

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC VIEWS THE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION AS A MAJOR PROBLEM

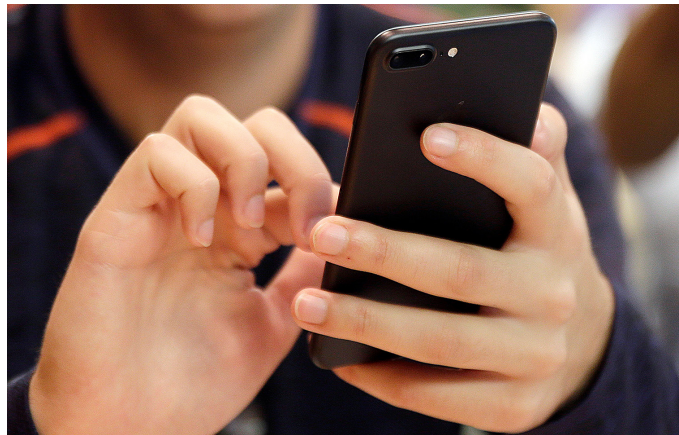
Ninety-five percent of Americans believe the spread of misinformation is a problem, and most blame social media companies, social media users, and U.S. politicians for its spread, according to a new Pearson Institute/AP-NORC poll.

The survey finds that three-quarters of Americans worry at least somewhat that they have been exposed to misinformation, but only about half are similarly concerned that they've spread misinformation, even unintentionally. Younger adults are more likely than older adults to worry that they have spread misinformation.

More Americans say that social media companies, social media users, and U.S. politicians are responsible for spreading misinformation than the U.S. government, Russia, China, Iran, or other foreign governments. Older adults are more likely than younger adults to hold foreign governments responsible, while Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say the U.S. government is responsible (61% vs. 38%).

Most adults report that social media companies, social media users, U.S. politicians, and the U.S. government all bear responsibility for addressing the spread of misinformation.

The nationwide poll was conducted by [the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts at the University of Chicago](#) and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research from September 9-13, 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 +/- 3.9 percentage points. The poll is being released in conjunction with the [2021 Pearson Global Forum](#), which will address these issues.



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Three Things You Should Know

About the Pearson Institute/AP-NORC Poll Among American Adults:

