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UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll: More than 3 in 4 say government has a responsibility to address poverty and homelessness, including majorities of both Democrats and Republicans

The public recognizes there are multiple causes of poverty and homelessness, and many say personal choices are a key contributor.

CHICAGO, September 9, 2025 – More than two-thirds of adults think poverty (68%) and homelessness (83%) have increased nationwide in the last 25 years, and most say the government has a responsibility to address the issues, according to a new [UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll](#).

While the public believes many factors contribute to persistent poverty and homelessness, most think personal choices play a major role. When it comes to the causes of homelessness, majorities cite substance abuse (76%), mental health issues (75%), lack of affordable housing (64%), job loss (63%) and personal choices (63%) as major factors.

Views on the causes of poverty and homelessness are closely related to partisanship. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to cite personal choices as major factors for both poverty (77% vs. 49%) and homelessness (77% vs. 51%). In contrast, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to cite lack of government support as major factors for both poverty (61% vs. 21%) and homelessness (63% vs. 26%).

The study finds that a majority of adults believe that poverty has increased in the United States over the past 25 years, both nationally (68%) and in their state (60%). However, only 48% say it has increased in their local community. Similarly, while 83% believe homelessness has increased nationwide and 72% believe it has gone up in their state, just 55% agree it has increased in their local community. Urban residents are more likely than those in suburban or rural areas to perceive increases in poverty (60% vs. 44% and 44%) and homelessness (64% vs. 53% and 52%).

“It’s interesting that the public perceives poverty to be increasing across the country when government estimates show that poverty rates are actually lower than they were 25 years ago,” said Bruce D. Meyer, the McCormick Foundation Professor at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy. “I suspect the public is generalizing from the obvious increases in

homelessness that they are seeing and that are recorded in government data. It's also clear that most Americans – regardless of political affiliation -- predominantly place the responsibility for addressing both poverty and homelessness on the federal government and local governments rather than charities or wealthy individuals.”

Many believe both the federal government (76%) and state and local governments (78%) have at least a moderate responsibility for addressing poverty—an opinion shared by majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Fewer feel that charities (65%) or very wealthy individuals (56%) share responsibility for addressing these issues.

The survey finds that 54% of adults believe the government is spending too little on poverty, while just 22% say it is spending the right amount and 22% think it is spending too much. Most Democrats think government spending to address poverty is too low (81%), compared with 61% of independents and 28% of Republicans.

When it comes to specific policies related to poverty and homelessness, more Americans favor than oppose removing homeless encampments in U.S. cities (43% vs. 25%), requiring working age adults on Medicaid to prove they are working (55% vs. 18%), and expanding the child tax credit to very low-income families (54% vs. 13%). However, fewer support than oppose providing a universal basic income (23% vs. 46%).

There is higher support among Republicans than Democrats for Medicaid work documentation requirements (76% vs. 43%) and removing homeless encampments (64% vs. 28%). Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support expanding the child tax credit (67% vs. 48%) and providing a universal basic income (36% vs. 10%).

“The findings highlight that the public has nuanced views on the causes of poverty and homelessness and recognize a variety of factors contribute to these issues,” said [David Sterrett](#), a principal research scientist at NORC. “Republicans and Democrats tend to have differing views on the causes for poverty and homelessness, but there is consensus among the public that both the federal government as well as state and local governments should address these issues.”

About the Study

This study was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Staff from Harris Public Policy and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study. Interviews for this survey were conducted between August 21 to August 25, 2025, with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,121 completed the survey. Interviews were conducted in English. The

overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

A full description of the study methodology for the survey can be found at the end of the report on www.apnorc.org.

The proper description of the survey's authorship is as follows: This study was conducted jointly by the [University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#).

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