



The Associated Press-NORC  
Center for Public Affairs Research

# TRUST IN GOVERNMENT IS LOW, BUT AMERICANS ARE UNITED AROUND INVESTMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY

Despite low levels of trust in government, the public expresses optimism that federal government initiatives can have a positive impact on their lives—especially investments in technology, according to a new study by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and MeriTalk.

Few trust the federal government, and confidence in the government to spend money in the best interest of the public is low. Just 15% of American adults say they trust the federal government to do what's right for them and their families all or most of the time. Additionally, just 9% express confidence in the ability of the federal government to spend money in the public's best interest and 22% feel the government is able to deliver citizen services fairly, regardless of race, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics.

Even so, most see the federal government playing the same or a more important role in improving the lives of the American people in the next 10 years. While citizens express general satisfaction with information provided by government websites and access to citizen services during the pandemic, the majority see opportunities for the federal government to improve their experiences, especially in the realms of health care and online data security.



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## Three Things You Should Know

About the AP-NORC/MeriTalk Poll  
among American Adults:

- 1) Just 15% trust the federal government to do what is right for them and their families all or most of the time.
- 2) Still, 76% say the federal government will be as important or more important in improving the lives of the American people over the next 10 years.
- 3) While just 9% are confident in the government's ability to spend money in the public's best interest, 68% say federal spending on technology is worth the investment.

For many Americans, investments in technology by the federal government are key to not only improving America's standing as a global economic leader, but also to the federal government's ability to provide impactful improvements in the lives of citizens.

Despite a lack of confidence in overall government spending, 68% say that federal government investments in technology pay off. Seventy-eight percent say technology plays a major role in the United States' ability to compete globally, and 69% support increased funding for technological research and development.

When it comes to the potential downsides of technology, Americans see a role for the federal government to play as well. Forty-three percent of adults say funding for training programs for workers to gain new skill sets in the face of increases in automation would have a major impact on their lives. More than 7 in 10 adults say the federal government should establish national standards for how companies collect, process, and share personal data to help protect the privacy and security of individuals in an increasingly online world.

The nationwide poll was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and MeriTalk from June 24 to 28, 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 1,004 adults. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.3 percentage points.

## **OTHER KEY FINDINGS FROM THE REPORT:**

- About half of those who used federal government websites such as the Census Bureau, the IRS, or the CDC to look up information say the websites were informative and easy to use.
- 68% want the federal government to prioritize improving health care and 61% want it to devote a good deal of time to data security and privacy.
- 7 in 10 support the federal government treating personal data security as a national security issue and investing in cyber security.
- 8 in 10 say the government has been at least somewhat effective at connecting citizens to needed services like unemployment and food assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Just 1 in 4 express pride in the way democracy works in the United States. One in 5 are proud of the country's political influence in the world.
- Just 1 in 5 say the federal government is very or extremely effective at adapting to the digital world.

## TRUST IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS LOW, THOUGH MANY ACKNOWLEDGE ITS IMPORTANCE IN IMPROVING THE LIVES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

While public trust in the federal government is low and few people believe it is effective at earning citizens' trust, the public does see a role for it in improving people's lives.

Just 15% of Americans trust the federal government to do what is right all or most of the time, 41% say some of the time, and 43% trust the government a little or none of the time. Only 9% of adults say the federal government is extremely or very effective at earning the American people's trust, 33% say it is somewhat effective, and 57% say it is only a little or not effective at all.

There are large partisan gaps when it comes to trust in federal government. Democrats are three times more likely than independents and four times more likely than Republicans to trust the government to do what is right for them and their families.

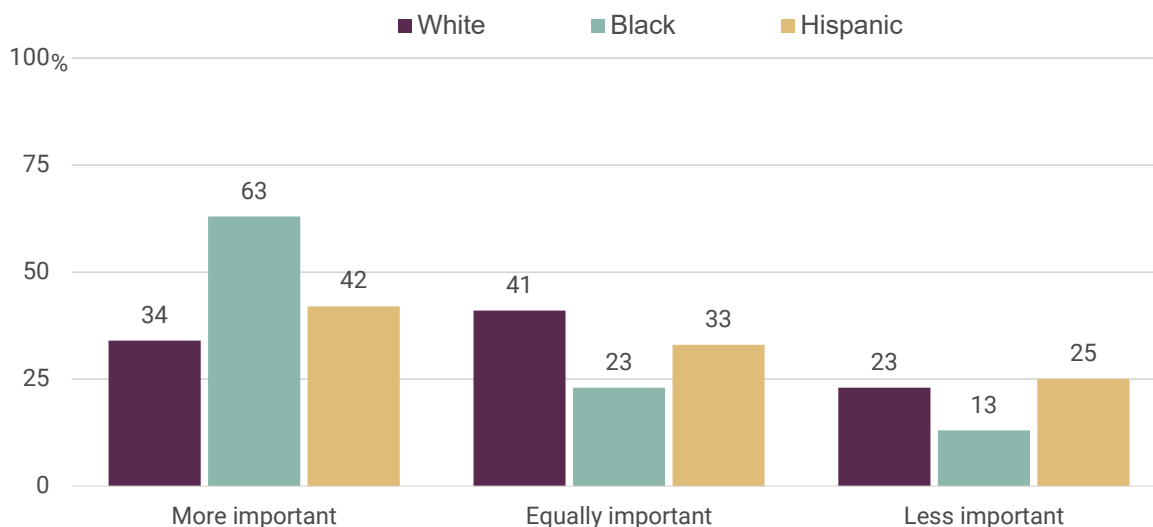
In addition to general lack of trust in the federal government, only 22% have a great deal or quite a bit of trust in the government to deliver services fairly, regardless of race, ethnicity, or other characteristics; 38% have a moderate amount of trust; and 39% have only a little or no trust at all.

Despite the lack of trust in the government, most believe the government's role in improving lives will stay the same or increase over the next 10 years. Thirty-eight percent think it will become more important in improving lives than it is now and 38% say it will remain as important. Twenty-three percent say it will be less important.

Black Americans are nearly twice as likely as white Americans to say the government will have a more important role in improving Americans' lives in the next 10 years than it has currently.

### More than 6 in 10 Black adults believe the federal government will be more important to improving the lives of Americans in the future.

Percent of adults



**Question:** Looking ahead to the next 10 years, how important do you think the federal government will be in terms of improving the lives of the American people? Will it be more important than it is now, less important than it is now, or will it be about equally as important?

