



State of the Facts 2026



Key Findings

State of the Facts

- Most believe information is factual when it is based on data (60%), followed by whether it is verified by scientists (49%), verified by an academic institution (39%), or comes from a nonpartisan source (39%).
- 71% feel transparency about how information is gathered is important to whether they consider it to be factual.
- While two-thirds of adults in the United States say it is easy to distinguish fact from opinion, many still find it difficult to determine whether the information they encounter is true.
- Half say it is easy to find factual information (49%) and most can understand the difference between fact and opinion (62%) , but fewer think it is easy to know if information is true (37%). This is roughly unchanged from 2024.

Key Findings

Trends

- While use of AI chatbots and AI-powered search results for news remains low, rates of use have nearly doubled since 2024 (AI chatbot use: 6% to 11%) even as concern about AI's role in spreading misinformation remains elevated.
- Trust in federal agencies has flipped along party lines. Republicans expressing a great deal or quite a bit of trust in federal agencies rose sharply from 26% in 2024 to 49% in 2026, while Democratic trust in federal agencies fell from 72% in 2024 to 41% in 2026.
- Few trust information from the federal government on a range of topics compared to 2024, including inflation and the cost of living (down from 26% to 18%), health care (26% to 16%), immigration (20% to 15%), jobs and unemployment (25% to 15%), the federal budget (23% to 14%), and the environment (21% to 12%).

Key Findings

2026 Midterm Elections

- 53% think the Republican Party's campaign messages are rarely or never based on factual information, and 47% think the Democratic Party's campaign messages are rarely or never based on factual information.
- 34% trust government certifications of election results a great deal or quite a bit, while 33% trust them a moderate amount and 32% trust them a little or not at all.
- 46% are extremely or very concerned about the federal government publicly discrediting or questioning election results, and the same share (46%) are concerned about the government tampering with election results directly.
- Finding factual election information has gotten harder since 2024: 63% say it's easy to find information on how to register to vote, down from 71% in 2024.

Key Findings

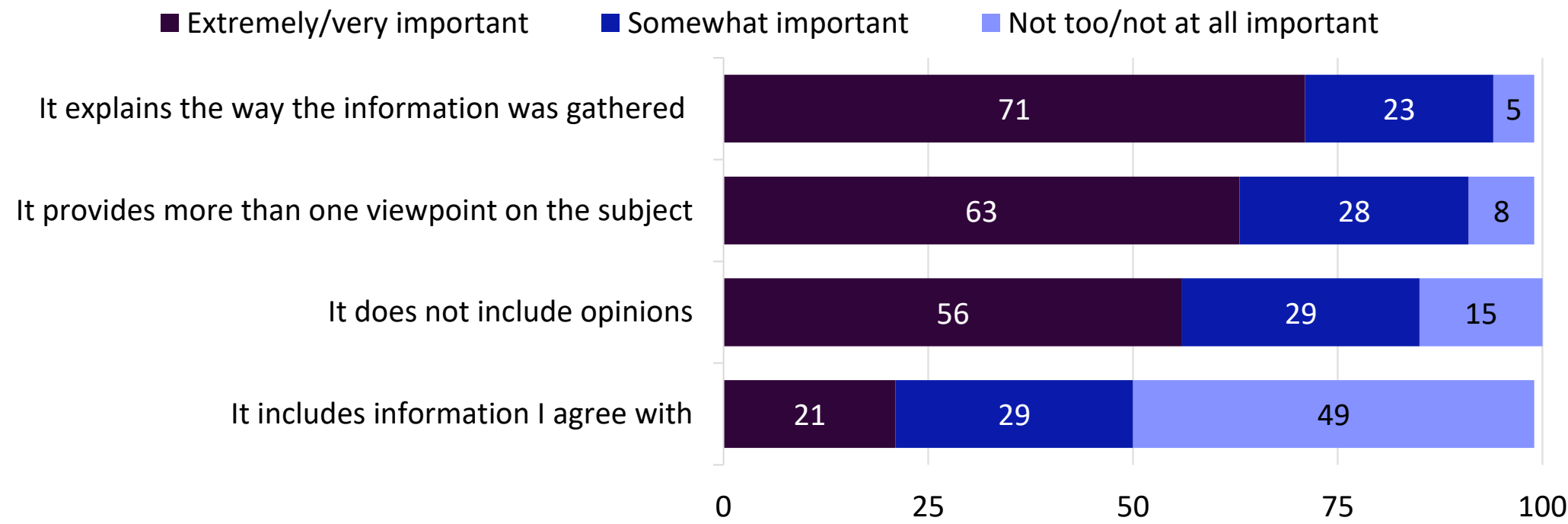
Artificial Intelligence

- As use of AI tools has increased, Americans have grown more pessimistic about AI's impact on society since 2025, with those saying AI will do “more to hurt” society as a whole rising from 44% to 52%, while “more to help” declined from 22% to 14%.
- Americans are divided on whether AI will make it easier or harder to know what's true – 22% say it will make it easier, 34% say it will make it harder, and 43% say AI will make it neither easier nor harder to know what information about the government is true.
- When it comes to understanding complicated information or problems, Americans are more optimistic, with 46% saying AI will make it easier, compared to just 22% who say it will make it harder.

What people are paying attention to and what makes a fact

Adults say transparency and objectivity matter most for making information factual while personal agreement matters least.

Thinking about information you consider factual, how important is each of the following factors?
Percent of adults

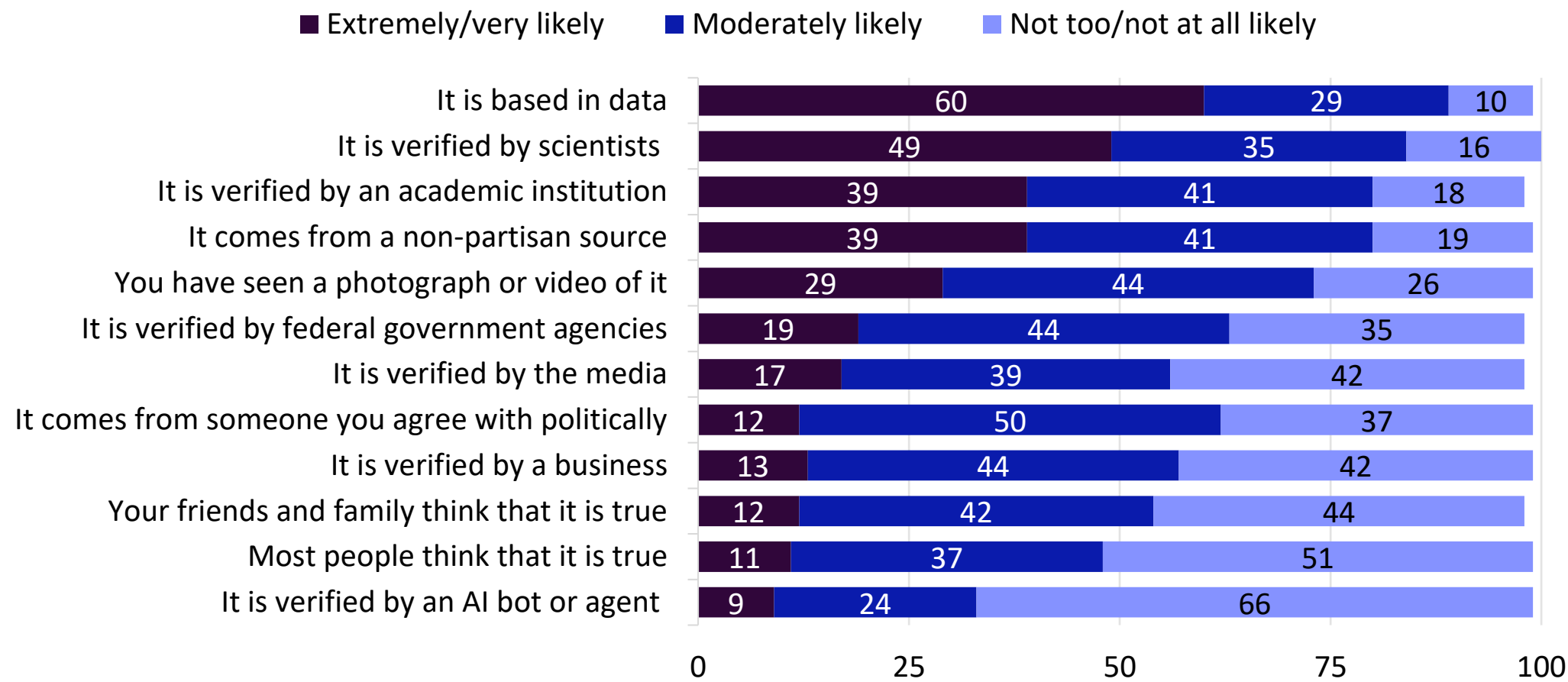


Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults.

Americans are most likely to believe that something is a fact if it is based in data.

How likely are you to consider information factual if it has each of the following characteristics?

