

MANY BELIEVE POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS ARE INCREASING AND FEEL THE GOVERNMENT HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES

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

Significant majorities of adults think poverty and homelessness 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.

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%).

Most adults believe that in the past 25 years, poverty has increased in the United States as a whole (68%) and in their state (60%), and about half think it has increased in their local community (48%). Similarly, 83% believe homelessness has increased nationwide, 72% say it has gone up in their state, and fewer, 55%, think it has increased in their local community.



© December 2017 / Matt Rourke for the Associated Press

Three Things You Should Know

About the UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll Among U.S. Adults:

- 1) 6 in 10 cite personal choices as a major factor in why people remain in poverty or are homeless, while about 4 in 10 cite a lack of government support.
- 2) 76% believe the federal government is responsible for addressing poverty, including 80% of Democrats and 72% of Republicans.
- 3) 54% think the government is spending too little on assistance for those in need, while 22% think it is spending about the right amount and 22% say too much.

Residents of urban areas are more likely than residents of suburban or rural areas to perceive increases in poverty (60% vs. 44% and 44%) and homelessness (64% vs. 53% and 52%).

About 3 in 4 adults believe the federal government as well as state and local governments have at least a moderate amount of responsibility to address poverty and homelessness, including majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Fewer feel that charities or very wealthy individuals share responsibility for addressing these issues.

The survey finds 54% think the government is spending too little to help those in need compared with just 22% who think it is spending the right amount and 22% who say it is spending too much. Most Democrats (81%) and independents (61%) think government spending is too low, compared with 28% of Republicans.

When it comes to specific policies, more favor than oppose removing homeless encampments in U.S. cities (43% vs. 25%), requiring working age adults who receive Medicaid benefits to prove they are working (55% vs. 18%), and expanding the child tax credit for 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 for Medicaid work documentation requirements and removing homeless encampments, while Democrats are more likely to support universal basic income and expanding the child tax credit.

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 August 21-25, 2025 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 1,121 adults. The margin of sampling error is +/-4.0 percentage points.

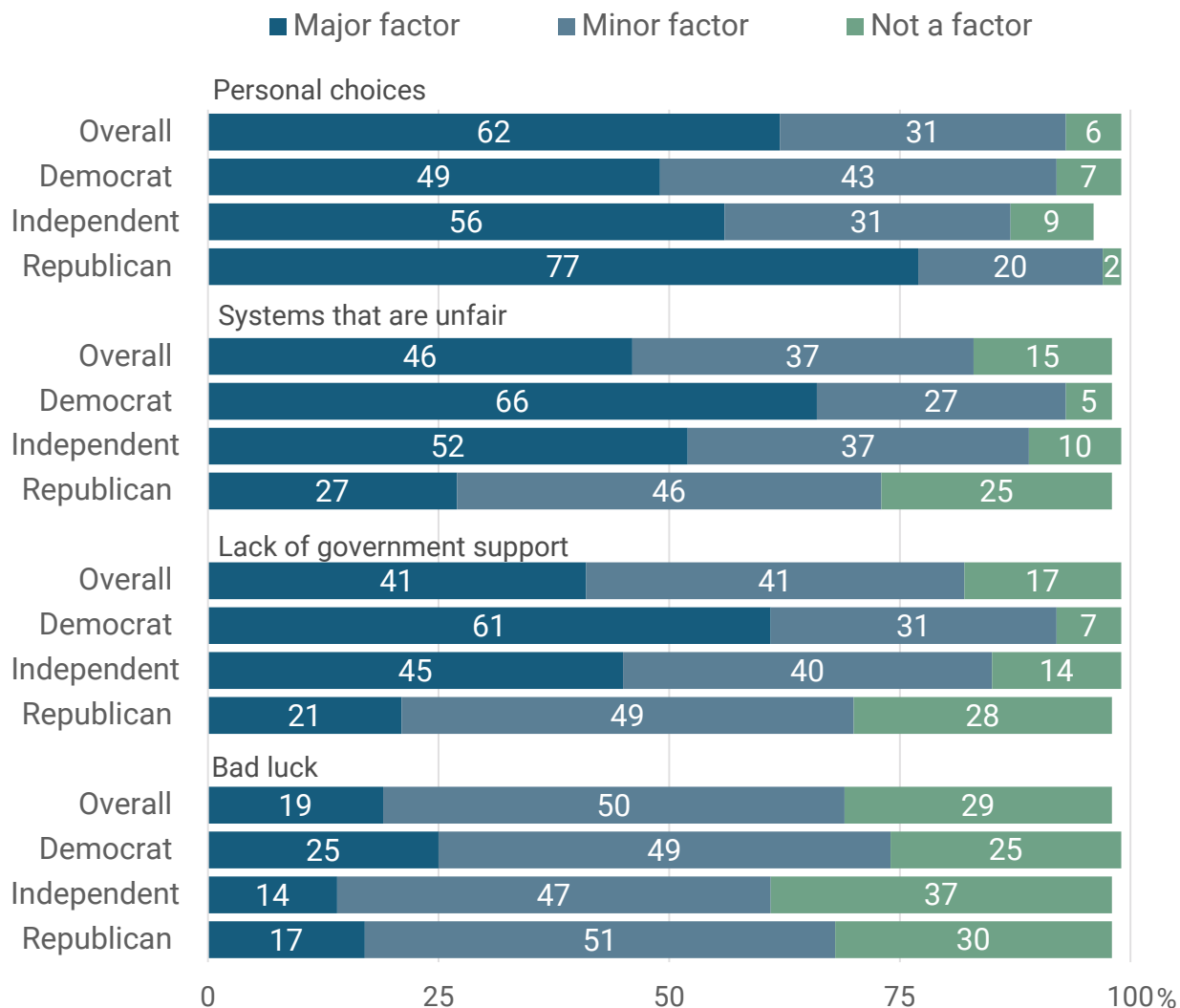
ADULTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BELIEVE INDIVIDUAL CHOICES PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN POVERTY THAN SYSTEMIC FACTORS.