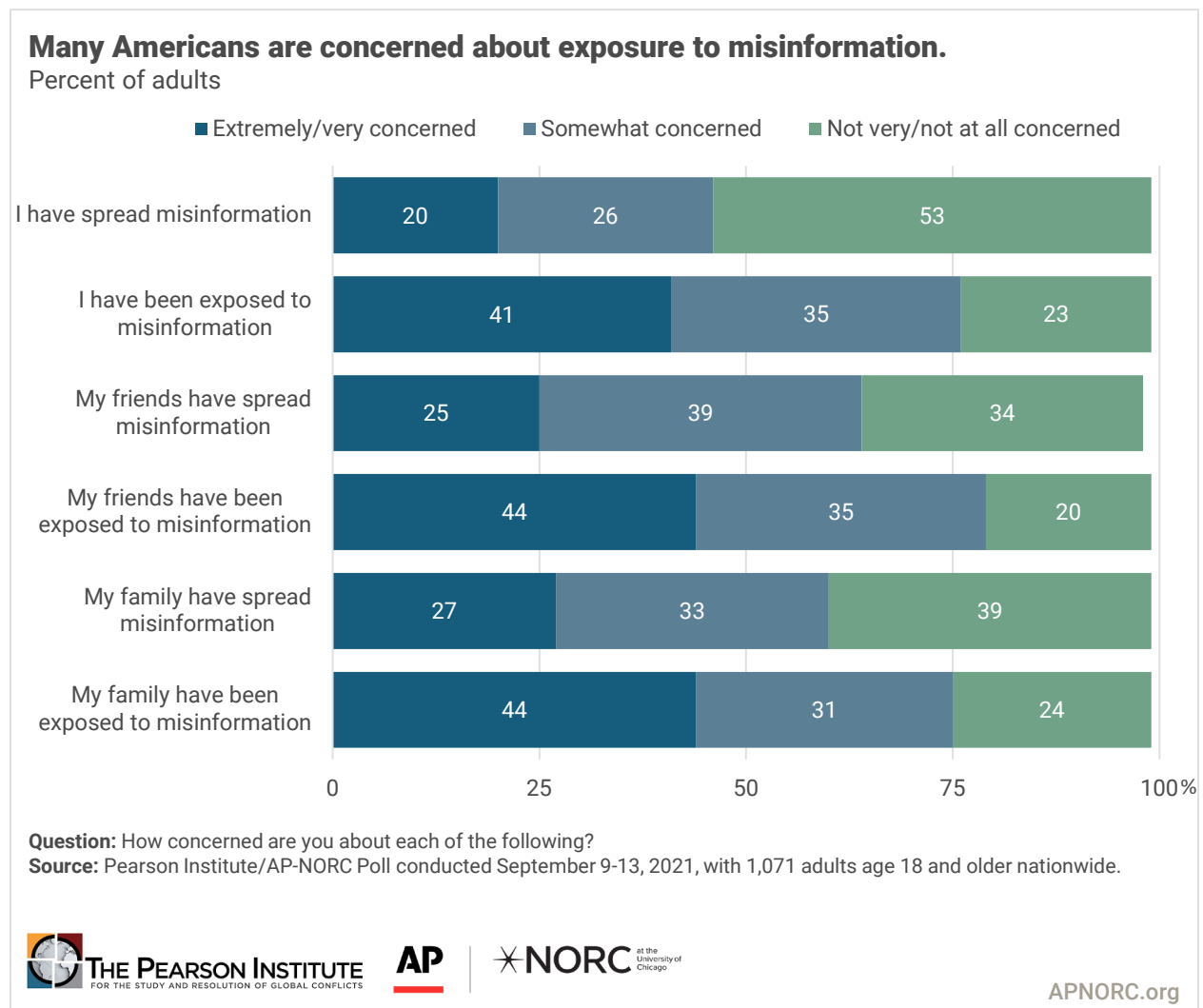
- 1) 95% say that the spread of misinformation is a problem when it comes to getting information about current events and important issues, including 81% who say it is a major problem.
- 2) 91% report that social media companies are responsible for the spread of misinformation, and 93% say the same about social media users.
- 3) 41% are very or extremely worried that they've been exposed to misinformation, but only 20% are similarly worried that they've personally spread it.

MOST AMERICANS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT BEING EXPOSED TO MISINFORMATION, BUT LESS THAN HALF WORRY THEY ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE SPREAD.

There is a strong public consensus that the spread of misinformation is a problem, and most Americans worry at least somewhat that they have personally been exposed or that their friends and family have been exposed.

Eighty-one percent of Americans view the spread of misinformation as a major problem, and another 13% say it is minor problem. Large majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents view misinformation as a problem.

About three-quarters of adults are at least somewhat concerned about their exposure to misinformation. And while about two-thirds worry at least somewhat that their friends and family have spread information (even unintentionally), only about half worry at least somewhat that they have done the same. Just 1 in 5 adults are very or extremely concerned that they have unintentionally spread misinformation.