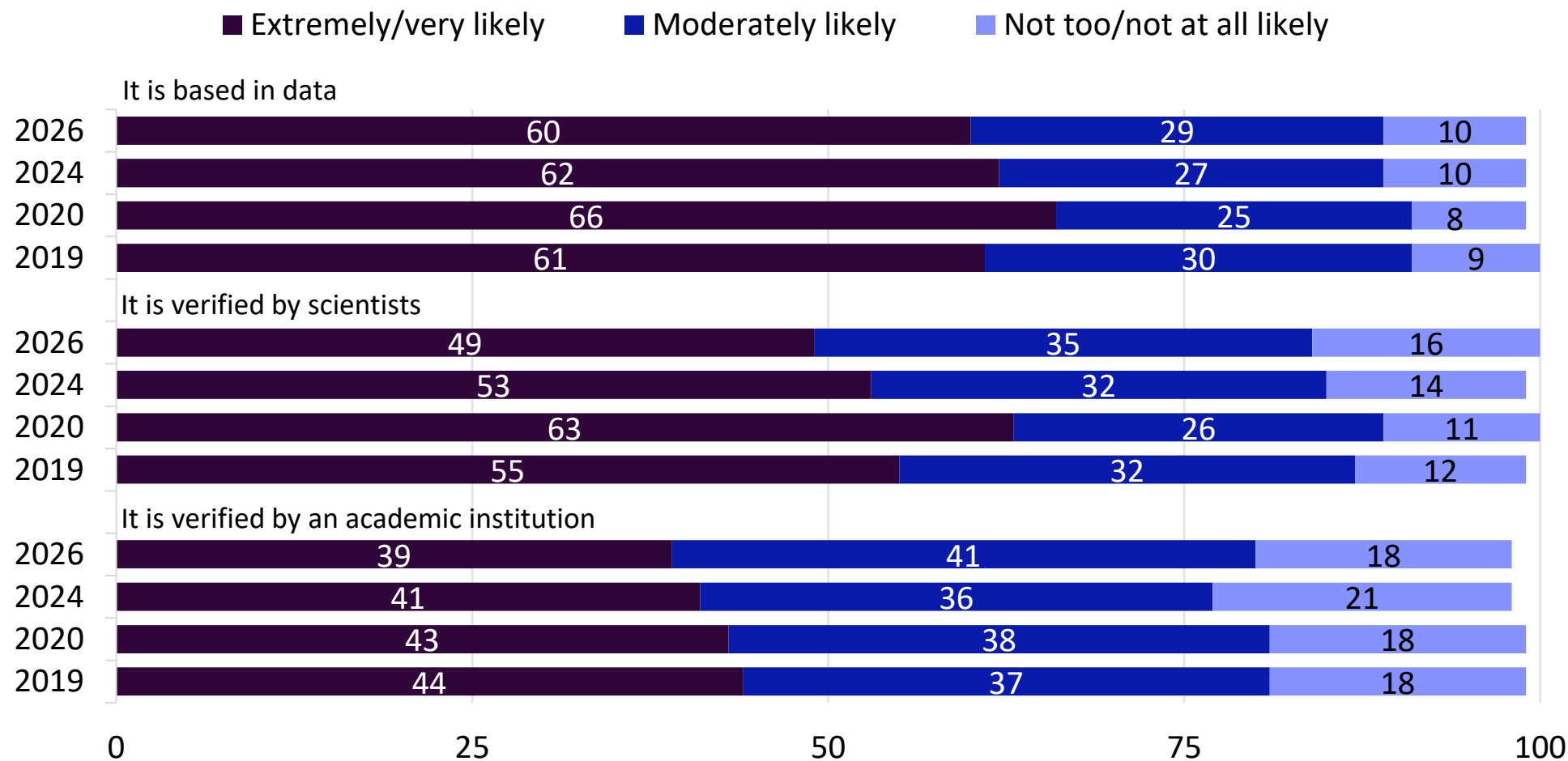
Percent of adults



Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults.

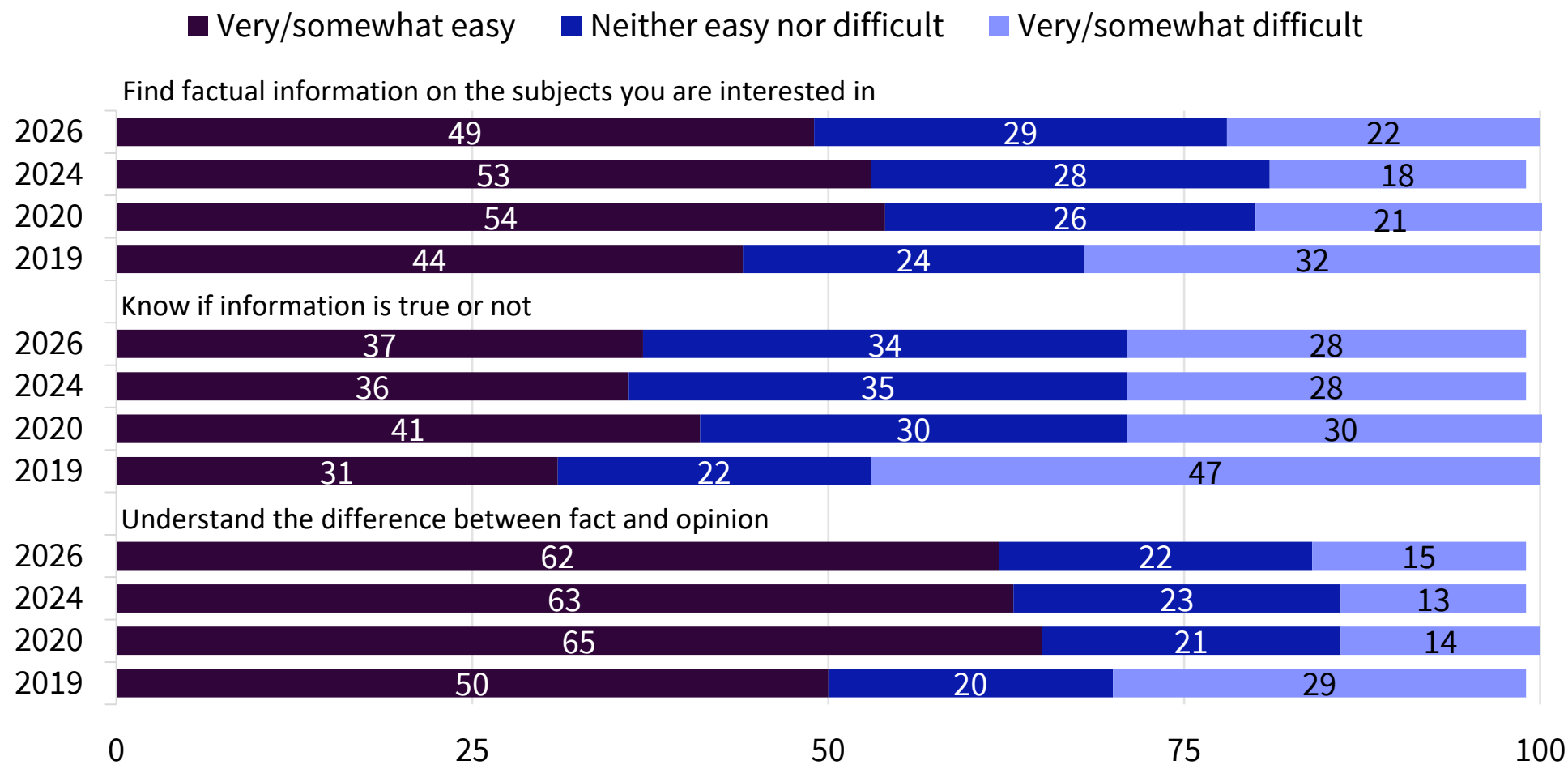
Data and expertise remain trusted sources for judging whether information is factual compared with 2024.

How likely are you to consider information factual if it has each of the following characteristics?
Percent of adults



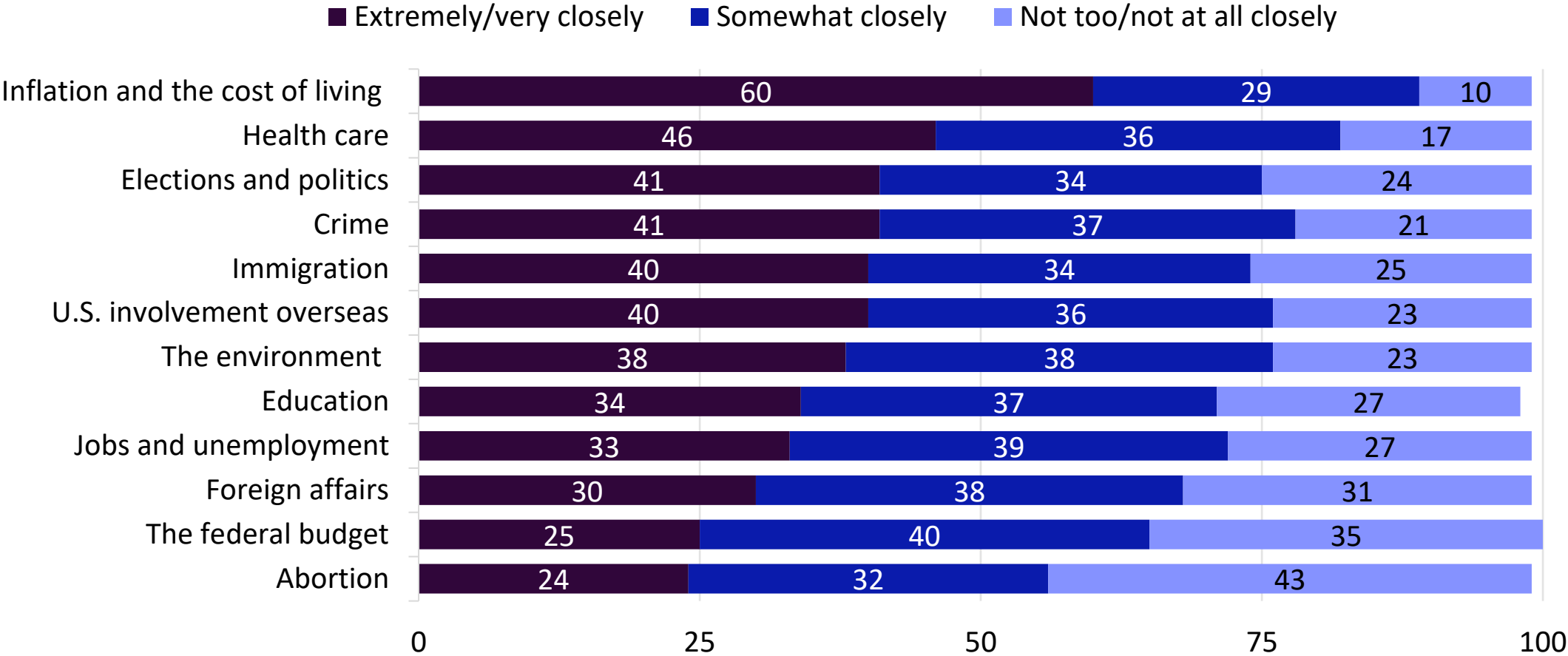
Distinguishing fact from opinion remains far easier than knowing if information is true – a gap that has persisted since 2020.

Next, in general, how easy or difficult is it for you to...
Percent of adults



The public follows inflation and the cost of living most closely, while abortion and the federal budget draw the least attention.

