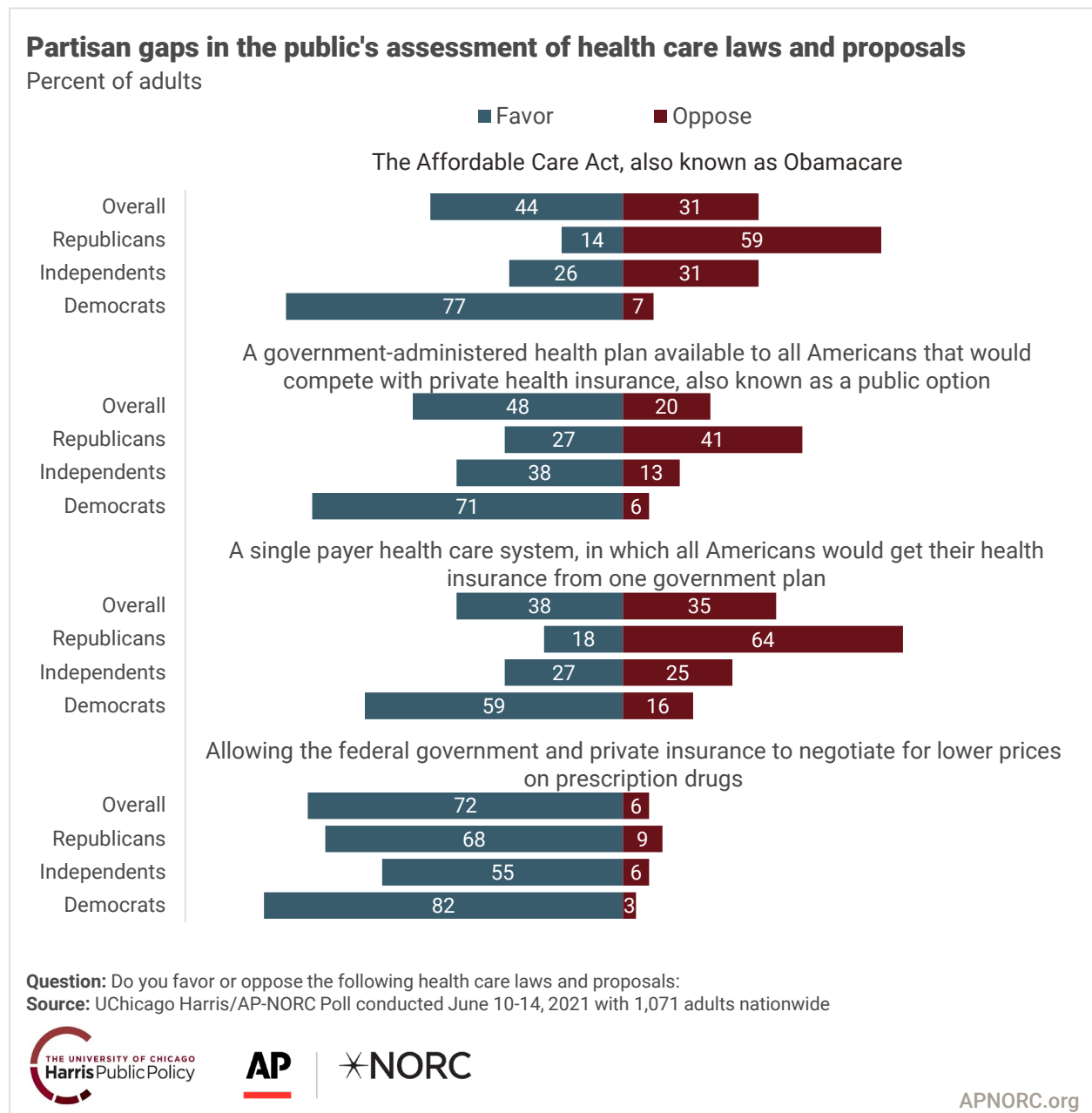
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Americans who trust doctors to do what is right for them and their families are a bit more likely to say doctors are paid the right amount. Thirty-two percent of those who trust doctors support increasing their pay, compared to 12% of those who distrust doctors.