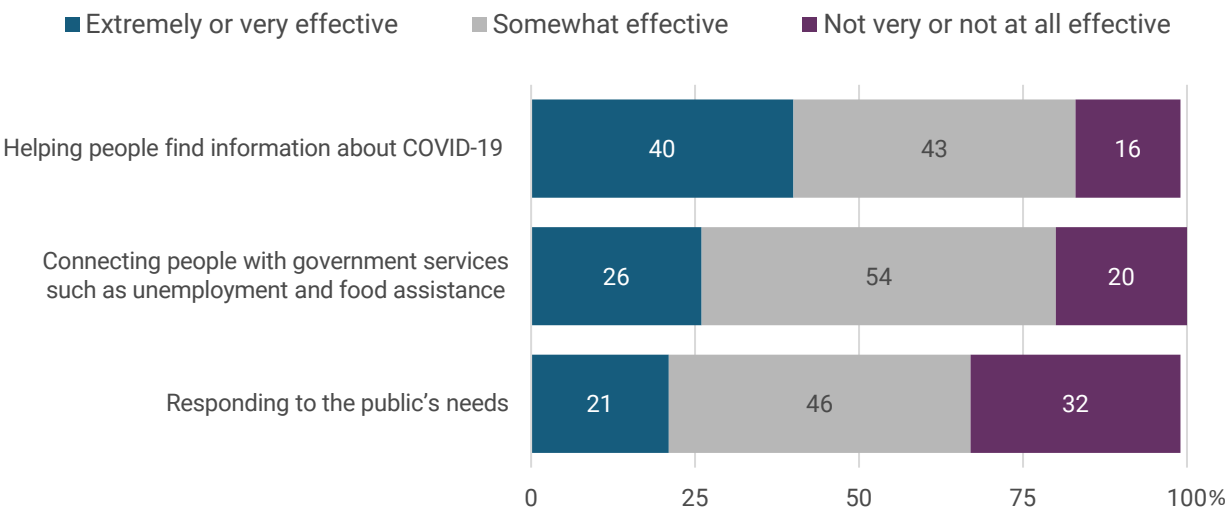
**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

## A MAJORITY FEELS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN AT LEAST SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE IN ASSISTING CITIZENS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

While trust in the federal government is low, the majority of Americans say it has been at least somewhat effective in assisting citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic by connecting people with government services, helping people find information, and responding to the public's needs.

### Most think the government has been at least somewhat effective assisting citizens during the pandemic.

Percent of adults



**Question:** During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, how effective do you think the federal government has been at each of the following?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

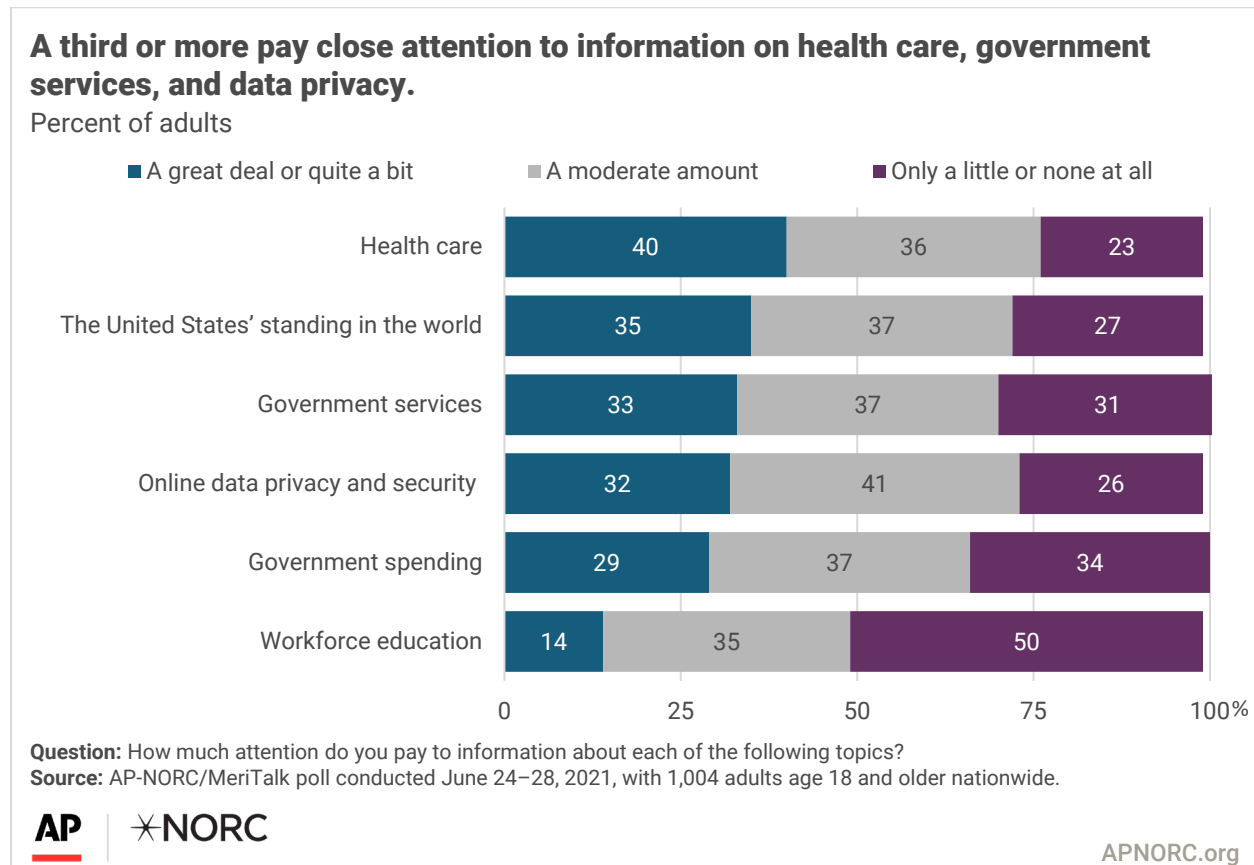
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Views of government effectiveness during the pandemic are influenced by age, race, and party affiliation. Adults age 40 and older are more likely than adults age 39 and younger to say the government was effective at responding to public needs (25% vs. 15%), as well as providing information about COVID-19 (44% vs. 33%). Black adults are about twice as likely as white adults to say the government effectively responded to the public's needs (40% vs. 20%) and connected them to services (44% vs. 22%). Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to say the federal government's efforts were effective.

## WHILE SCRUTINY LEVELS VARY, THE MAJORITY OF AMERICANS ARE SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO SPEND TAX DOLLARS WISELY.

The majority of adults are at least moderately attentive to information on issues like health care, the country's reputation and standing abroad, government services, data security, and government spending. Fewer are paying attention to information about workforce education.



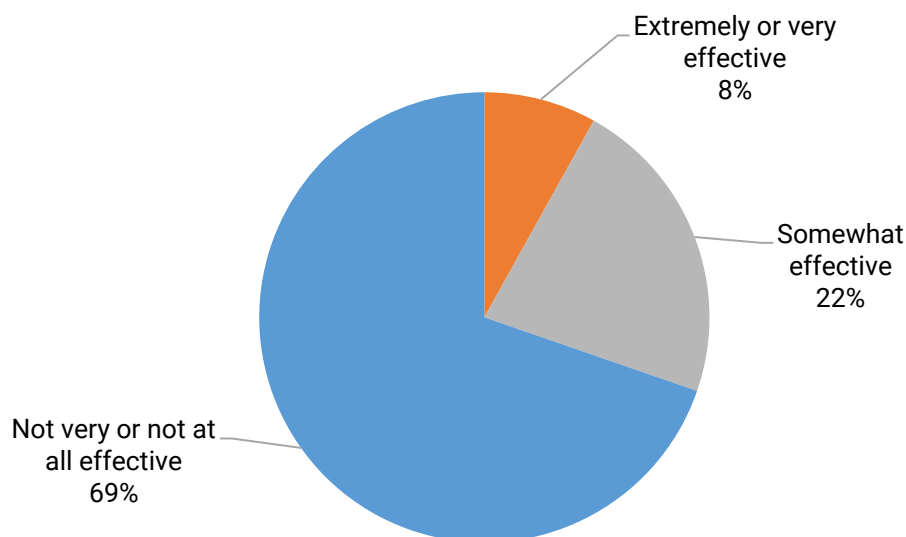
Adults age 40 and older are more likely than younger adults to pay attention to information about each issue except workforce education.