How closely do you pay attention to information about each of the following topics?
Percent of adults

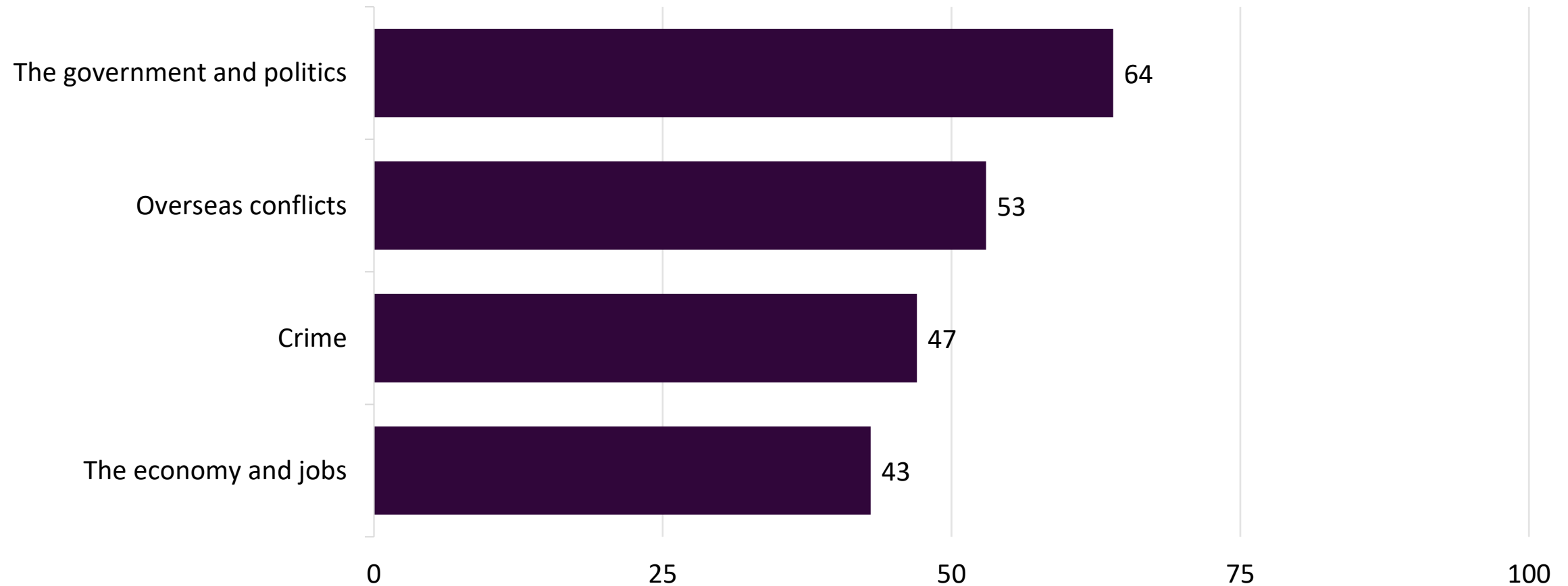


Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults.

Nearly two-thirds of adults say they've tuned out political news due to fatigue or overload.

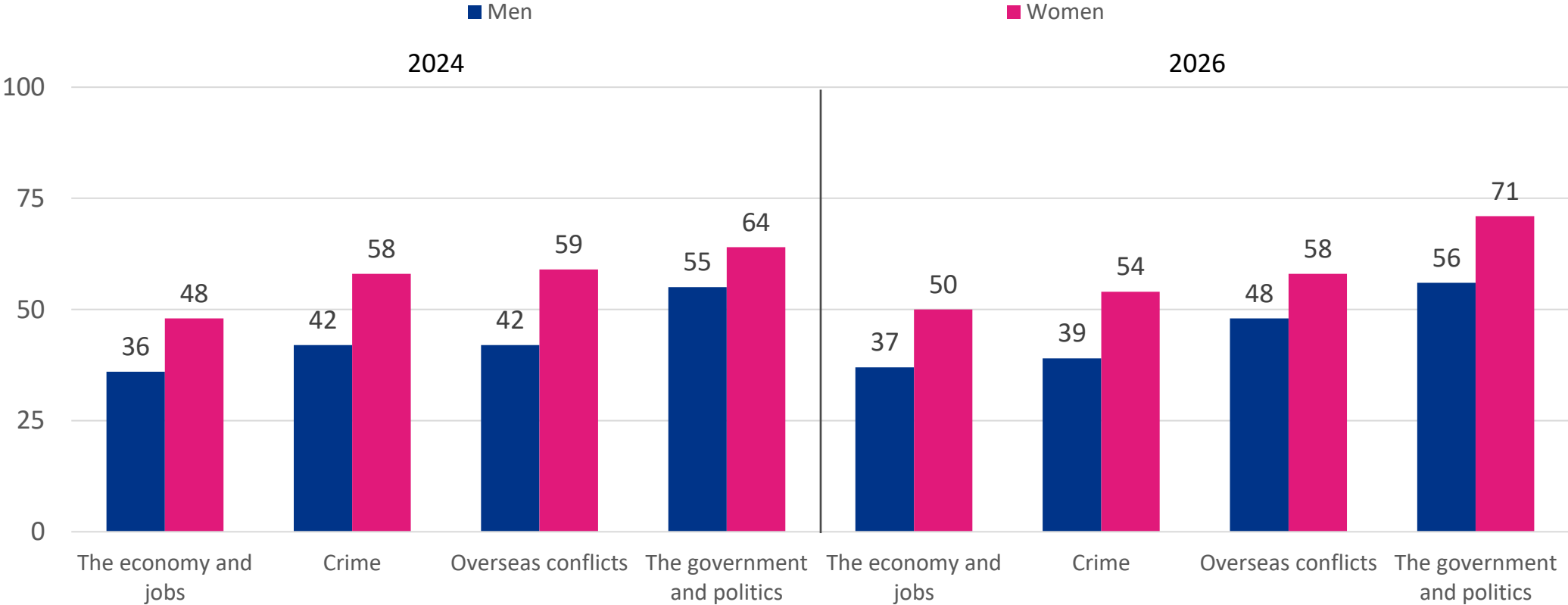
Have you ever felt the need to limit your media consumption on the following topics due to information overload, fatigue, or similar reasons?

Percent of adults who say yes



The gap between the shares of women and men who have limited their news consumption continues in 2026.

Have you ever felt the need to limit your media consumption on the following topics due to information overload, fatigue, or similar reasons?
Percent of adults who say yes