Six in 10 adults view personal choices as a major factor in why people remain in poverty, while about 4 in 10 think unfair systems and lack of government support play a significant role. Few, just 1 in 5, think that bad luck is a key factor in poverty.

Views on the causes of poverty are tied to partisan perspectives. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to view personal choices as a major factor in poverty. Conversely, Democrats are more likely to cite unfair systems or a lack of government support.

A majority of the public cites personal choices as a major factor in why people remain in poverty.

Percent of adults



Question: Would you say each of the following is a major factor, minor factor, or not a factor in why people remain in poverty?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted August 21-25, 2025 with 1,121 adults nationwide.



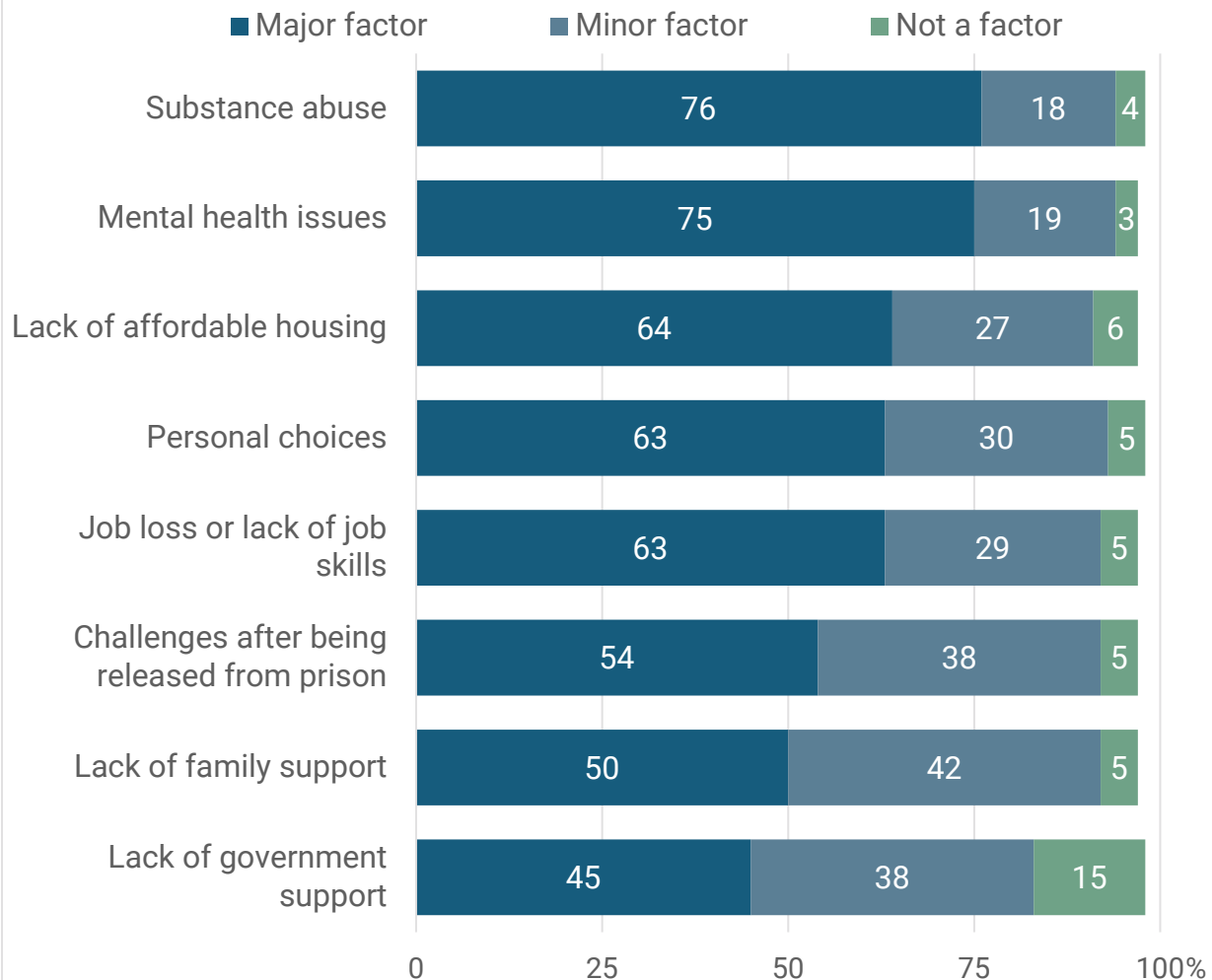
APNORC.org

THE PUBLIC BELIEVES MANY FACTORS, INCLUDING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES, PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN HOMELESSNESS.

Substance abuse and mental health issues are considered the biggest factors for why people are homeless, followed by a lack of affordable housing, personal choices, and job loss or lack of job skills. Fewer view challenges after being released from prison, the lack of family support or government support as major factors.

The public ranks mental health issues and substance abuse as the most significant factors for why people are homeless.

Percent of adults



Question: Would you say each of the following is a major factor, minor factor, or not a factor in why people are homeless?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted August 21-25, 2025 with 1,121 adults nationwide.