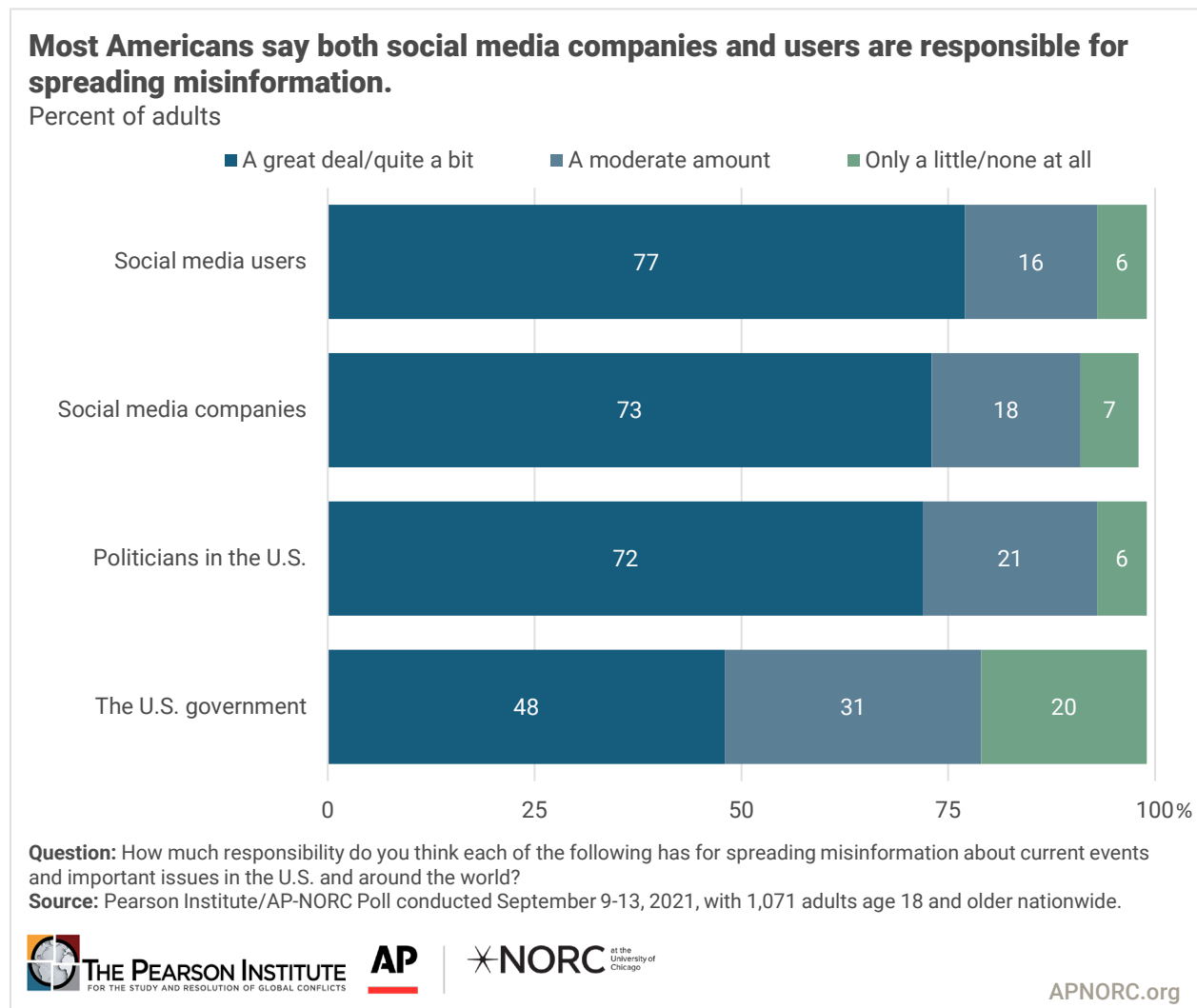
Younger adults tend to be more worried about spreading misinformation themselves, with 53% of those age 18-29 at least somewhat concerned that they have spread misinformation, compared to 42% of adults age 60 and older.

MOST AMERICANS HOLD BOTH SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA USERS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION.

Most Americans say social media companies, politicians, and their fellow Americans are all responsible for the spread of misinformation, and the public places less blame on foreign governments.

More than 9 in 10 Americans believe social media companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are at least moderately responsible for the spread of misinformation, and a similar number say the same about social media users. Those with a college degree are more likely than those without a degree to think that individual users have a large responsibility (85% vs. 72%).