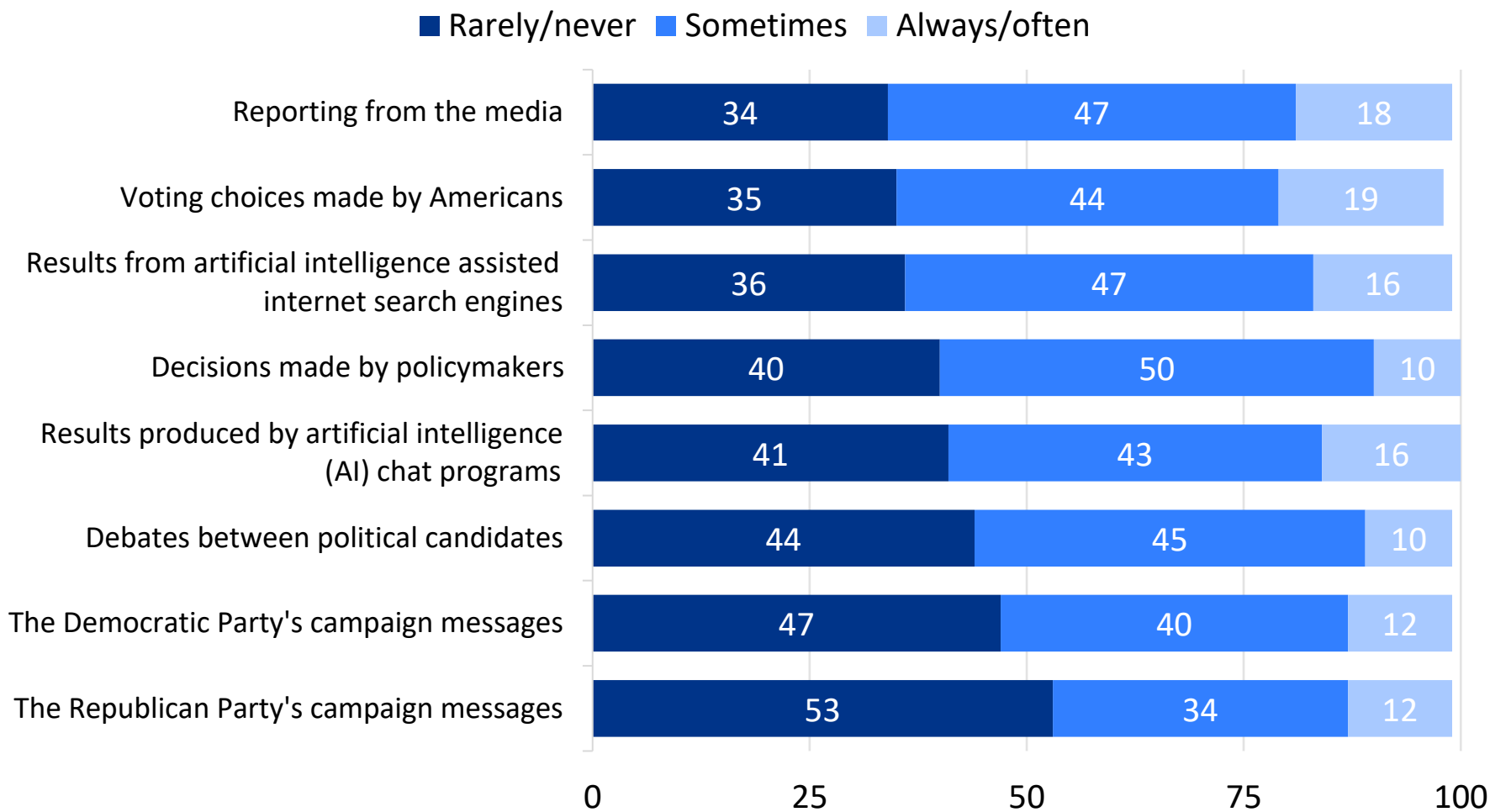


How Americans think about facts and issues



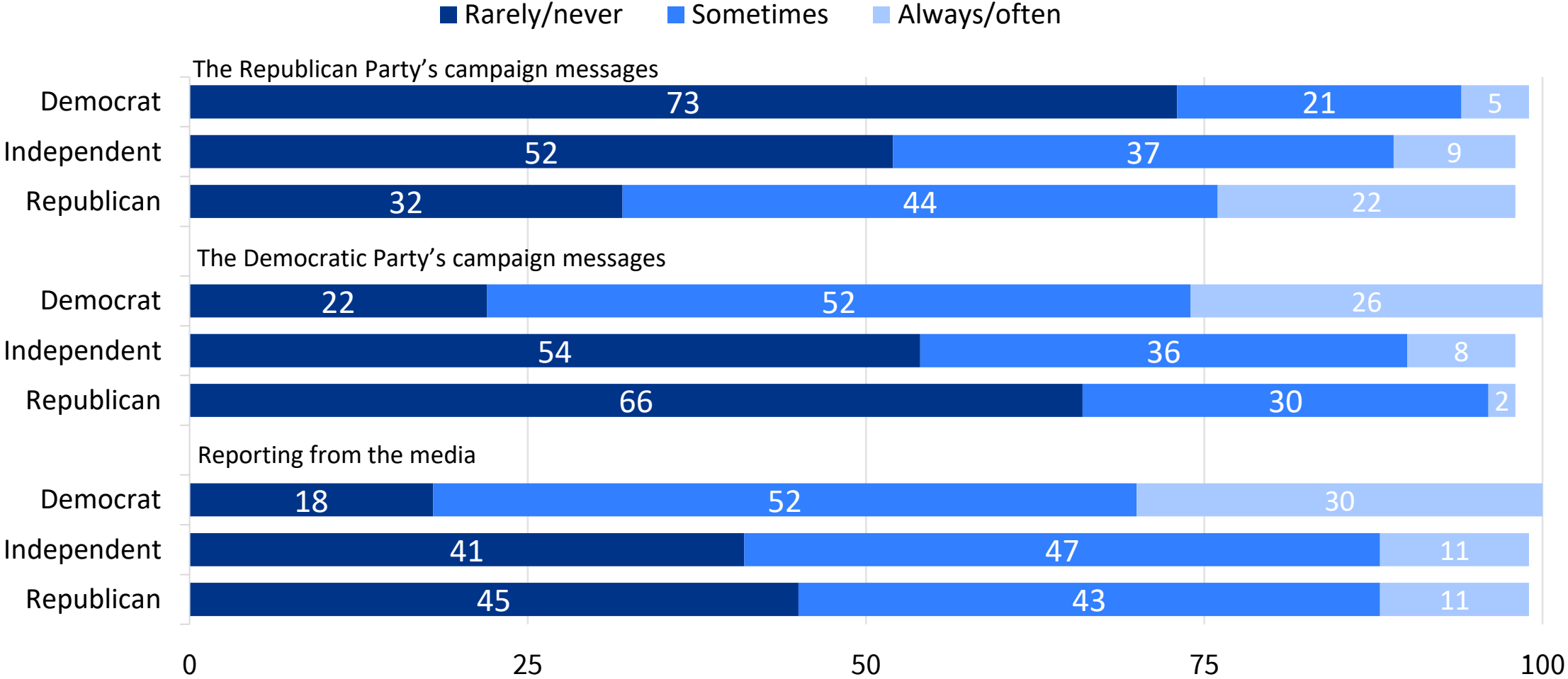
Only 1 in 10 Americans think policymakers’ decisions, candidate debates, and party campaign messages are usually fact based.

How often do you think each of the following are based on factual information?
Percent of adults



The majority of Democrats and Republicans rarely or never think that the opposing party uses factual information in their campaign messages.

How often do you think each of the following are based on factual information?
Percent of adults



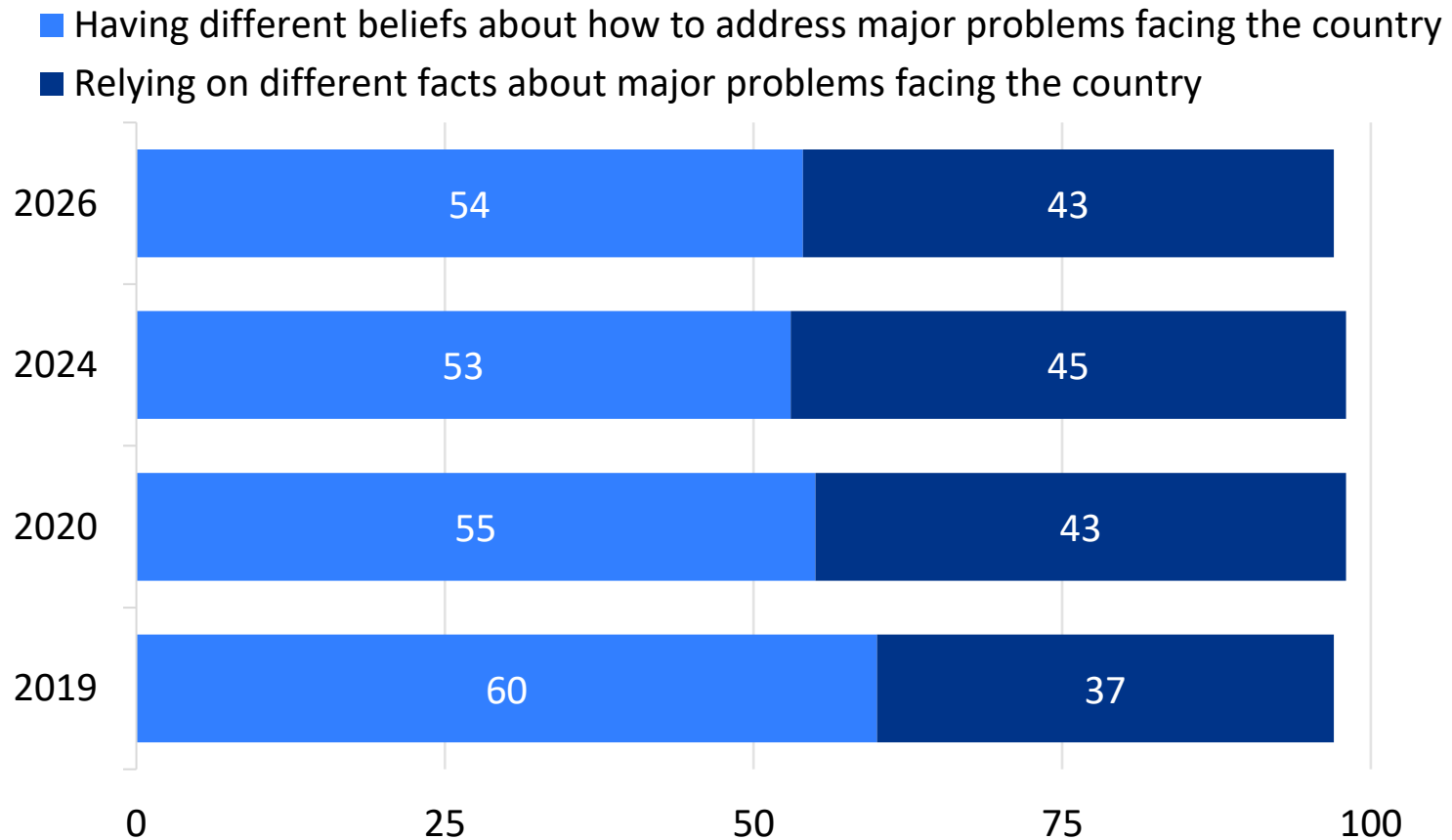
Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults

Americans blame political division on differing facts almost as much as differing beliefs.

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

Political division in the United States is more a result of Americans...

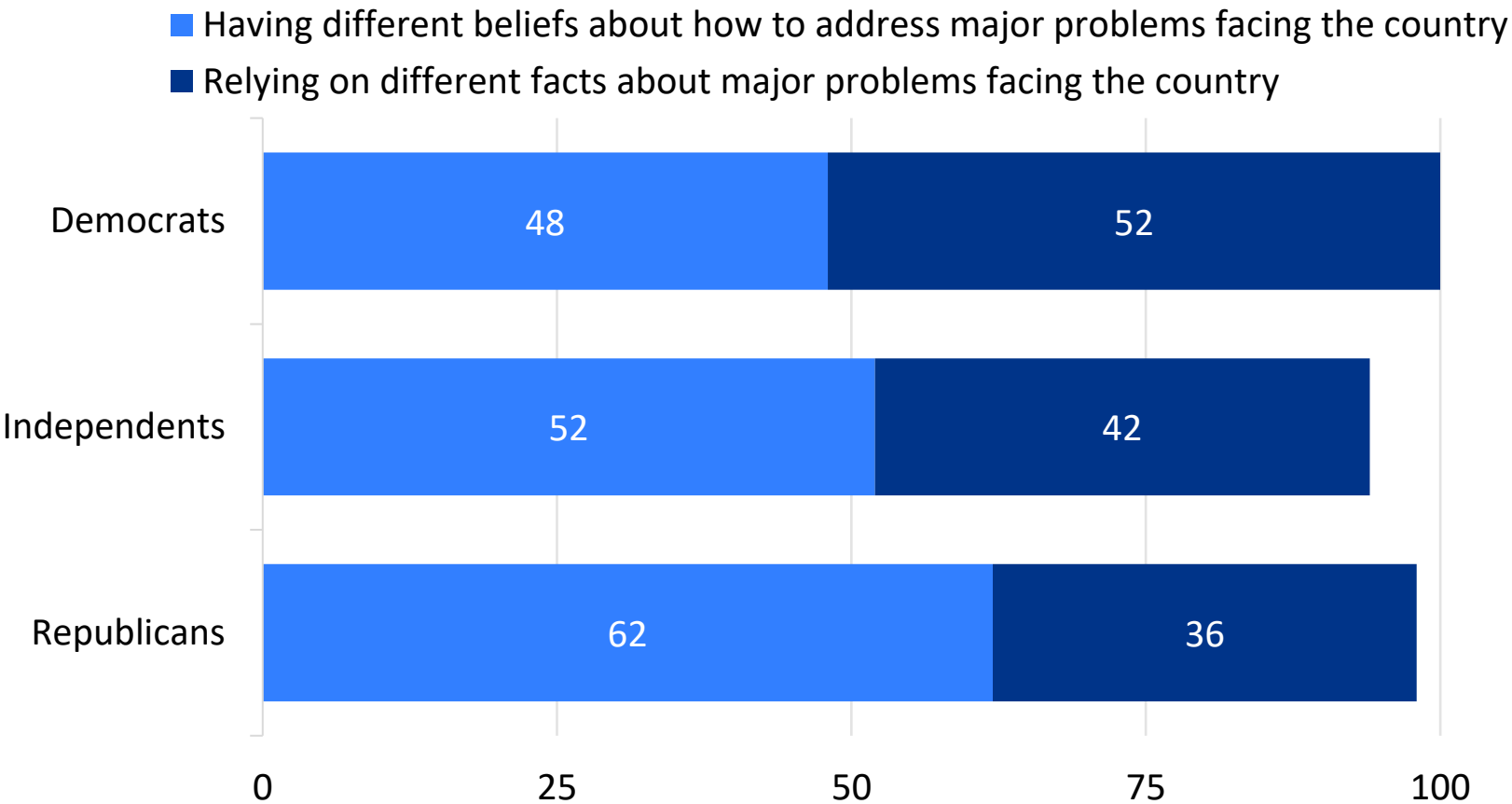
Percent of adults



More Republicans than Democrats say the country is divided because of differing beliefs rather than differing facts.