APNORC.org

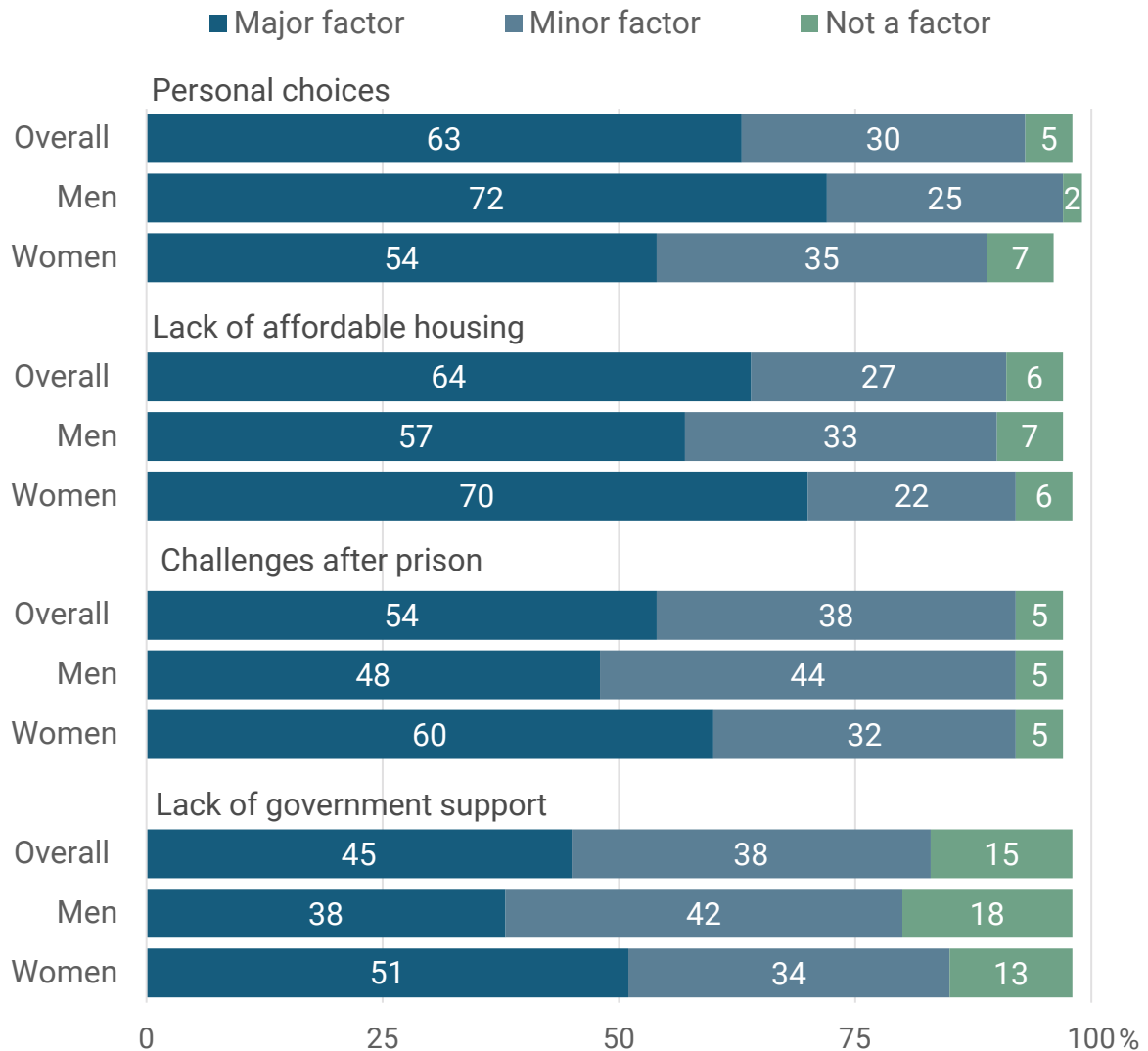
There are also partisan divides in opinion regarding the causes of homelessness. While Republicans are more likely than Democrats to point to personal choices as a factor in homelessness (77% vs. 51%), Democrats are more likely than Republicans to cite a lack of affordable housing (74% vs. 54%), job loss (70% vs. 59%), challenges after incarceration (66% vs. 50%), and inadequate government support (63% vs. 26%).

There are significant differences in views toward the causes of homelessness related to gender, even when controlling for partisanship. Women are more likely than men to view a lack of government support as a reason people are homeless (51% vs. 38%). Men are more likely to think people are homeless

due to personal choices (72% vs. 54%). Women are also more likely than men to attribute homelessness to systemic challenges such as lack of affordable housing (70% vs. 57%) or challenges after prison (60% vs. 48%).

Women are more likely than men to cite systemic factors as major reasons why people experience homelessness.