While few attend closely to information on government spending, most of the public lacks confidence in the federal government's ability to spend money in the best interest of the public. Fifty-nine percent have only a little or no confidence at all, 31% have a moderate amount of confidence, and 9% have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence.

Further, a large majority of adults say the government is not effective in identifying and eliminating wasteful spending.

**Most see the government as ineffective at avoiding careless spending.**

Percent of adults



**Question:** [Identifying and eliminating wasteful spending] How effective do you think the federal government is at each of the following?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



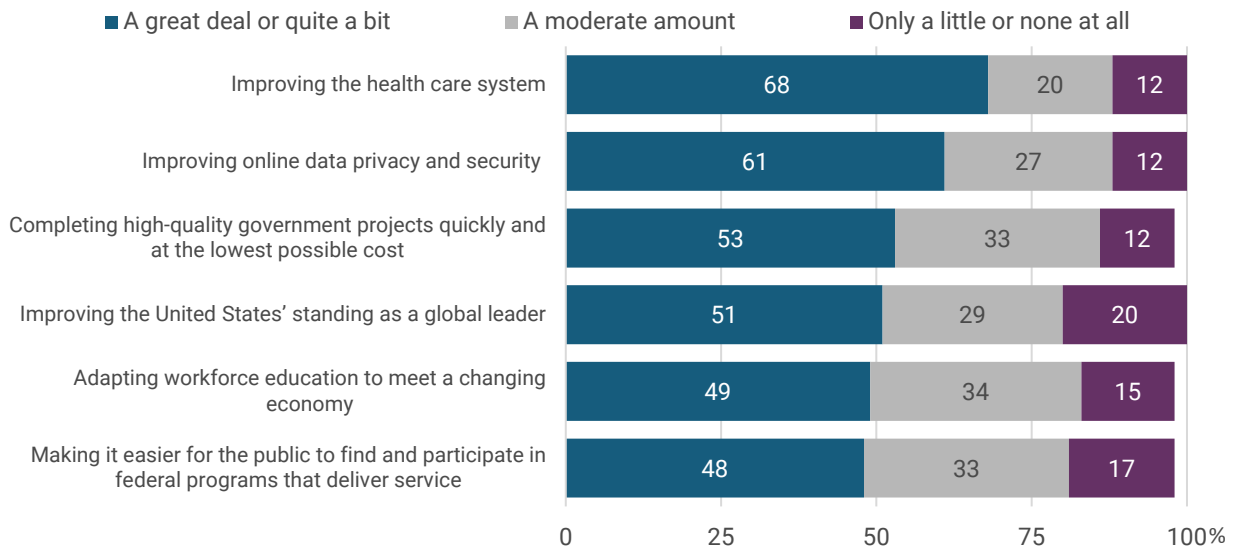
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**MOST WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO PRIORITIZE IMPROVING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM AND ONLINE DATA PRIVACY AND SECURITY.**

Most adults prioritize improving the health care system and online data security when asked how the federal government should allocate its effort across a range of issue areas. About half say the federal government should pay special attention to other issues like improving the country's standing as a global leader, updating workforce education, and making it easier for people to enroll in federal service programs.

## Most want the government to prioritize improving the health care system and online data privacy.

Percent of adults



**Question:** How much effort would you like the federal government to devote to each of the following areas over the next 10 years?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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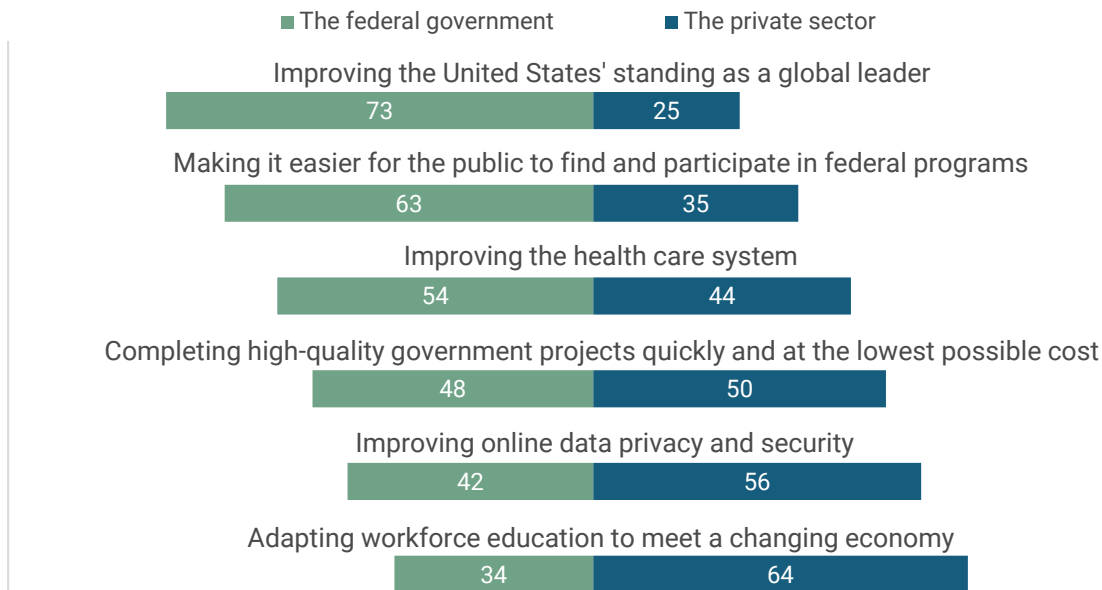
Partisan differences arise when it comes to the level of effort citizens would like from the federal government on issues like improving health care, simplifying federal programs and making the public's participation easier, and adapting workforce education. Democrats are more likely to think the government should prioritize these issues than Republicans.

Adults age 40 and older are more likely than younger adults to say they want the federal government to devote a great deal or quite a bit of effort on completing government projects efficiently (60% vs. 41%), improving data privacy (65% vs. 55%), and improving the country's standing in the world (59% vs. 35%).

Most Americans say the federal government would do a better job than the private sector in improving the country's standing as a global leader, making it easier for the public to learn about federal programs, and improving the health care system. A majority believe the private sector would do a better job at adapting the workforce and improving online data privacy.

## Americans say the government would do a better job in some areas, but are split between it and the private sectors on others.

Percent of adults



**Question:** If you had to choose, do you trust the federal government or the private sector to do a better job of handling each of the following?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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Americans age 39 and younger are more likely than those age 40 and older to say the federal government would do a better job than the private sector at improving health care (64% vs. 49%), as well as adapting the workforce to a changing economy, (43% vs. 29%).

There are stark partisan differences in views of the government or private sector's ability to handle these issues. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say the federal government would do a better job at improving the country's international standing, helping the public participate in federal programs, improving the health care system, completing government projects, and modernizing the workforce. A majority of Republicans agree the federal government would do a better job at improving the United States' standing in the international community, but believe the private sector is better equipped to handle each of the other issues.