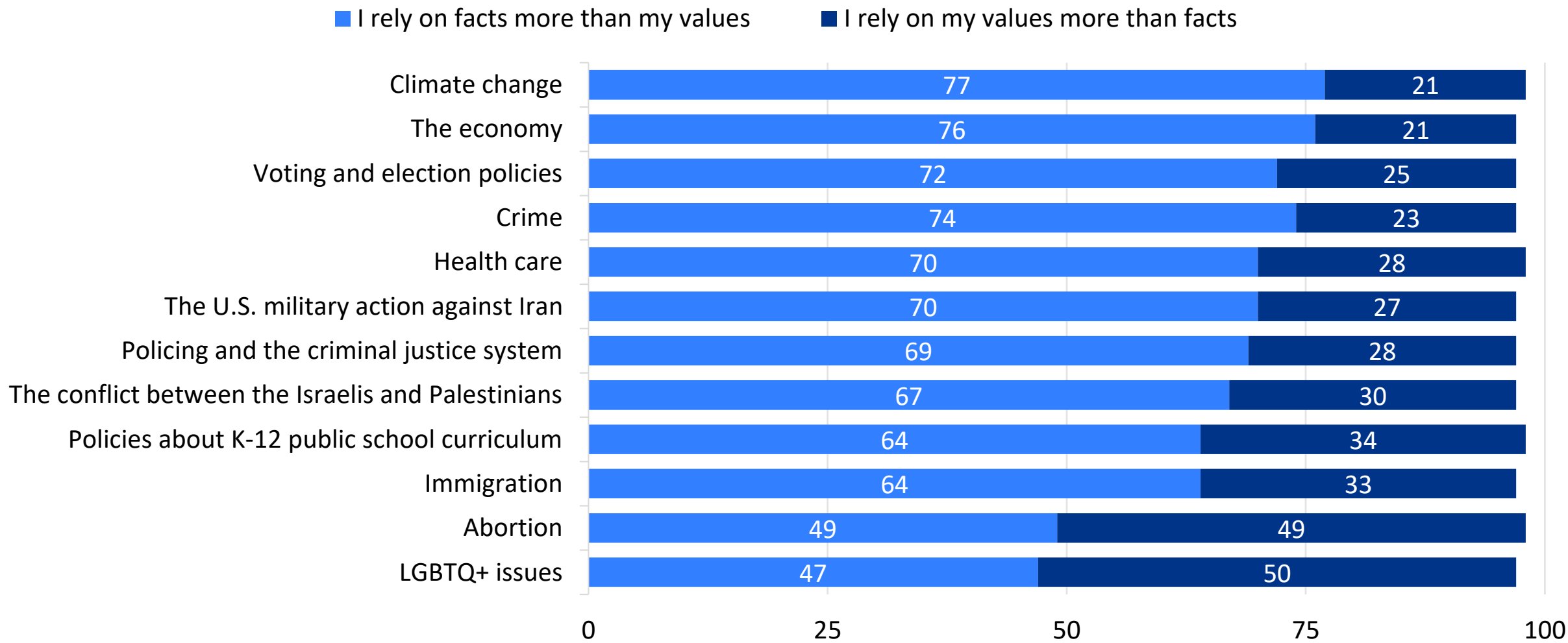
Which of the following statements comes closest to your view, even if neither is exactly right?
Political division in the United States is more a result of Americans...

Percent of adults



Americans still say they rely more on facts than values when forming opinions on most public issues

Which comes closer to describing how you think about each of the following issues?
Percent of adults



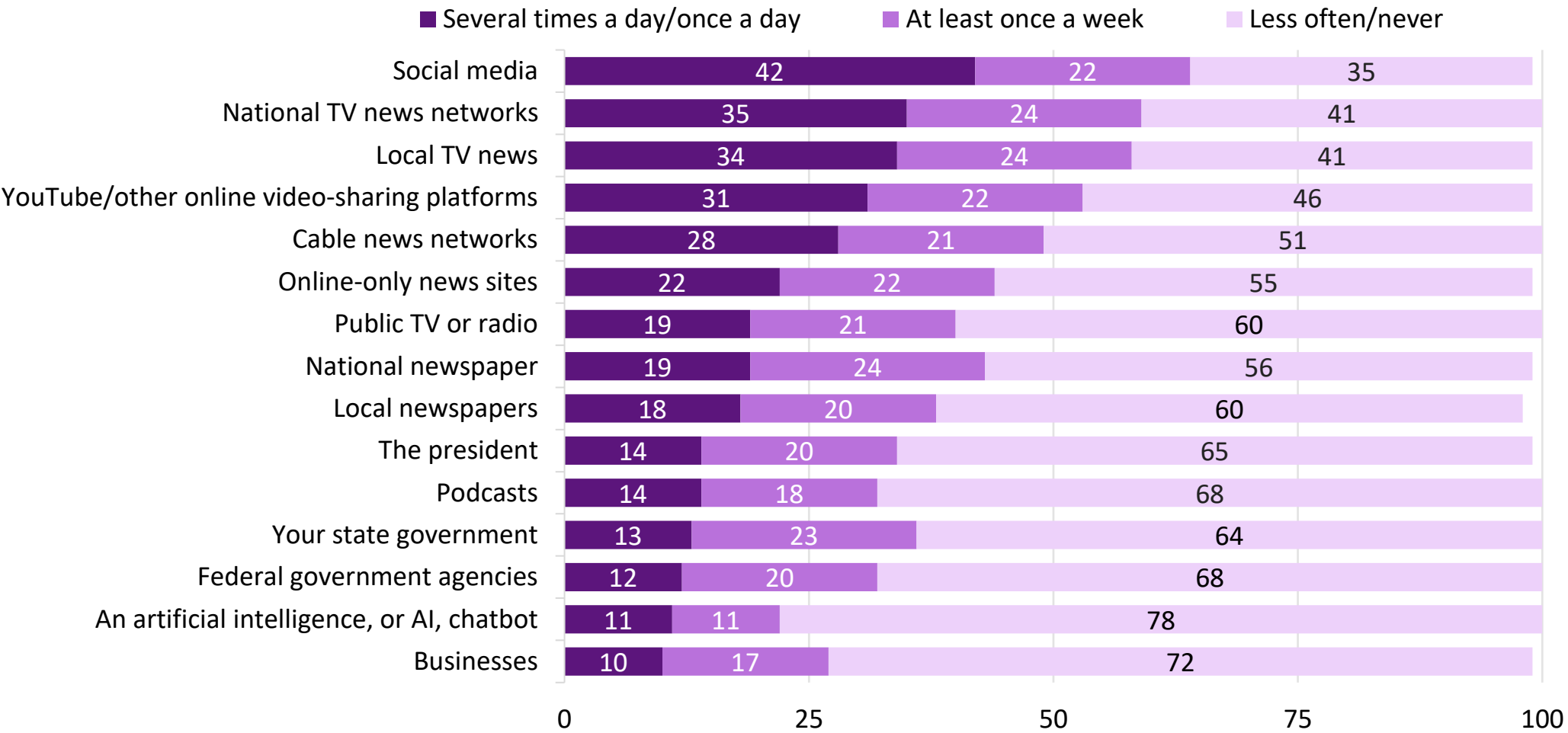
Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults

The Government Information Ecosystem – where do people go, how much do they trust it, and who they think is shaping it

Social media and TV are the most common sources for information about the government.

Thinking about some of the ways you get information about the government these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from...

Percent of adults

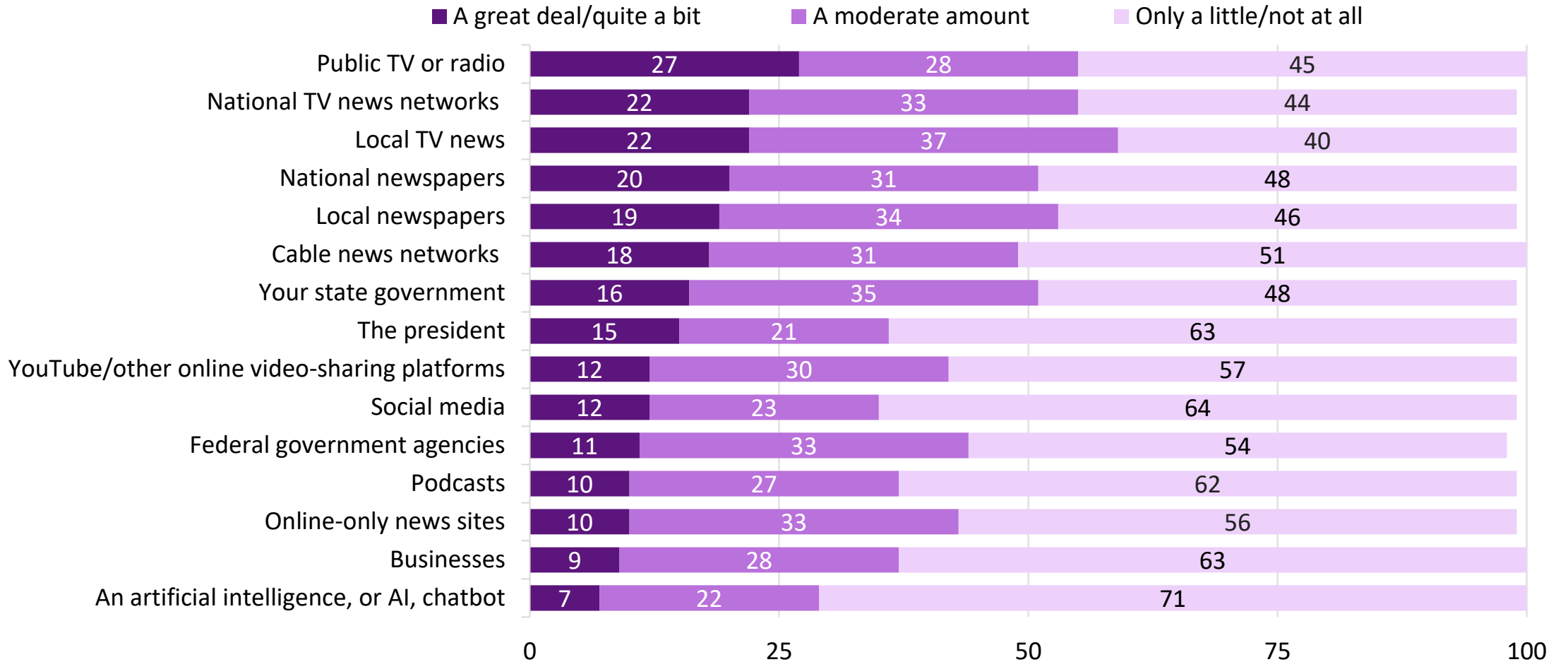


Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults

AI is the least trusted source for information about the government.

Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about the government?

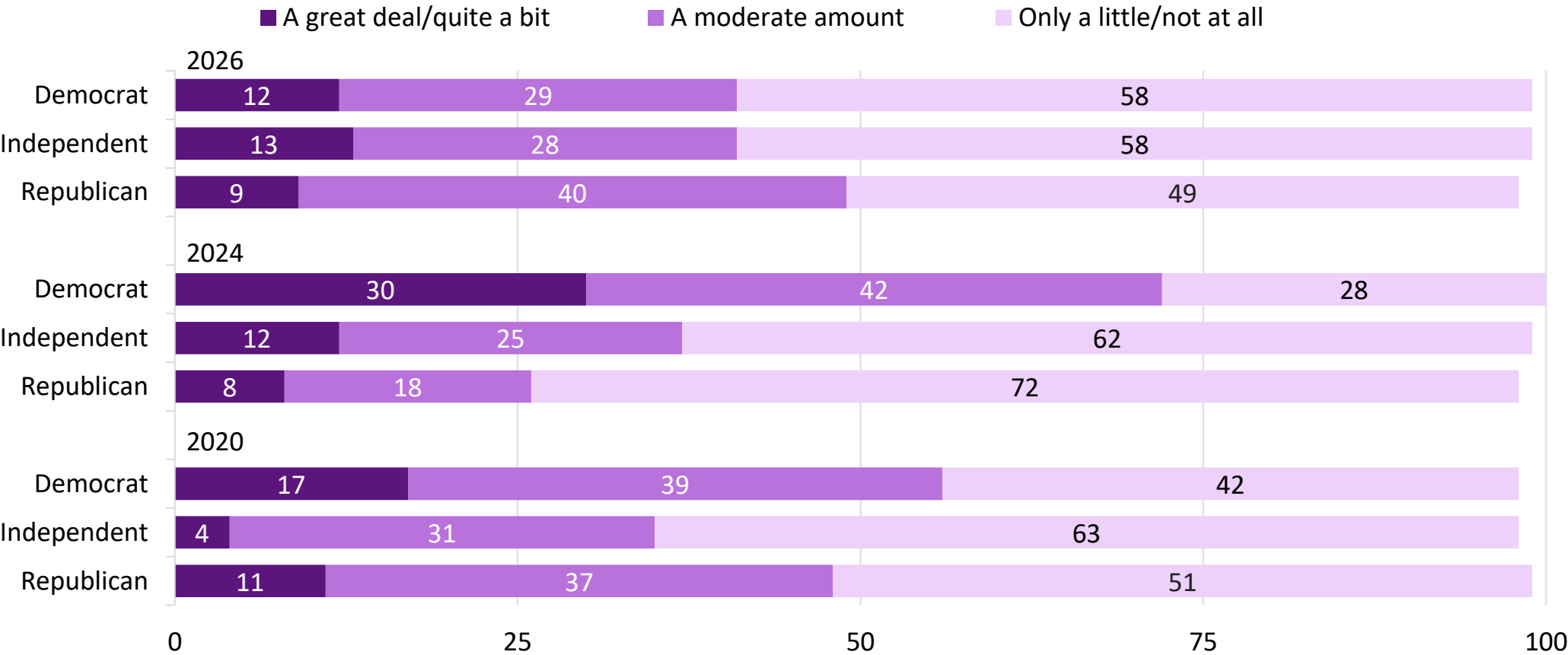
Percent of adults



The share of Democrats who at least moderately trust federal agencies for information about the government fell by 30 points since 2024, while trust among Republicans increased by 22 points.

[Federal government agencies] Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about the government?

Percent of adults

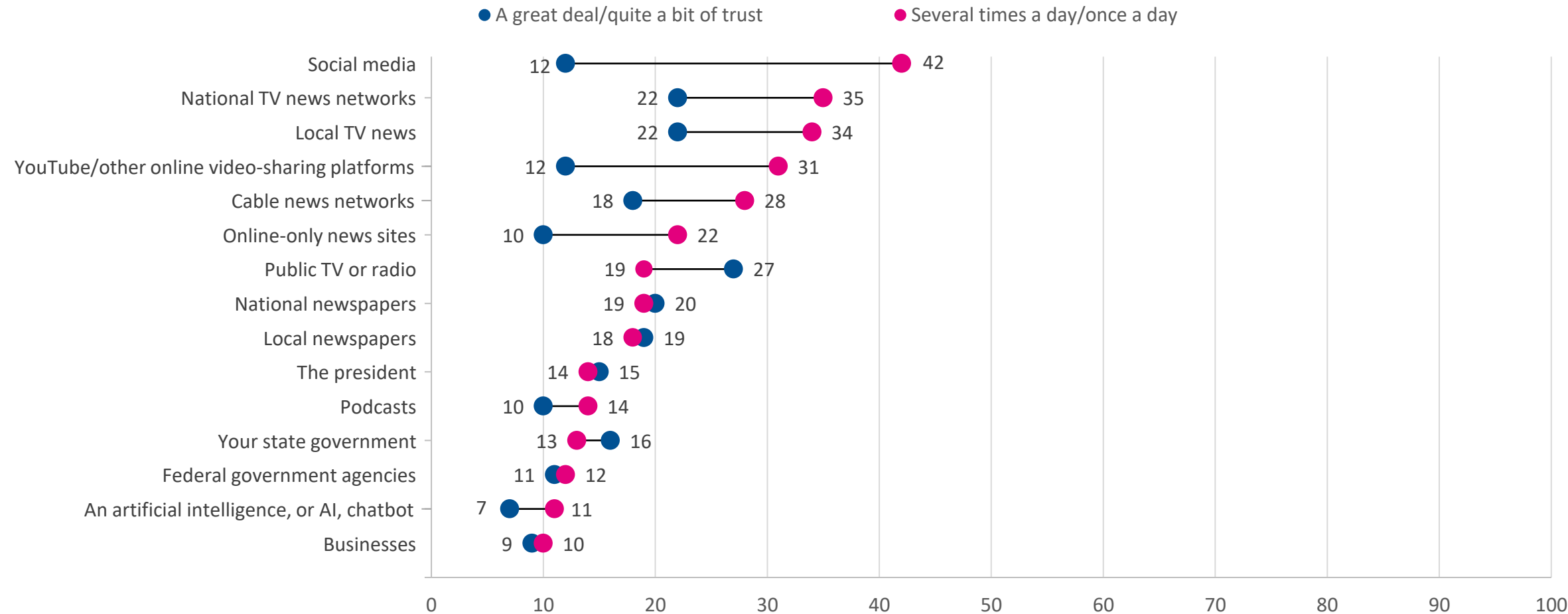


Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts polls conducted July 29-August 10, 2026 with 1,036 adults, July 29-August 8, 2024, with 1,019 adults, and September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults

Few trust information about the government from sources they use the most regularly.

Thinking about some of the ways you get information about the government these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from.../Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about the government?