Percent of adults



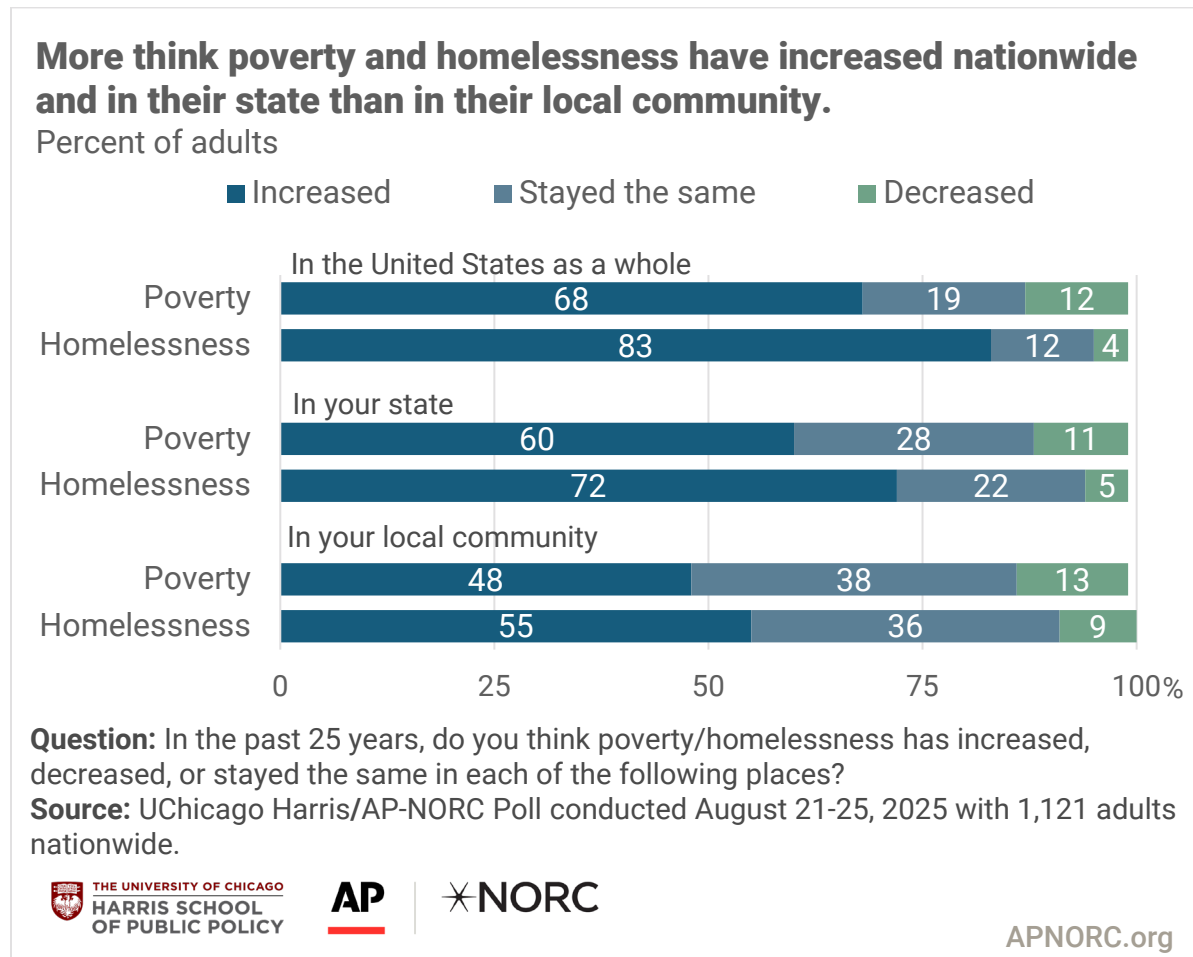
Question: Would you say each of the following is a major factor, minor factor, or not a factor in why people are homeless?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted August 21-25, 2025 with 1,121 adults nationwide.

MORE THINK POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS HAVE INCREASED NATIONWIDE AND IN THEIR STATE THAN IN THEIR COMMUNITY.

About 7 in 10 Americans say that poverty has increased nationwide over the past quarter century, although annual estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau show a slight decline in the poverty rate since 2000¹. About 6 in 10 believe it has increased in their state and about half think it has gone up in their local community. Very few, only about 1 in 10, think it has decreased over that same time period.

People are more likely to perceive an increase in homelessness than poverty at all geographic levels, although there are no official estimates of homelessness dating back to 2000³.



Residents of urban areas are more likely than residents of either suburban or rural areas to perceive increases in poverty (60% vs. 44% and 44%) or homelessness (64% vs. 53% and 52%) in their local community within the past 25 years.

Despite many partisan differences in views toward those in need, Democrats and Republicans have similar perceptions of how poverty and homelessness have changed in their community.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-people.html>

² Other poverty measures that make common improvements to the official measure tend to show even larger declines in poverty over time, see Burkhauser, Richard V., Kevin Corinth, James Elwell, and Jeff Larrimore. 2024. "Evaluating the Success of the War on Poverty since 1963 Using an Absolute Full-Income Poverty Measure." *Journal of Political Economy*, 132(1): 1-47

³ Meyer, Bruce D., Angela Wyse and Douglas Williams. 2025. *Asylum Seekers and the Rise in Homelessness*. NBER Working Paper, May 2025. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w33655>

MOST BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT HAS A SIGNIFICANT RESPONSIBILITY TO ADDRESS POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS.