## SIGNIFICANT PARTISAN DIFFERENCES IN VIEWS TOWARD HEALTH CARE POLICIES PERSIST IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19.

Public attitudes toward several major health care policies have not changed significantly since the start of the pandemic. Consistent with pre-pandemic research,<sup>2</sup> most Americans, including the majority of both Democrats and Republicans, support allowing the federal government and private insurance to negotiate for lower prices on prescription drugs.

However, there are significant partisan differences in support for the other health care policies. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support the ACA, a public option, and a single payer health care system.



<sup>2</sup> Question wording differed slightly between the two polls. AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. (April, 2019). "Attitudes toward Changing the Health Care Law." <https://apnorc.org/projects/attitudes-toward-changing-the-health-care-law/>

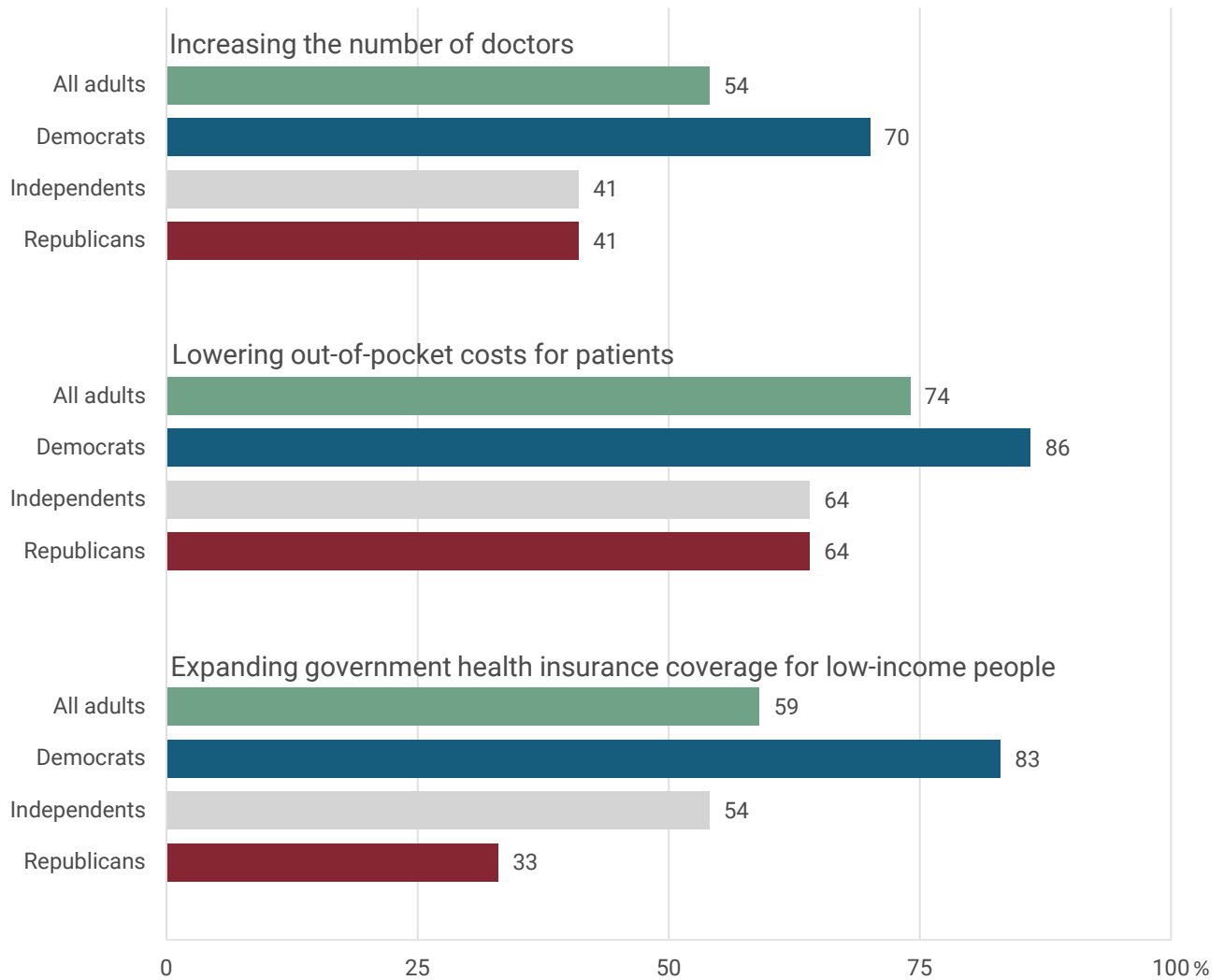
Independent of partisanship, those who support the ACA are more likely to say both that nurses and health care aides are underpaid (66% and 73%) and that insurance executives are overpaid (83%) than those who do not support the ACA (55%, 52%, and 71%, respectively). Supporters of a single payer health care system and supporters of a government option feel the same, with 67% of single payer supporters saying nurses are underpaid versus 54% of opponents saying so.