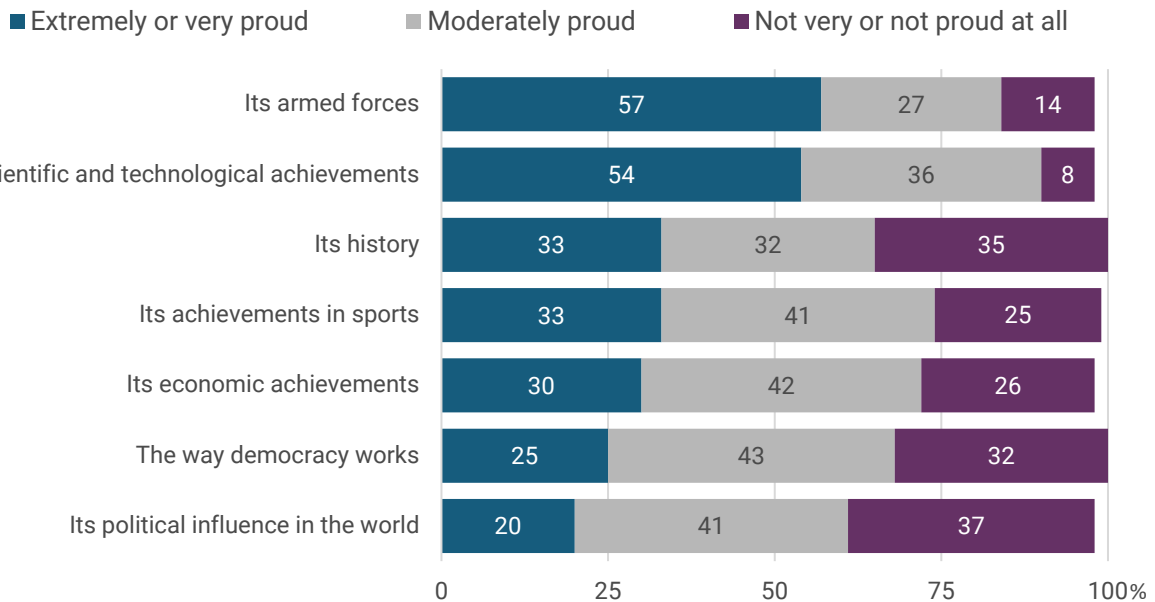


## MOST ARE PROUD OF THE COUNTRY'S SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENTS, AND NEARLY 7 IN 10 BELIEVE INVESTMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY PAY OFF.

More than half of Americans are extremely or very proud of the country's armed forces and its scientific and technological achievements. Fewer express pride in America's history, sports and economic achievements, the way democracy works, and America's political influence in the world.

### Most express pride in America's armed forces and technological achievements.

Percent of adults



**Question:** How proud are you of the United States in each of the following?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MerriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

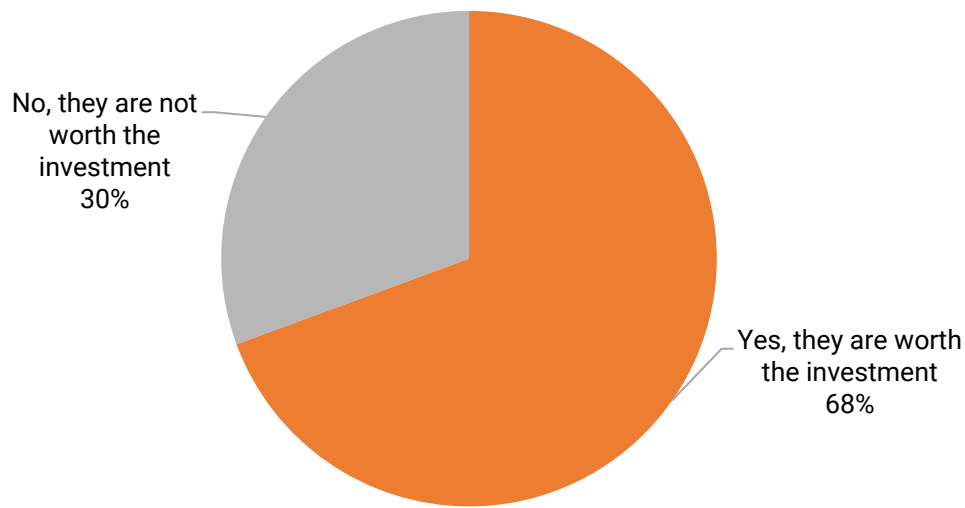
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Support for federal investments in technology is widespread, with 68% saying the investment is worthwhile and only 30% saying it is not.

## Most agree that the federal government's spending on technology is a good investment.

Percent of adults



**Question:** In your opinion, are federal government investments in technology usually worth the investment, or not?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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Majorities of both Democrats (79%) and Republicans (56%) see value in technology investments. This level of agreement is also similar between white Americans (65%), Black Americans (72%), and Hispanic Americans (75%).

## A LARGE MAJORITY OF AMERICANS BELIEVE TECHNOLOGY IS A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE UNITED STATES' ABILITY TO COMPETE GLOBALLY.

Most Americans do not see the United States as the single leader in the global economy. Overall, 20% of adults say the United States stands above all other countries in the world, 55% say it is one of the greatest countries in the world along with some others, and 24% say there are other countries better than the United States.

Republicans and adults age 40 and older are more likely to hold a positive view of the country's standing in the global economy than Democrats and younger adults.

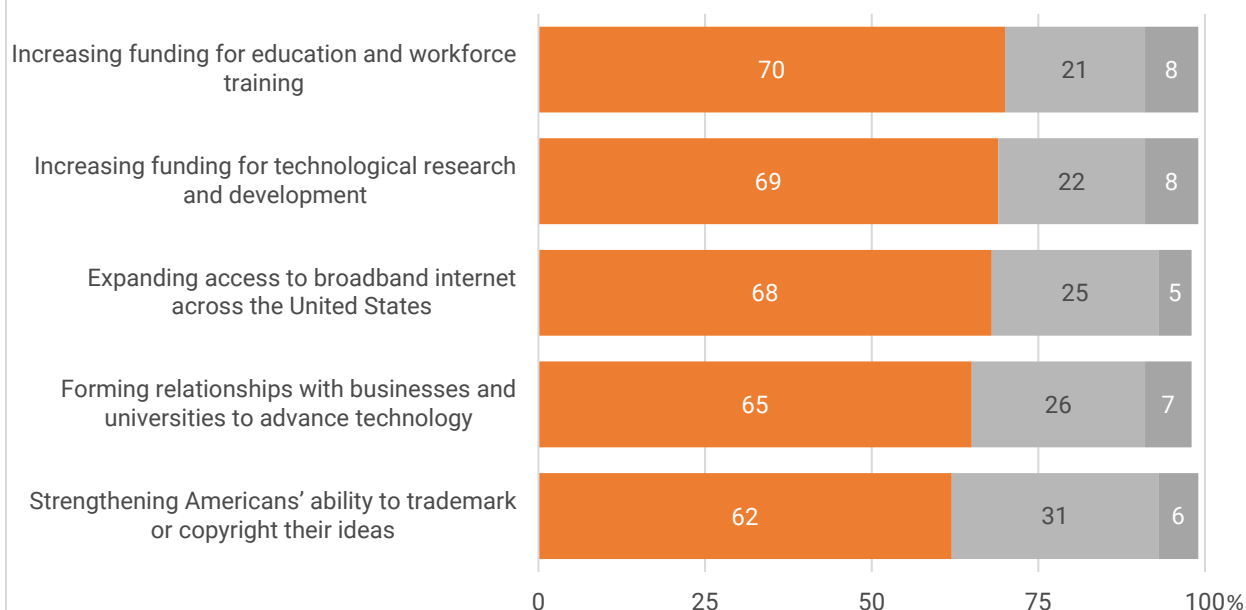
A majority of adults (78%) view technology as playing a major role in the United States' ability to compete globally, 18% say it plays a minor role, and only 3% say it plays no role at all. This level of agreement is similar among Democrats (81%), independents (66%), and Republicans (78%).