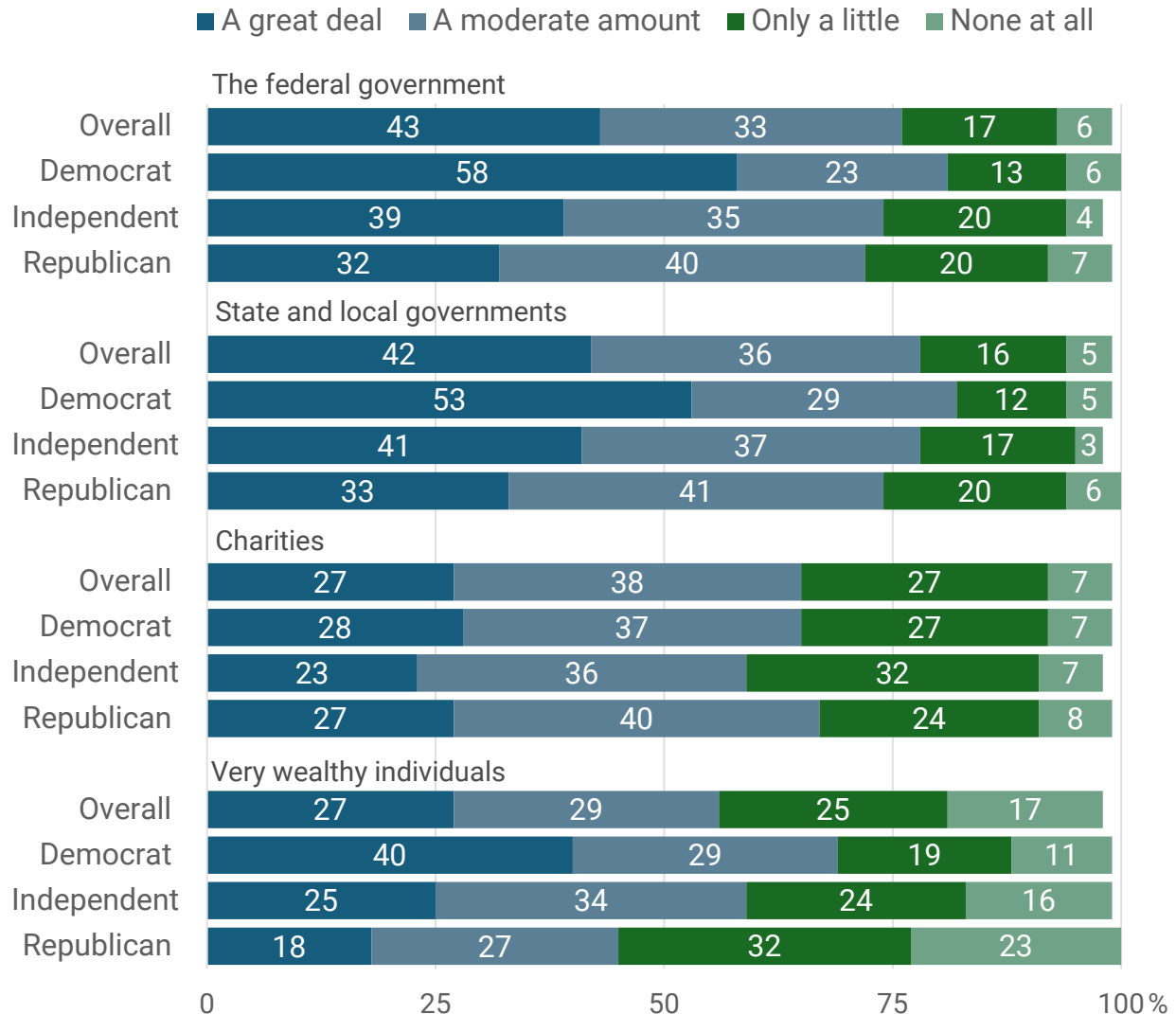
About three-quarters of adults believe that the federal government and state and local governments have at least a moderate responsibility to address poverty, and about 6 in 10 say the same regarding private entities like charities and wealthy individuals.

Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans agree that the federal government (80% and 72%) and state and local governments (82% and 74%) have at least a moderate responsibility to deal with poverty. Democrats are more likely than Republicans or independents to say government at all levels have a great deal of responsibility.

However, while 68% of Democrats think wealthy individuals have a responsibility to help the poor, just 45% Republicans say the same. There are no significant partisan differences regarding the responsibility of charities.

Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans think the government has a responsibility to address poverty.

Percent of adults



Question: How much responsibility does each of the following have to help address poverty?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted August 21-25, 2025 with 1,121 adults nationwide.