The majority of Americans favor government funding to increase the number of doctors, but Democrats are significantly more likely to favor the policy than Republicans. The level of public support for increasing the number of doctors is similar to the level of support for expanding government health insurance coverage for low-income people, but is significantly less popular than using government funding for lowering out-of-pocket costs for patients.

While 70% of Democrats are in favor of government support for increasing the number of doctors, only 41% of Republicans back such a proposal. Similarly, 84% of Democrats are in favor of increasing funding for expanded government health insurance coverage for low-income people, compared to 33% of Republicans.

**Do you favor, oppose or neither favor nor oppose increased government funding for each of the following:**

Percent of adults who favor



**Question:** Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor, nor oppose increased government funding for each of the following:

**Source:** UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted June 10-14, 2021 with 1,071 adults nationwide



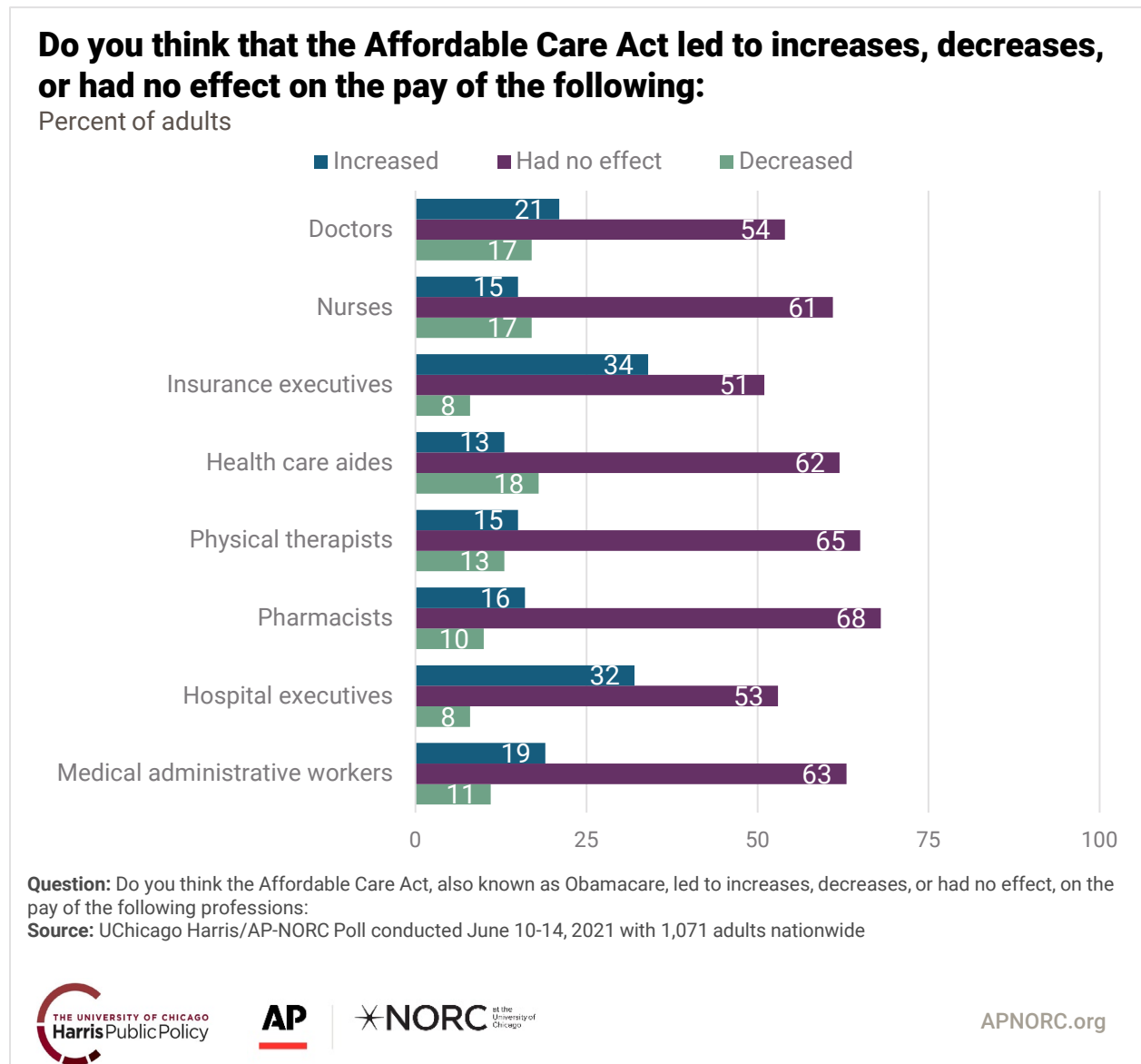
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Support for government funding to increase the number of doctors is strongest among those who say they are in favor of the ACA, a public option, or a single payer health care system. For example, among those who support the ACA, 73% favor funding to increase the number of doctors, compared to 42% among those who oppose. Likewise, there is more support for increasing the number of doctors among those who favor a public option (69% vs. 40%) or a single payer health care system (69% vs. 46%) than those who oppose such reforms.