Further, measures to improve the country's ability to compete globally are overwhelmingly popular. At least 6 in 10 adults support the federal government taking measures like increasing funding for technology, expanding access to broadband internet, and strengthening copyright protections to improve the country's global competitiveness.

**There is widespread support for measures to improve U.S. global competitiveness.**

Percent of adults

■ Strongly or somewhat support 
 ■ Neither support nor oppose 
 ■ Somewhat or strongly oppose



**Question:** Do you support, oppose, or neither support nor oppose the federal government taking each of the following measures to improve the country's ability to compete globally?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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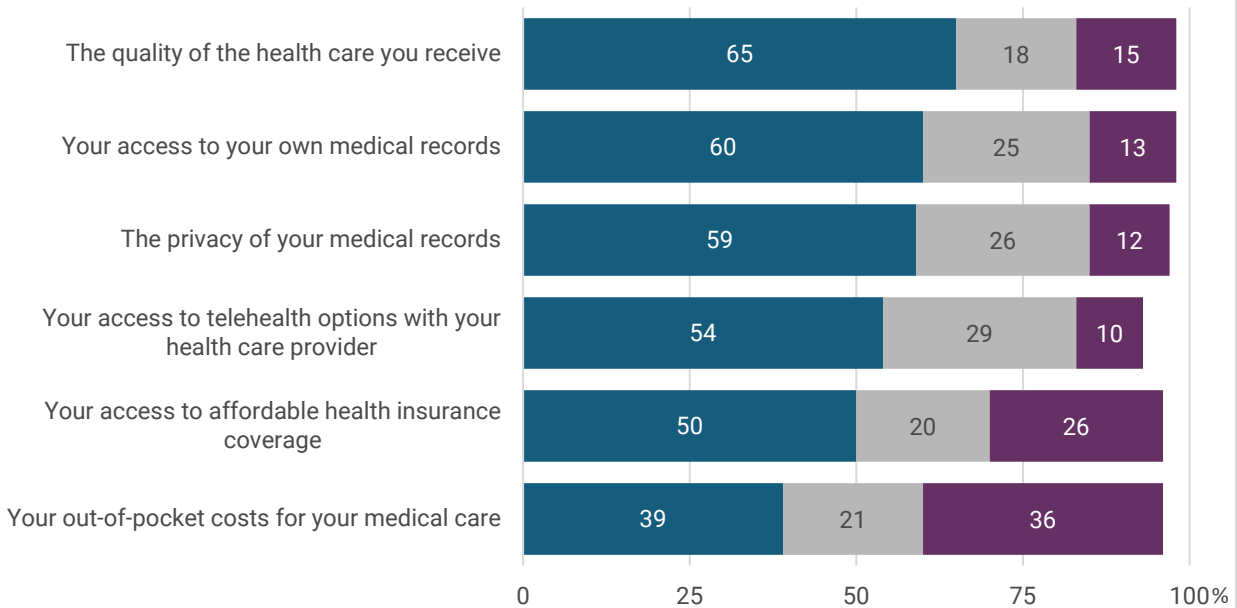
## AMERICANS ARE GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH THE QUALITY OF THEIR HEALTH CARE BUT LACK SATISFACTION WITH ITS OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS.

When it comes to health care, a majority of Americans are satisfied with the quality of care they receive, their overall access, and their personal data privacy. About half are content with their access to telehealth options and affordable insurance. Fewer are satisfied with the out-of-pocket costs related to their medical care.

## Many Americans are satisfied with their health care, except when it comes to out-of-pocket costs.

Percent of adults

■ Very or somewhat satisfied ■ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ■ Somewhat or very dissatisfied



**Question:** Overall, are you satisfied, dissatisfied, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with each of the following?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

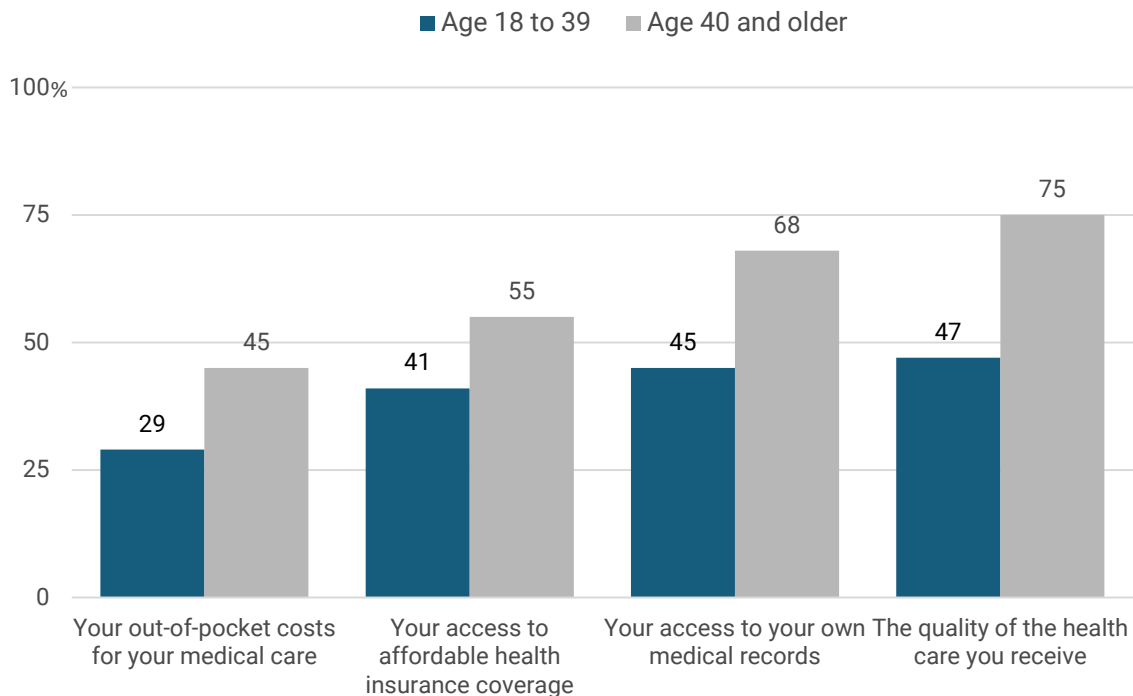
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Younger Americans are more likely to have a critical perspective about several aspects of their health care compared to adults age 40 and older, who have a mostly positive view about them.