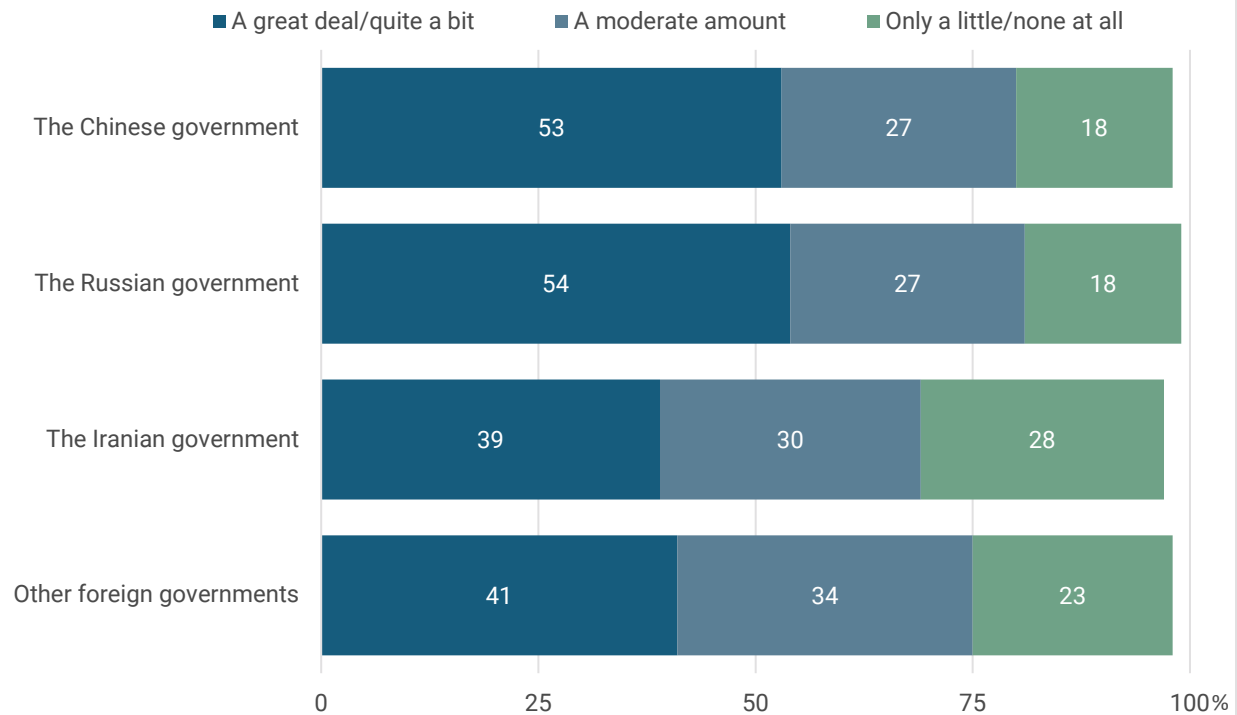
While 72% of adults think that U.S. politicians have quite a bit of responsibility for spreading misinformation, about half say the same about the U.S. government. However, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to believe that the U.S. government bears quite a bit of responsibility (61% vs. 38%).



About half of Americans think that the governments of China and Russia have a great deal of responsibility for spreading misinformation, but fewer say the same about the Iranian government and other foreign governments.

About half of Americans say the Chinese and Russian governments are largely responsible for misinformation.

Percent of adults



Question: How much responsibility do you think each of the following has for spreading misinformation about current events and important issues in the U.S. and around the world?