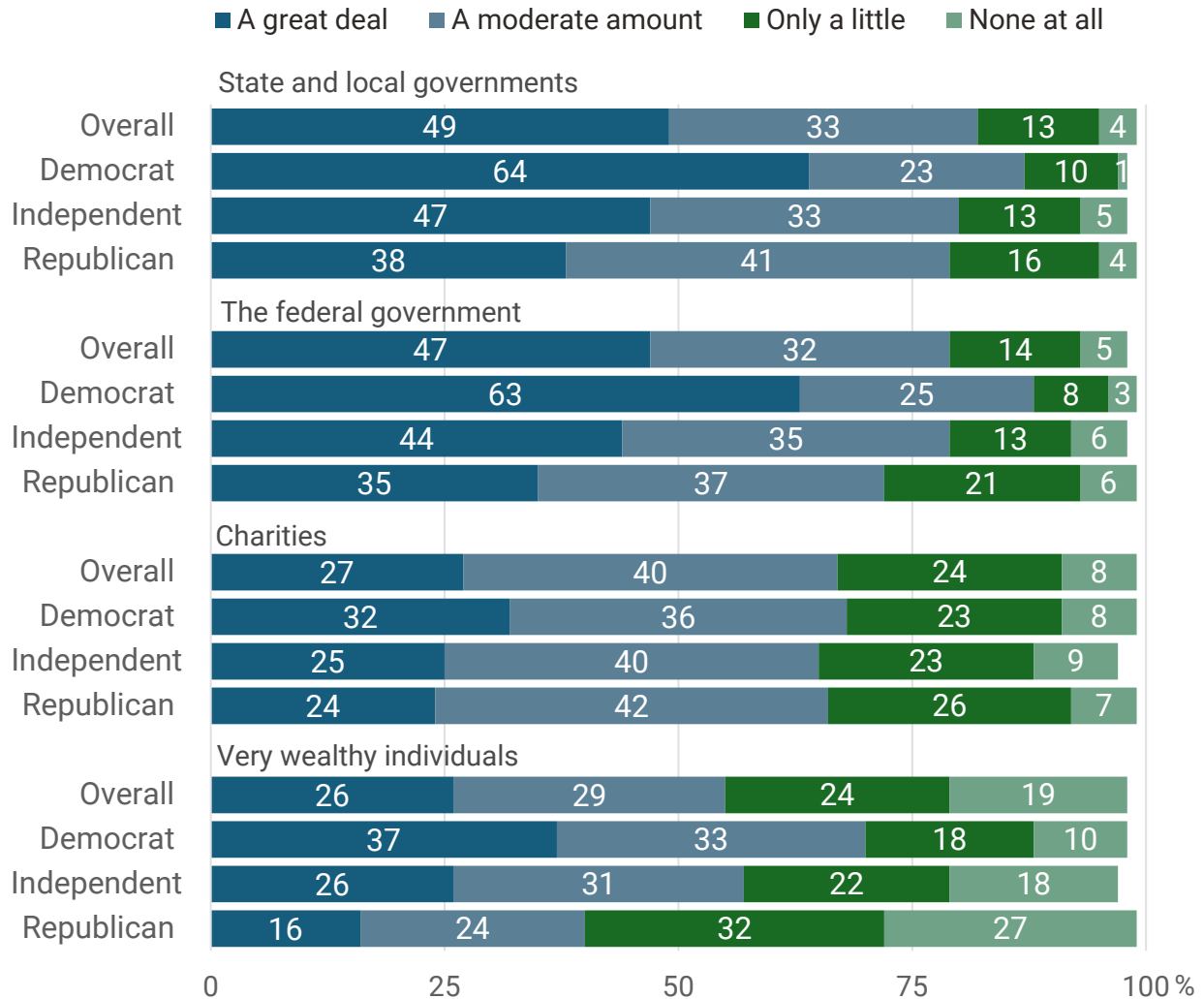


APNORC.org

The same pattern holds for views on who should address homelessness. Majorities in both parties think government is at least moderately responsible to help homeless people, though Democrats are more likely than Republicans to think it has a great deal of responsibility. And Republicans are less likely than Democrats to say wealthy individuals have a responsibility to help homeless people. There are no significant differences in the responsibility charities hold according to partisanship.

8 in 10 think the government has a responsibility to address homelessness.

Percent of adults



Question: How much responsibility does each of the following have to help address homelessness?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted August 21-25, 2025 with 1,121 adults nationwide.



APNORC.org

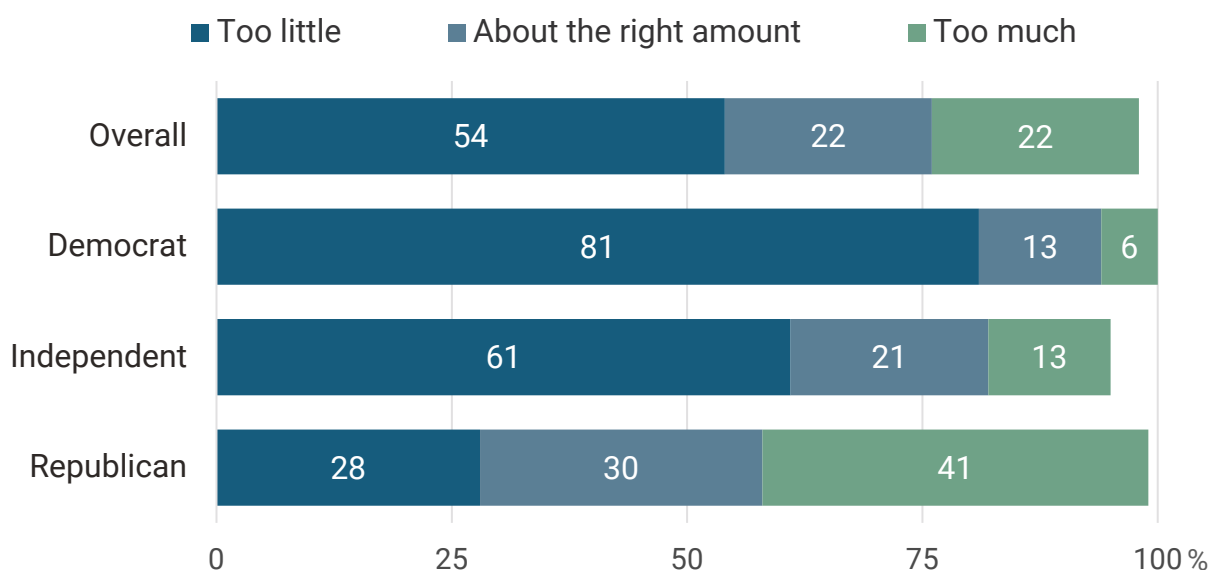
Individuals with a religious affiliation are more likely to say charities have a responsibility to help alleviate poverty (67% vs. 58%) or homelessness (69% vs. 58%) than those who are not affiliated with a particular religion.

WHILE MANY THINK THE GOVERNMENT IS SPENDING TOO LITTLE ON ASSISTANCE FOR THOSE IN NEED, PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC POLICIES IS MIXED.