**Older adults express higher levels of satisfaction with health care.**

Percent of adults who are extremely or very satisfied with each aspect of health care

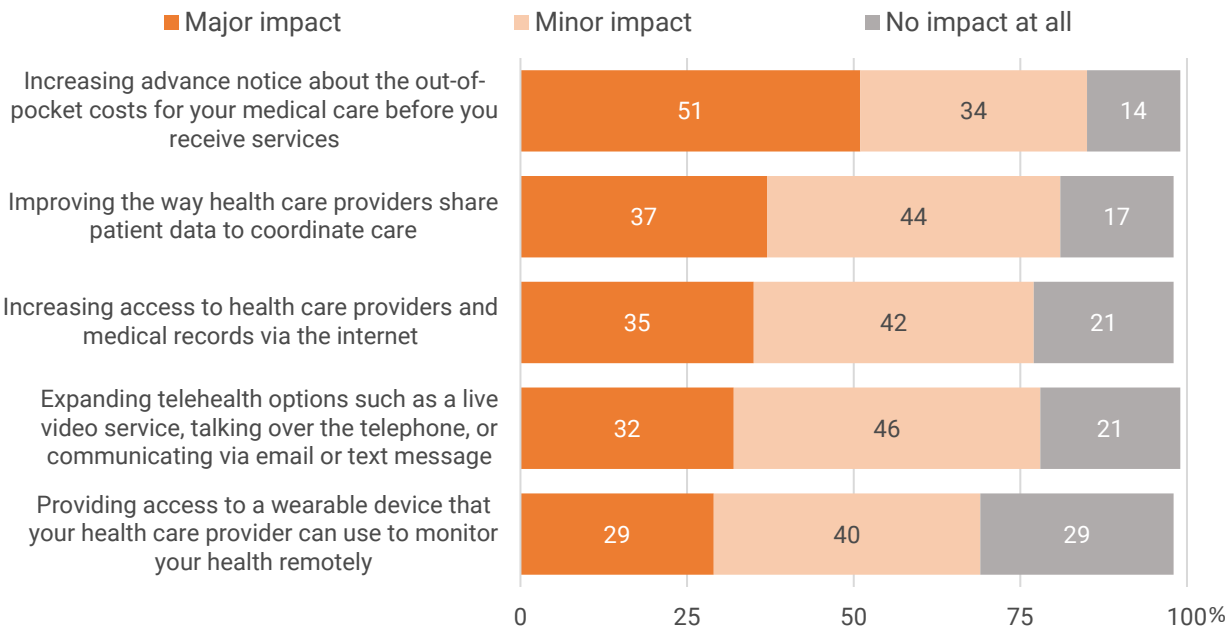
**Question:** Overall, are you satisfied, dissatisfied, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with each of the following?**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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When asked about certain measures the federal government might take to improve health care, half say advance notice of out-of-pocket health care costs would have a major impact on their lives. Fewer say measures like expanding telehealth, improving coordination of care, and record keeping of patient data or medical records online would have a major impact, though more than half say each measure would have at least some impact on their lives.

## Advance notice of out-of-pocket costs seen as the most beneficial measure to improve health care.

Percent of adults



**Question:** Thinking about measures the federal government could take to improve health care in the United States, how much of an impact would each of the following have on you personally?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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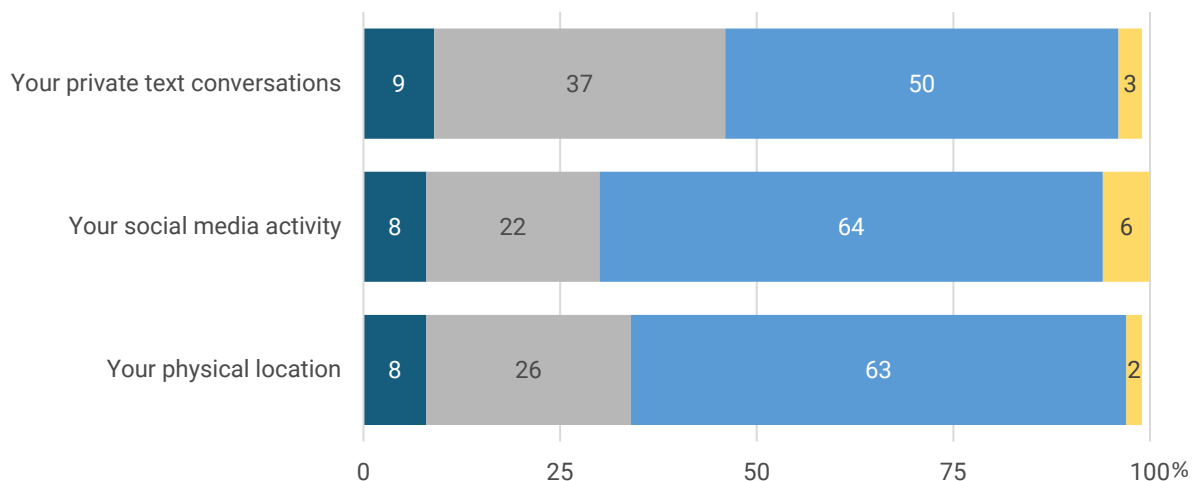
## FEW BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT IS DOING ENOUGH TO PROTECT THEIR ONLINE DATA, AND MEASURES TO IMPROVE PROTECTION ARE POPULAR.

The majority of Americans think their online data are not secure. Only 9% think their information on their social media accounts is secure. Sixty-three percent of adults feel that their physical location is not very secure. Half believe that their private text conversations lack security.

### Most Americans do not believe that their personal information is secure online.

Percent of adults

■ Extremely or very secure ■ Somewhat secure ■ Not very or not at all secure ■ Not applicable



**Question:** How secure do you think information about each of the following is online?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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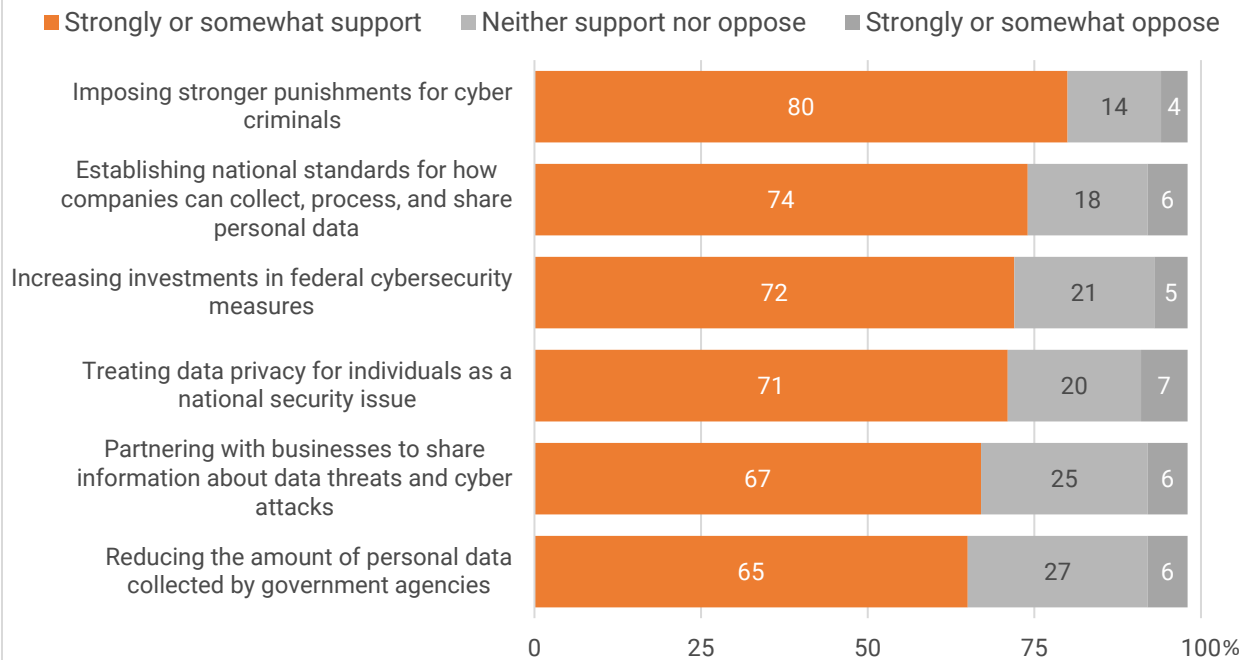
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Few are satisfied with the federal government's current efforts to protect Americans' privacy and secure their personal data online. Only 23% of Americans say they are very or somewhat satisfied. Thirty-eight percent say they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 38% say they are somewhat or very dissatisfied.