Source: Pearson Institute/AP-NORC Poll conducted September 9-13, 2021, with 1,071 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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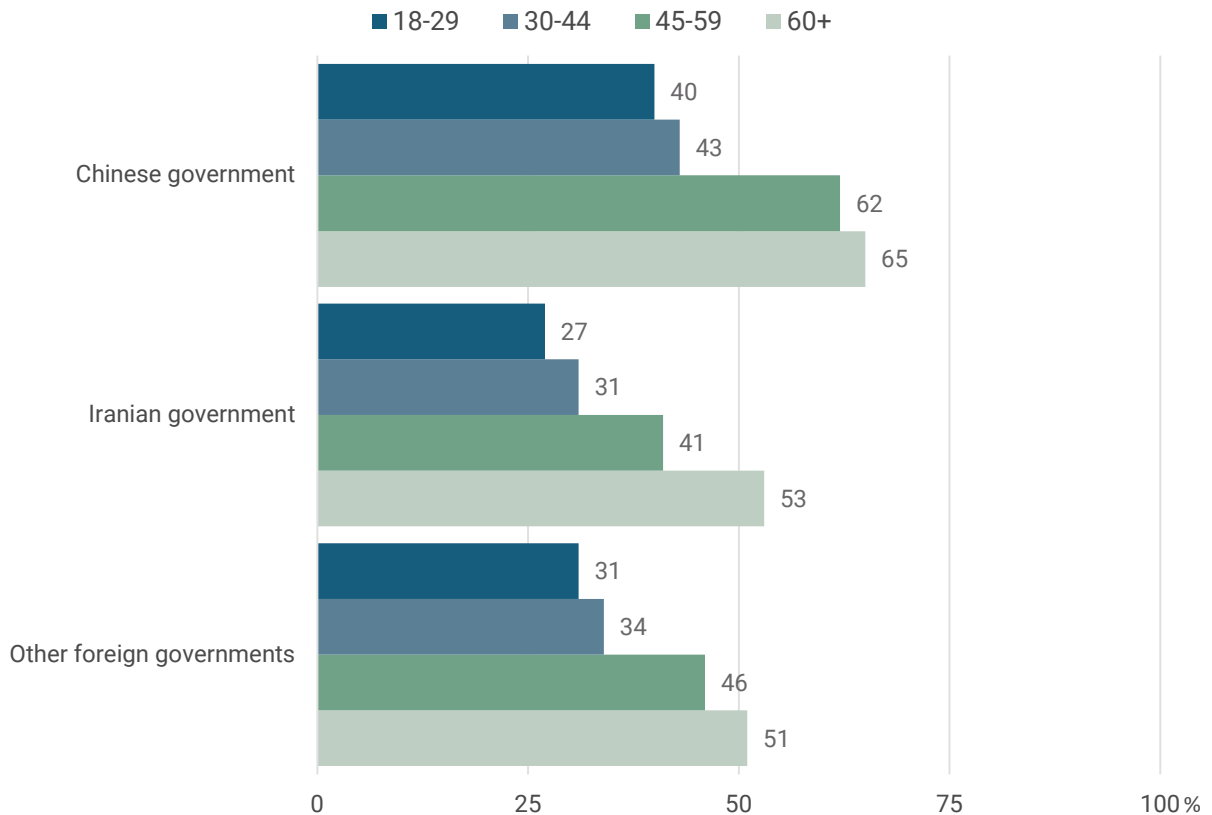
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Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say that the Chinese government has a large responsibility for spreading misinformation (63% vs. 52%).

In addition, older adults are significantly more likely than younger adults to say foreign governments have a large responsibility for spreading misinformation.

Older adults are the most likely to say foreign governments are responsible for misinformation.

Percent of adults who say quite a bit/a great deal of responsibility



Question: How much responsibility do you think each of the following has for spreading misinformation about current events and important issues in the U.S. and around the world?