When it comes to general spending on assistance for those in need, about half the public believes government spending is too low, while about a quarter think it is too high, and a quarter say it is about right. Majorities of both Democrats and independents believe the government is spending too little. Republicans are more likely to say government is spending too much than too little.

Few think the government is spending too much on assistance for those in need.

Percent of adults



Question: Do you think the government is spending too much, too little, or the right amount on assistance for those in need?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted August 21-25, 2025 with 1,121 adults nationwide.

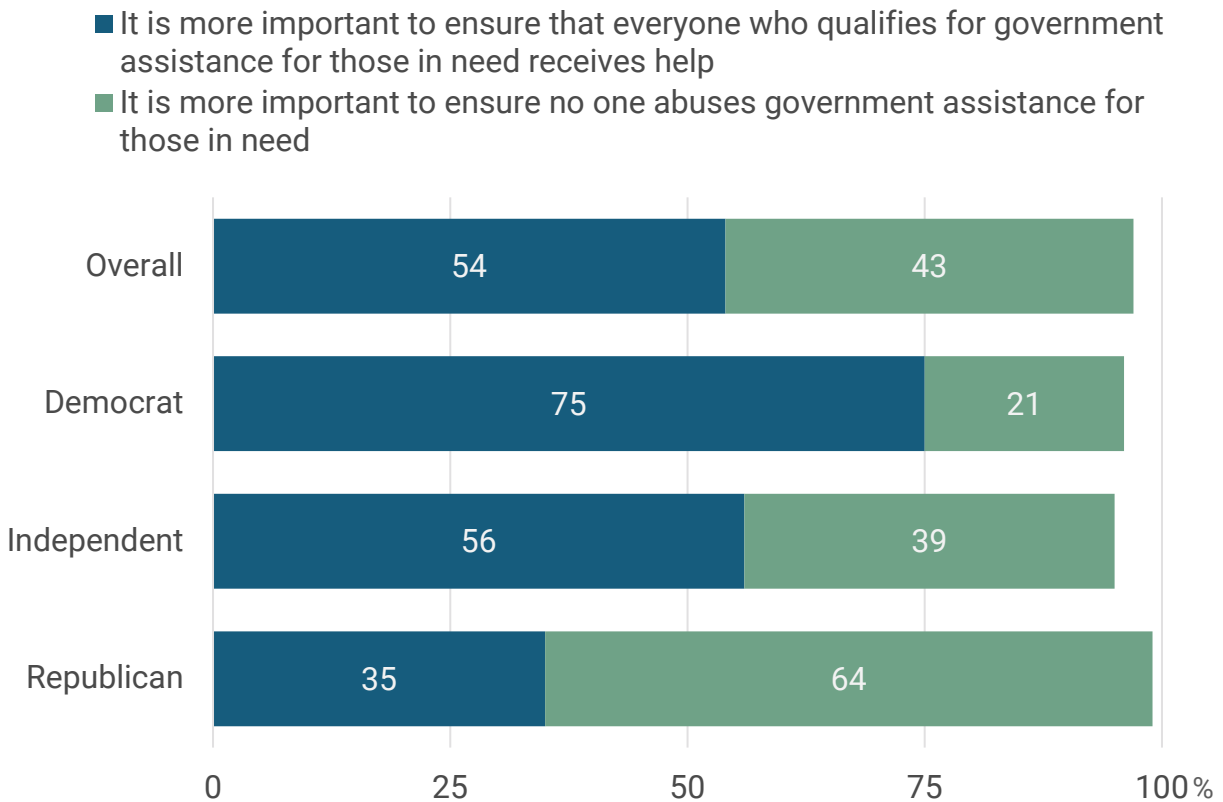


APNORC.org

The survey asked people to prioritize whether it's more important to ensure that everyone who needs help gets it or to make sure there is no fraud or abuse of government assistance programs. Overall, 54% feel it is more important to guarantee that everyone who qualifies for government assistance receives help and 43% prioritize ensuring that no one abuses that assistance. There is a clear partisan divide, with 75% of Democrats and 56% of independents saying it is more important to safeguard access to all who qualify compared with 64% of Republicans saying it is more important to prevent abuse.

The public is divided on whether it is more important to ensure no one abuses government assistance or ensure everyone who qualifies receives help.

Percent of adults



Question: Which of these statements comes closer to your views, even if neither is exactly right?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted August 21-25, 2025 with 1,121 adults nationwide.



APNORC.org

Opinions toward several specific policy proposals related to poverty and homelessness are also closely tied to partisanship.

About half of Americans report that they are in favor of the Medicaid work requirements included in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act passed in July. Views are heavily associated with partisanship, with three-quarters of Republicans in favor compared to 4 in 10 Democrats.

Overall, more adults favor than oppose clearing homeless encampments in U.S. cities, a provision introduced in the July executive order "[Ending Crime and Disorder on America's Streets](#)". While two-thirds of Republicans support clearing encampments, there is less consensus among Democrats.