There is significant support for government action to protect data privacy. Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans favor such measures. For example, 71% of Americans believe that individuals' data privacy should be treated as a national security issue. This level of support is similar among Democrats (75%), independents (64%), and Republicans (70%).

## The majority of Americans support the federal government taking measures to protect individuals' data privacy and security.

Percent of adults



**Question:** Do you support, oppose, or neither support nor oppose the federal government taking each of the following measures to help protect the data privacy and security of individuals?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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While majorities of all age groups support federal measures to protect individuals' data privacy and security, older Americans are especially likely to express these views. For example, 85% of adults age 40 and older support imposing stronger punishments for online criminals compared with 70% of adults age 39 and younger.

There is a great deal of uncertainty about the impact that the rise of cryptocurrencies has had on cyberattacks. Thirty-five percent say the rise has led to an increase in cyberattacks and 2% say they have led to a decrease. Another 16% say the rise of cryptocurrencies has had no impact either way on cyberattacks. Forty-six percent are unsure about the impact.

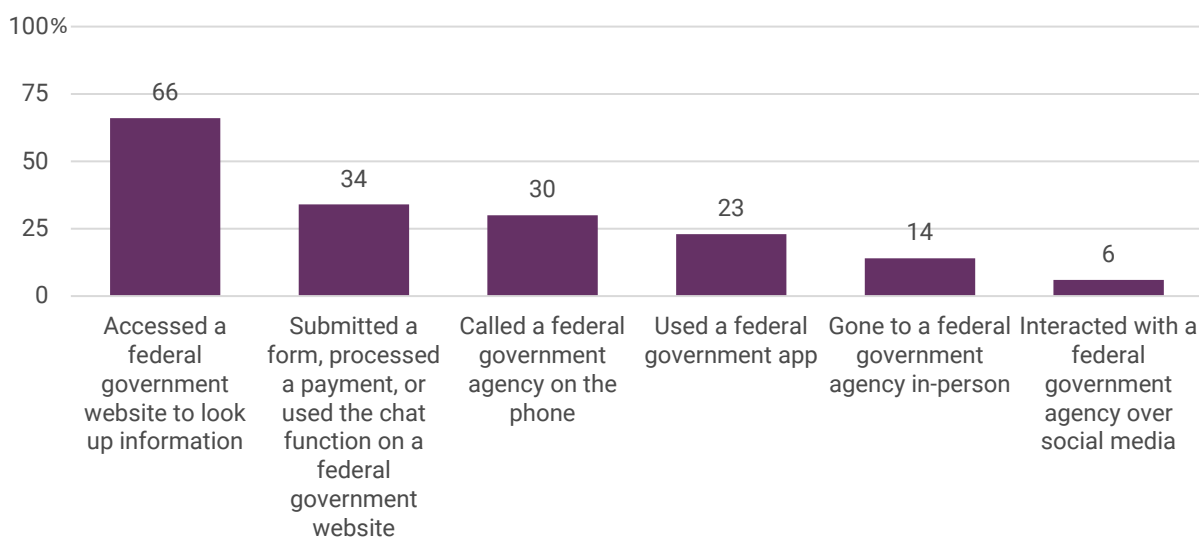


## AMERICANS THINK THE GOVERNMENT HAS A LONG WAY TO GO IN TERMS OF ADAPTING TO THE DIGITAL WORLD, BUT MANY ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR ONLINE INTERACTIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

The majority of Americans (77%) have interacted in some way with the federal government in the past year, whether it be online, on the phone, or in-person. Seventy-three percent have engaged with the federal government online.

### Most Americans have used a federal government website to access information.

Percent of adults who have done each of the following in the past year



**Question:** Have you done any of the following in the past year, or not? If you are not sure, you can say that, too.

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

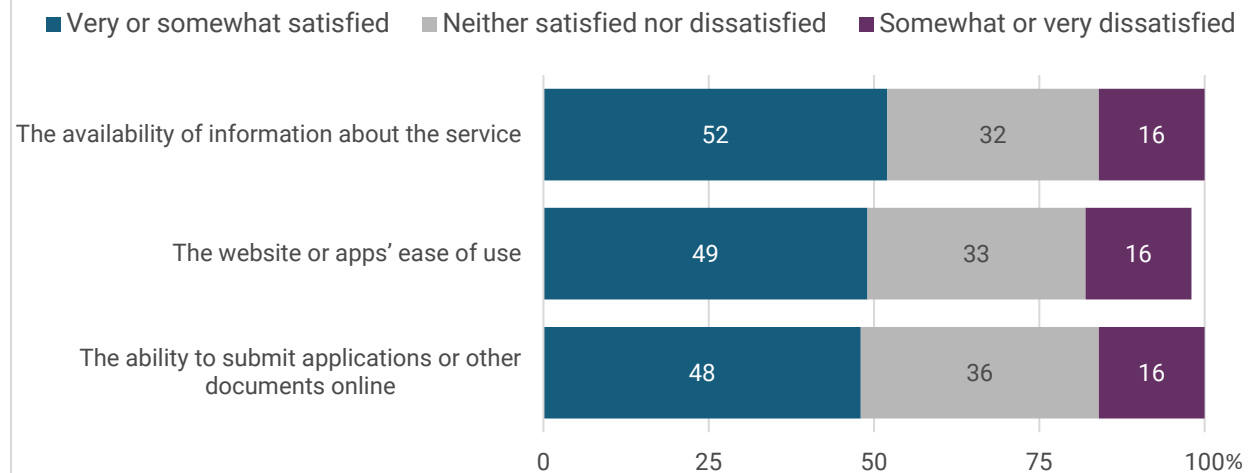
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About half of American adults are satisfied with the various online services offered by the federal government. For example, 49% of the public says they are either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the usability of government websites and apps. Only 16% of the public are dissatisfied with these services.

## Half of Americans are satisfied with online government services.

Percent of adults who have accessed a federal government website, interacted with an agency on social media, or used a government app in the past year.