## MAJORITIES SAY THE ACA HAD NO EFFECT ON THE SALARY OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS, BUT A THIRD BELIEVE IT LED TO INCREASES IN PAY FOR HOSPITAL AND INSURANCE EXECUTIVES.

Most Americans think that the ACA had no effect on the pay of a variety of medical professions, including doctors, nurses, insurance executives, health care aides, physical therapists, hospital executives, and medical administrators. However, about one-third of the public believes the law led to increases in pay for both insurance executives and hospital executives.



Those who oppose the ACA are more likely to say that it led to increases in the salaries of hospital executives. Among those who oppose the ACA, 42% think it led to increases for hospital executives, compared to 28% of those who support the ACA. Despite significant differences in support of the ACA between Democrats and Republicans, partisanship does not impact views of the ACA's effect on health care workers' salaries.

## STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Staff from the Harris School of Public Policy and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using the 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 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 June 10 and June 14, 2021, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak®, and 1,071 completed the survey—1,036 via the web and 35 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in English. The final stage completion rate is 16.0 percent, the weighted household panel recruitment rate is 19.1 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 75.0 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 2.3 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.2 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 noncoverage 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.

A topline with full question wordings is available at [www.apnorc.org](http://www.apnorc.org). For more information, email [info@apnorc.org](mailto:info@apnorc.org).

## ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO HARRIS SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

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- 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.