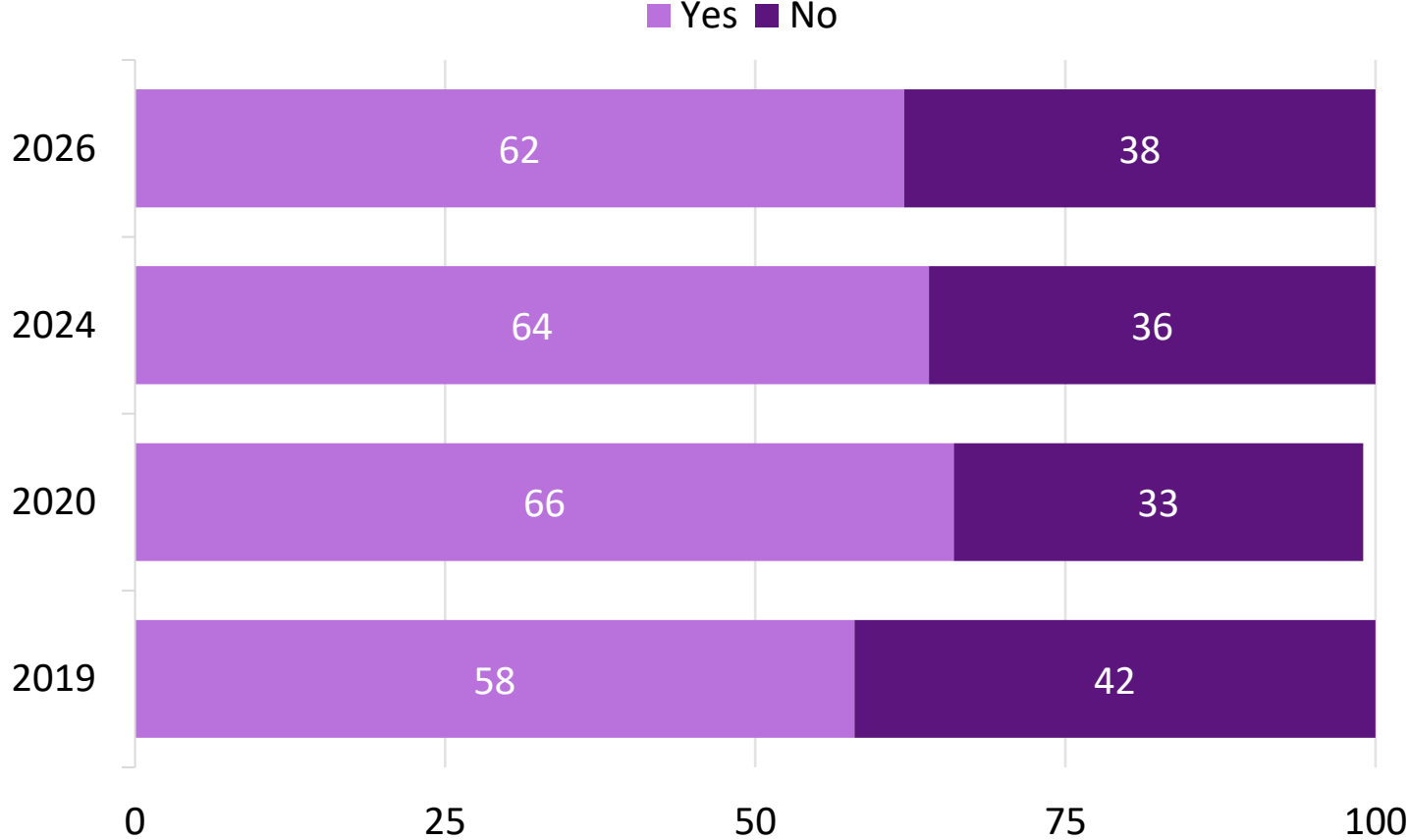
Percent of adults



Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults

Despite low trust in information from the government, about two-thirds continue to report using a federal government website to look up information.

Have you ever used federal government website (e.g. Census Bureau, IRS, Centers for Disease Control) to look up information?
Percent of adults

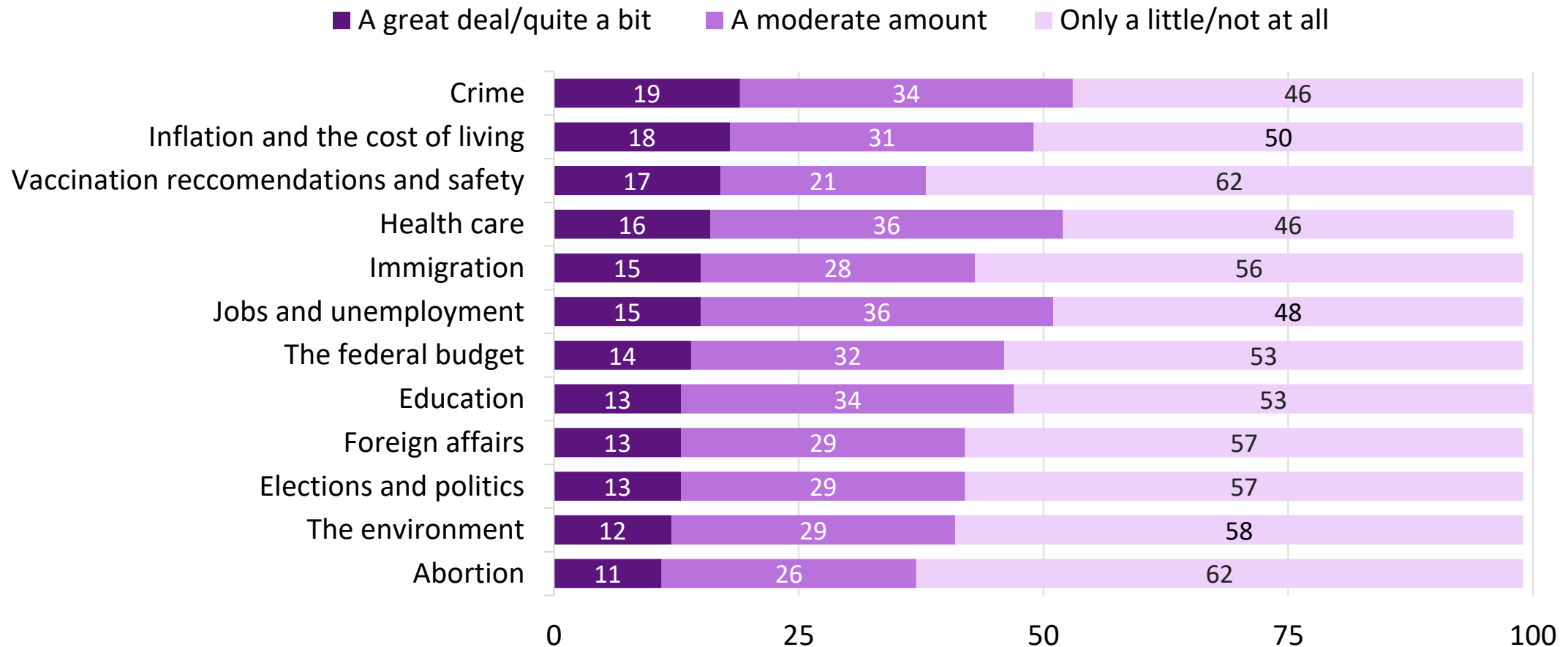


Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts polls conducted July 29-August 10, 2026 with 1,036 adults, July 29-August 8, 2024, with 1,019 adults, September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults, and October 15-28, 2019, with 1,032 adults

On a range of issues, few are very trusting of information from the federal government.

How much do you trust information from the federal government about the following topics?

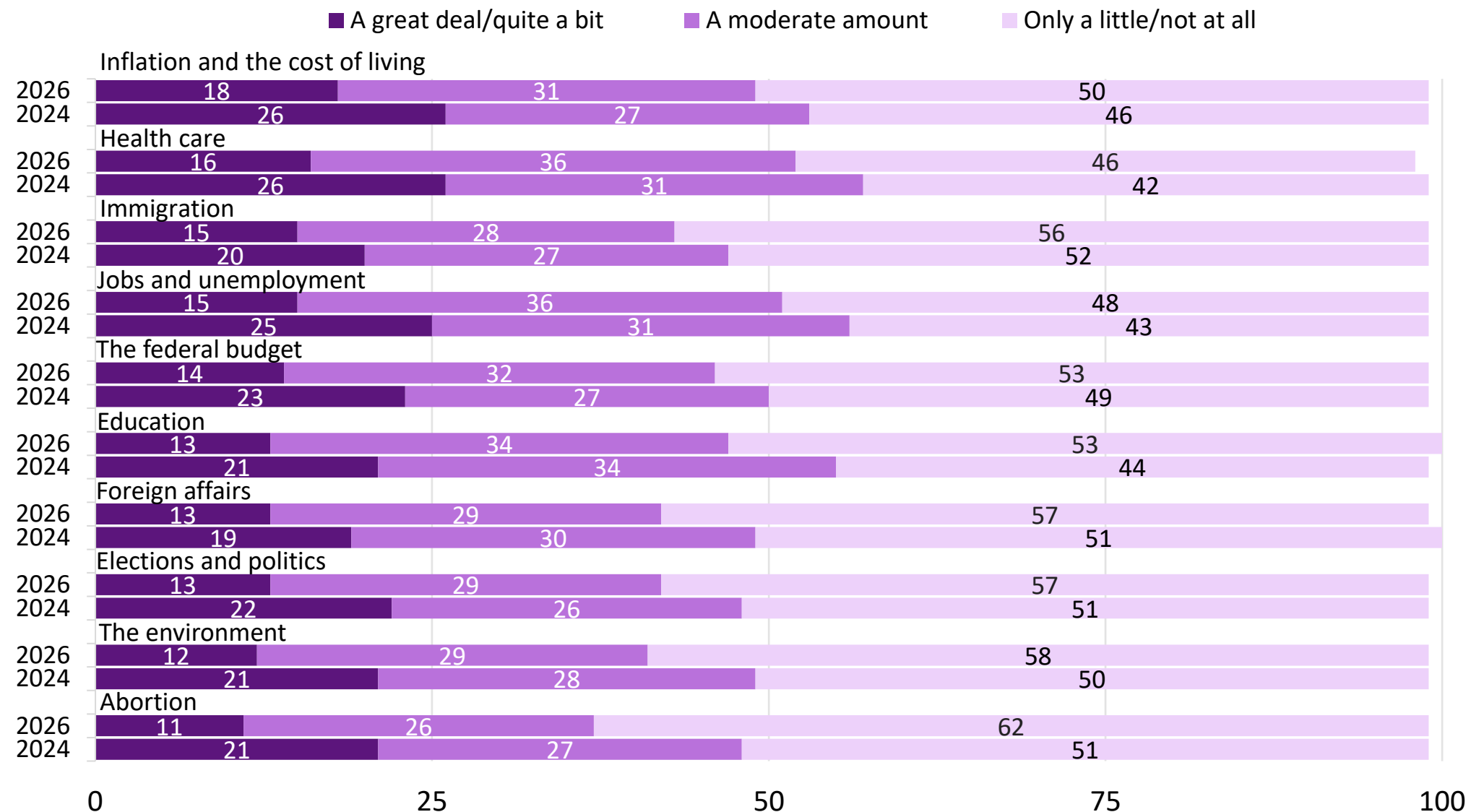
Percent of adults



Fewer trust information from the federal government than they did 2 years ago across many issues.

How much do you trust information from the federal government about the following topics?