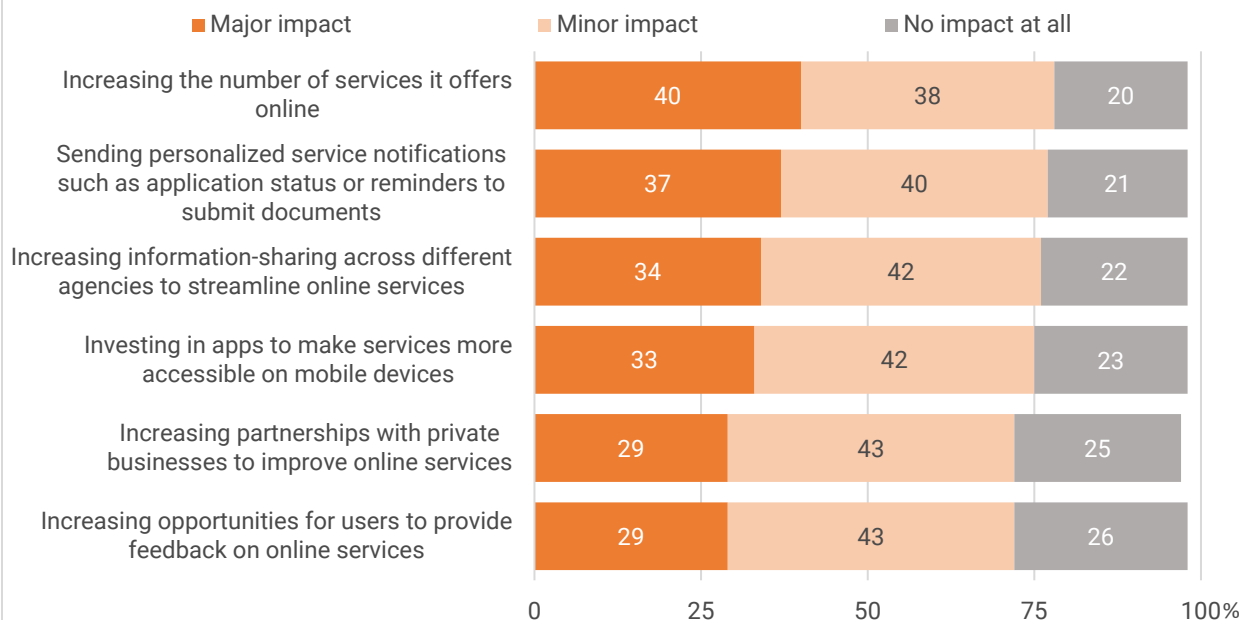
**Question:** Thinking about the federal government service or services you accessed online, are you satisfied, dissatisfied, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with each of the following?

**Source:** AP-NORC poll conducted June 24–28 2021, with 726 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

Although the public is generally satisfied with online government services, the vast majority say improvements to these services would have some impact on their lives. For example, at least 7 in 10 say that personalized notifications and reminders to submit documents as well as more opportunities to provide feedback on these online services would have an impact.

## The public believes that improvements to online government services would impact their lives.

Percent of adults



**Question:** Thinking about measures the federal government could take to improve the services it offers online, how much of an impact would each of the following have on you personally?

**Source:** AP-NORC poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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Sixty-eight percent of adults say that the federal government has been at least somewhat effective in adapting to the digital world, including 21% who say it has been very effective. However, about one-third believes that the federal government has not been effective.

## FEW WORKERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT LOSING THEIR JOBS TO AUTOMATION, BUT MANY AMERICANS FEEL THEY WOULD PERSONALLY BENEFIT FROM INITIATIVES TO MODERNIZE THE WORKFORCE.

In general, few believe that the automation of jobs through new technology and artificial intelligence has been beneficial to American workers. Twenty-seven percent say automation has helped workers a lot or a little, while 41% say it has hurt workers a lot or a little. Another 31% say it has neither helped nor hurt workers.

However, among adults who are employed, few are concerned that their own job could be eliminated in the next 10 years as a result of increases in automation. Just 9% say they are extremely or very concerned, 21% are moderately concerned, and 69% are not very concerned or not concerned at all.

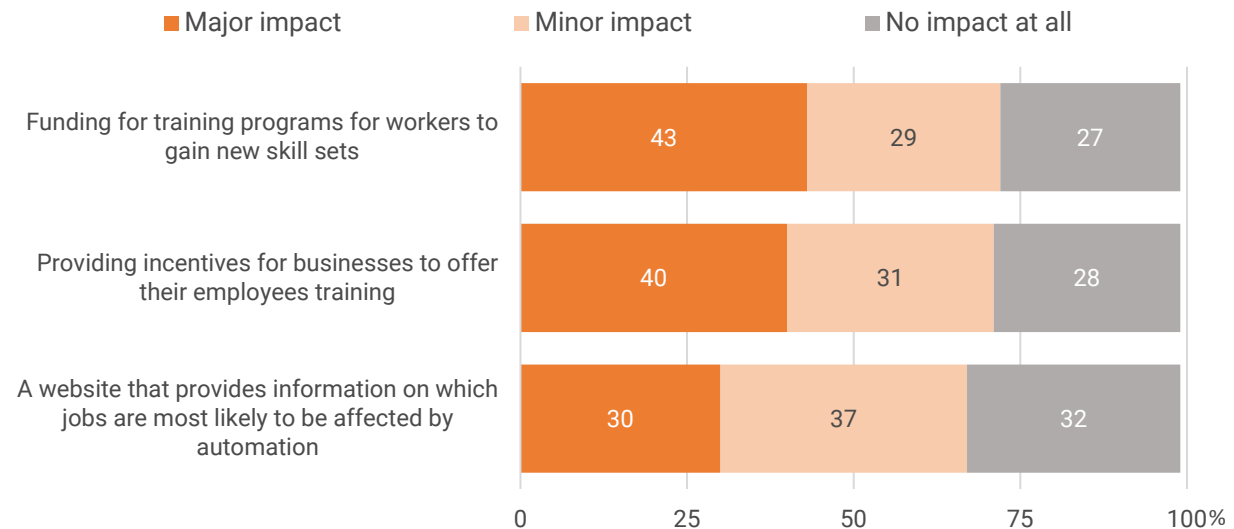
Although fears are low, Hispanic workers are more concerned than white workers (20% vs. 7%).

Many Americans feel that federal initiatives to modernize the workforce would have a major personal impact.

About four in 10 adults say funding from the government for job training and government incentives for businesses to offer employees training would have a major personal impact. Less popular is a government website providing information on which jobs are likely to be affected by automation, with only 30% saying it would have a major impact.

### Many adults say job training would have a major impact on them.

Percent of adults



**Question:** Thinking about measures the federal government could take to help the workforce adapt to increases in automation, how much of an impact would each of the following have on you personally?

**Source:** AP-NORC/MeriTalk poll conducted June 24–28, 2021, with 1,004 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

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Americans age 39 and younger are more likely than those age 40 and older to say a website with automation information would have a major personal impact (36% vs. 26%). Younger adults are also more likely to see potential in funding for training programs, with 51% seeing a major impact compared to 39% of older adults.

## STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from MeriTalk. Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago, The Associated Press, and MeriTalk 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 24th and 28th, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,004 completed the survey—965 via the web and 39 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in English. The final stage completion rate is 16.9 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 19.1 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 75.0 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 2.4 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/-4.3 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 2021 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

For more information, email [info@apnorc.org](mailto:info@apnorc.org).

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