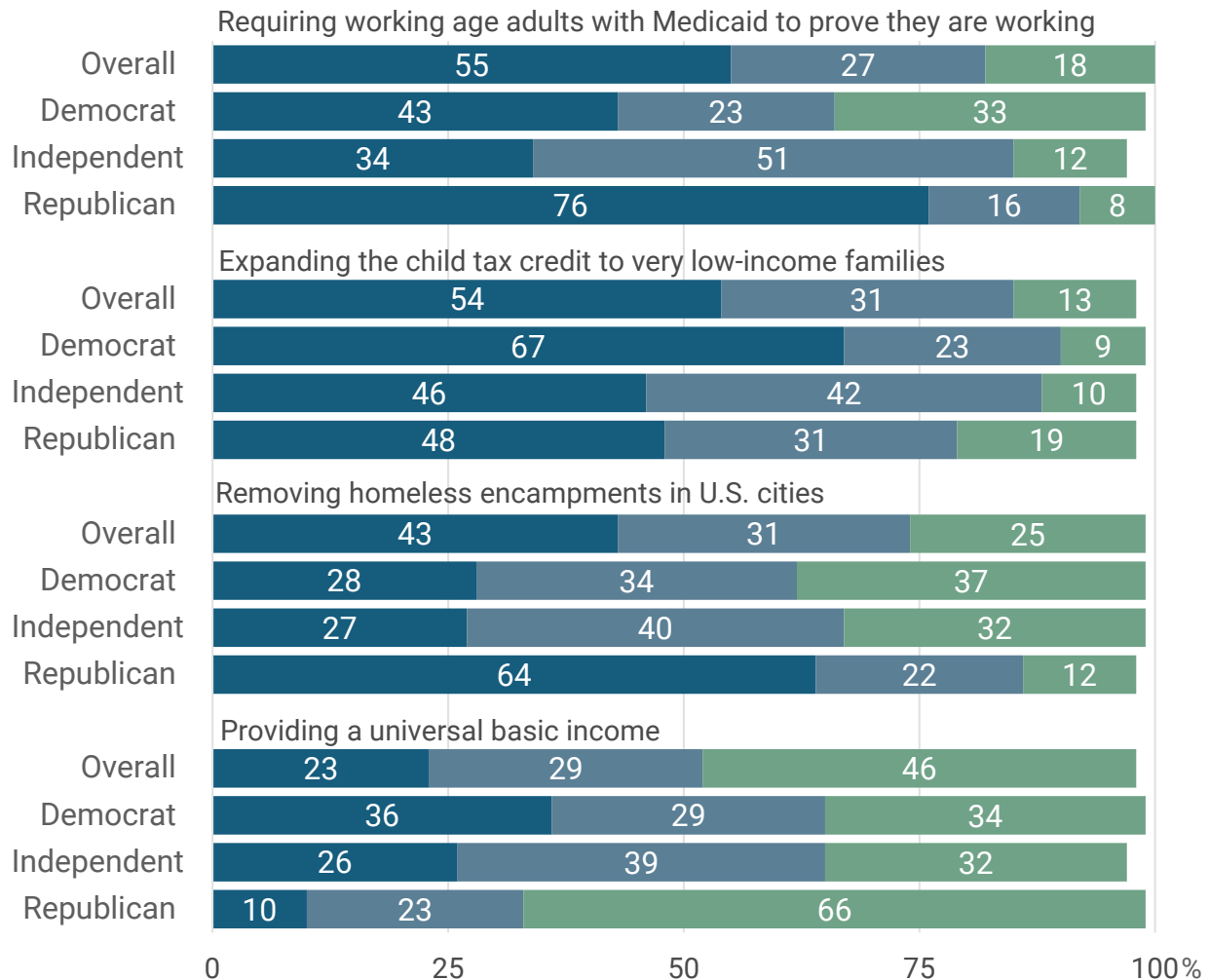
When it comes to policies that have not yet been enacted, about half of the public supports expanding the child tax credit for very low-income families, including about two-thirds of Democrats and about

half of Republicans. By contrast, only a quarter support universal basic income, with about equal shares of Democrats in favor and in opposition, but two-thirds of Republicans opposing it.

Support is mixed for proposed policies related to poverty and homelessness.

Percent of adults

■ Strongly/somewhat favor ■ Neither favor nor oppose ■ Strongly/somewhat oppose



Question: Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose each of the following:

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted August 21-25, 2025 with 1,121 adults nationwide.

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 the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy. Staff from Harris Public Policy and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a bi-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 August 21 through August 25, 2025, with adults aged 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,121 completed the survey – 1,041 via the web and 80 by telephone. Panel members were invited by email or by phone from an NORC telephone interviewer. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for completing the survey. The final stage completion rate is 15.4 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 26.3 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 78 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 3.2 percent.

The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups. For example, the margin of sampling error is 5.8 percentage points for Democrats, 6.3 percentage points for Republicans, and 9.7 percentage points for independents.

Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error and there may be other unmeasured error in this or any other survey.

Quality assurance checks were conducted to ensure data quality. In total, 72 interviews were removed for nonresponse to at least 50% of the questions asked of them, for completing the survey in less than one-third the median interview time for the full sample, or for straight-lining all grid questions asked of them. These interviews were excluded from the data file prior to weighting.

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, education, and 2024 presidential vote. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2024 Current Population Survey and the final results for 2025 presidential vote turnout and vote choice. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

Complete questions and results are available at: www.apnorc.org.

Additional information on the AmeriSpeak Panel methodology is available at:

<https://amerispeak.norc.org/about-amerispeak/Pages/Panel-Design.aspx>.

For more information, email info@apnorc.org.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO HARRIS SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

One of the largest graduate professional schools at the University of Chicago, Harris Public Policy has been driven by the belief that evidence-based research, not ideology or intuition, is the best guide for public policy. For more than three decades, our exceptional community of scholars, students, and alumni have applied this exacting perspective to the world's most pressing problems using the latest tools of social science. Through our undergraduate and graduate programs, we empower a new generation of data-driven leaders to create a positive social impact throughout our global society. For more information visit <https://harris.uchicago.edu/>

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

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. Learn more at www.apnorc.org