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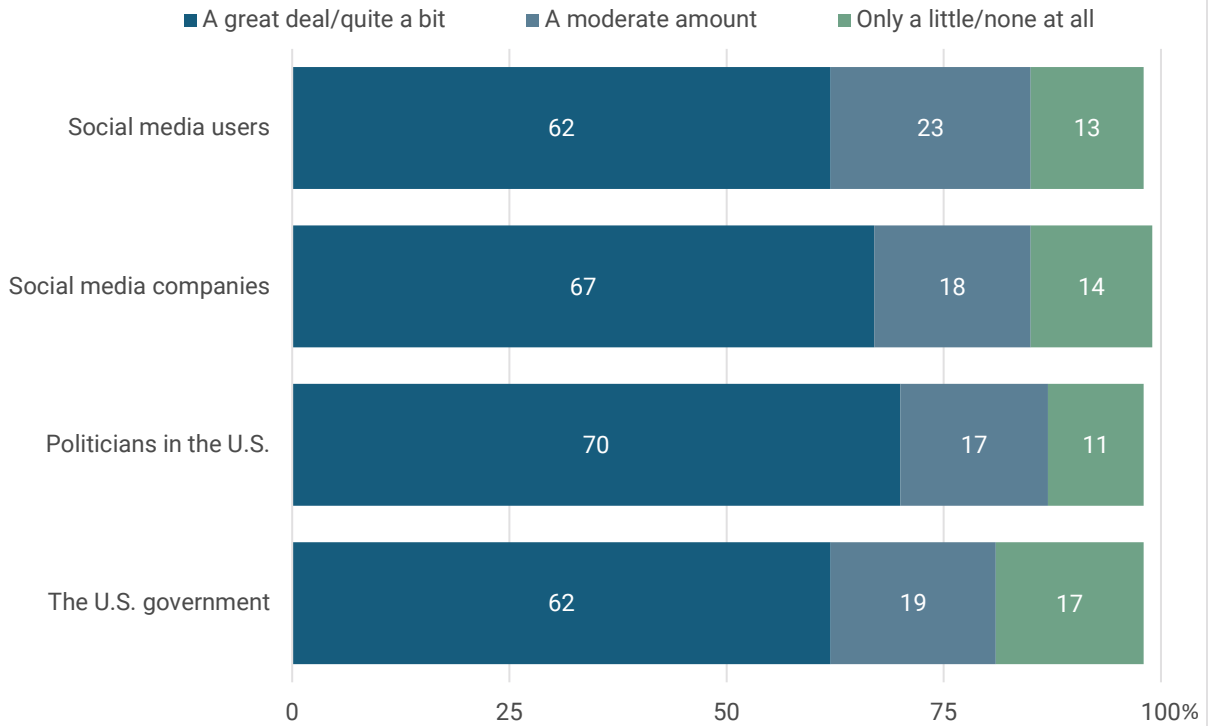
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When it comes to addressing the spread of misinformation, a large majority of Americans think that social media users and social media companies have quite a bit of responsibility for addressing this problem. Most also believe that both U.S. politicians (70%) and the U.S. government (62%) have at least quite a bit of responsibility for addressing the issue.

Most Americans say both individuals and institutions are responsible for addressing the spread of misinformation.

Percent of adults



Question: How much responsibility do you think each of the following has for addressing the spread of misinformation in the U.S.?

Source: Pearson Institute/AP-NORC Poll conducted September 9-13, 2021, with 1,071 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts at the University of Chicago and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Staff from the Pearson Institute 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 September 9 and September 13, 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 – 986 via the web and 85 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in English. The final stage completion rate is 19.3 percent, the weighted household panel recruitment rate is 19.0 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 75.1 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 2.8 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.9 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.

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

- The Associated Press (AP) is an independent global news organization dedicated to factual reporting. Founded in 1846, AP remains today the most trusted source of fast, accurate, unbiased news in all formats and the essential provider of the technology and services vital to the news business. More than half the world's population sees AP journalism every day. www.ap.org
- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and nonpartisan research institutions in the world. www.norc.org

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. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more. Learn more at www.apnorc.org.

ABOUT THE PEARSON INSTITUTE

The Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts at the University of Chicago promotes the ongoing discussion, understanding, and resolution of global conflicts, and contributes to the advancement of a global society more at peace. Established through a grant from The Thomas L. Pearson and The Pearson Family Members Foundation, and led by Institute Director James Robinson, co-author of *Why Nations Fail* and *The Narrow Corridor*, the Institute achieves this by employing an analytically rigorous, data-driven approach and global perspective to understanding violent conflict. It is global in its scope, activities and footprint. Attracting students and scholars from around the world, its faculty is in the field studying conflicts – and approaches to conflict resolution – in Nigeria, Colombia and Afghanistan, to name just a few.