Percent of adults

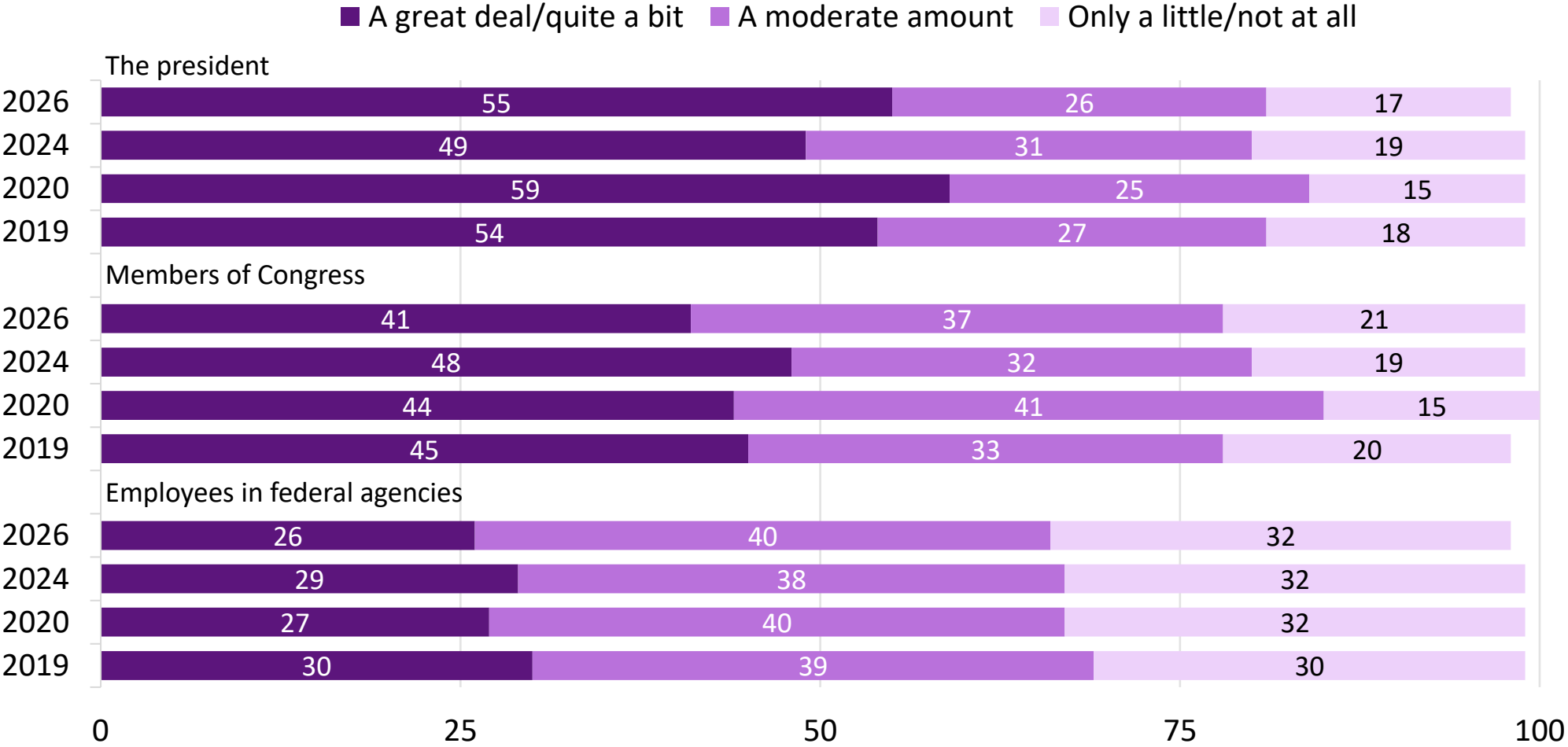


Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults and July 29-August 8, 2024, with 1,019 adults

Just a quarter say federal employees' political beliefs heavily influence information provided by the federal government; about half say the same about the president's beliefs.

How much influence do you think the political beliefs of each of the following have over information provided by the federal government?

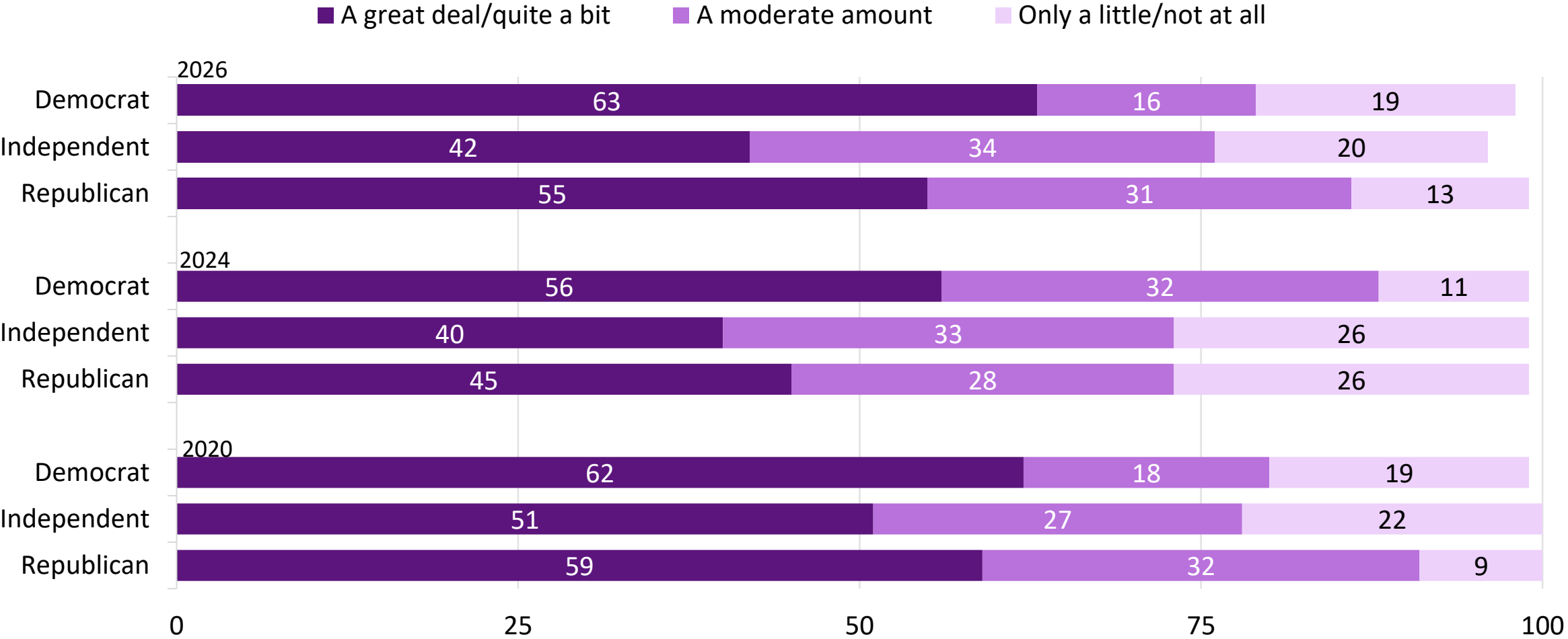
Percent of adults



Democrats are more likely than independents to say the president's political beliefs influence government information, and the share of Republicans who say so has increased since 2024.

[The president] How much influence do you think the political beliefs of each of the following have over information provided by the federal government?

Percent of adults



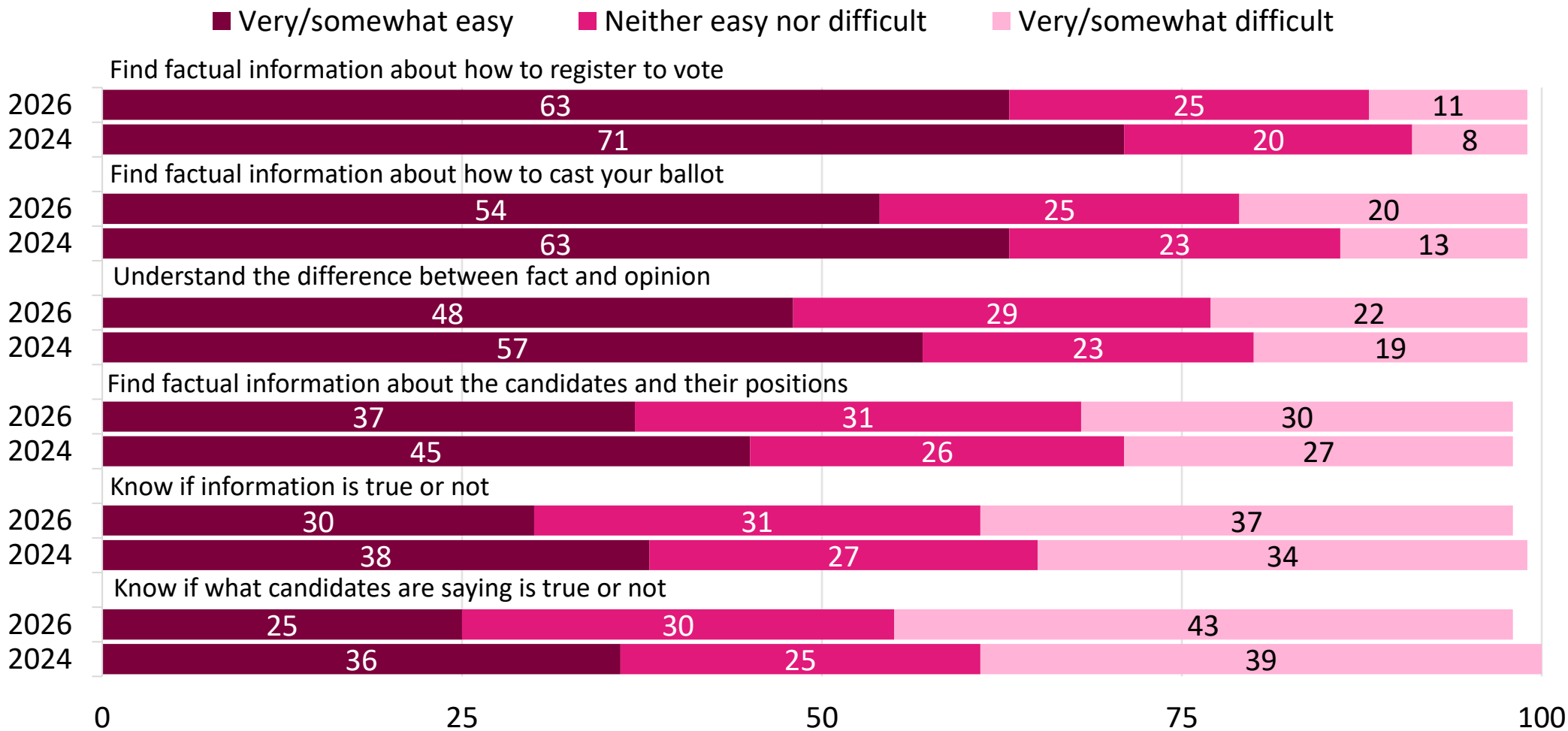
Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts polls conducted July 29-August 10, 2026 with 1,036 adults, July 29-August 8, 2024, with 1,019 adults, and September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults

Perceptions around the 2026 Midterm Elections

Navigating factual election information is getting harder, with ease declining across every measure since 2024.

When it comes to information about the upcoming midterm elections, how easy or difficult is it for you to...

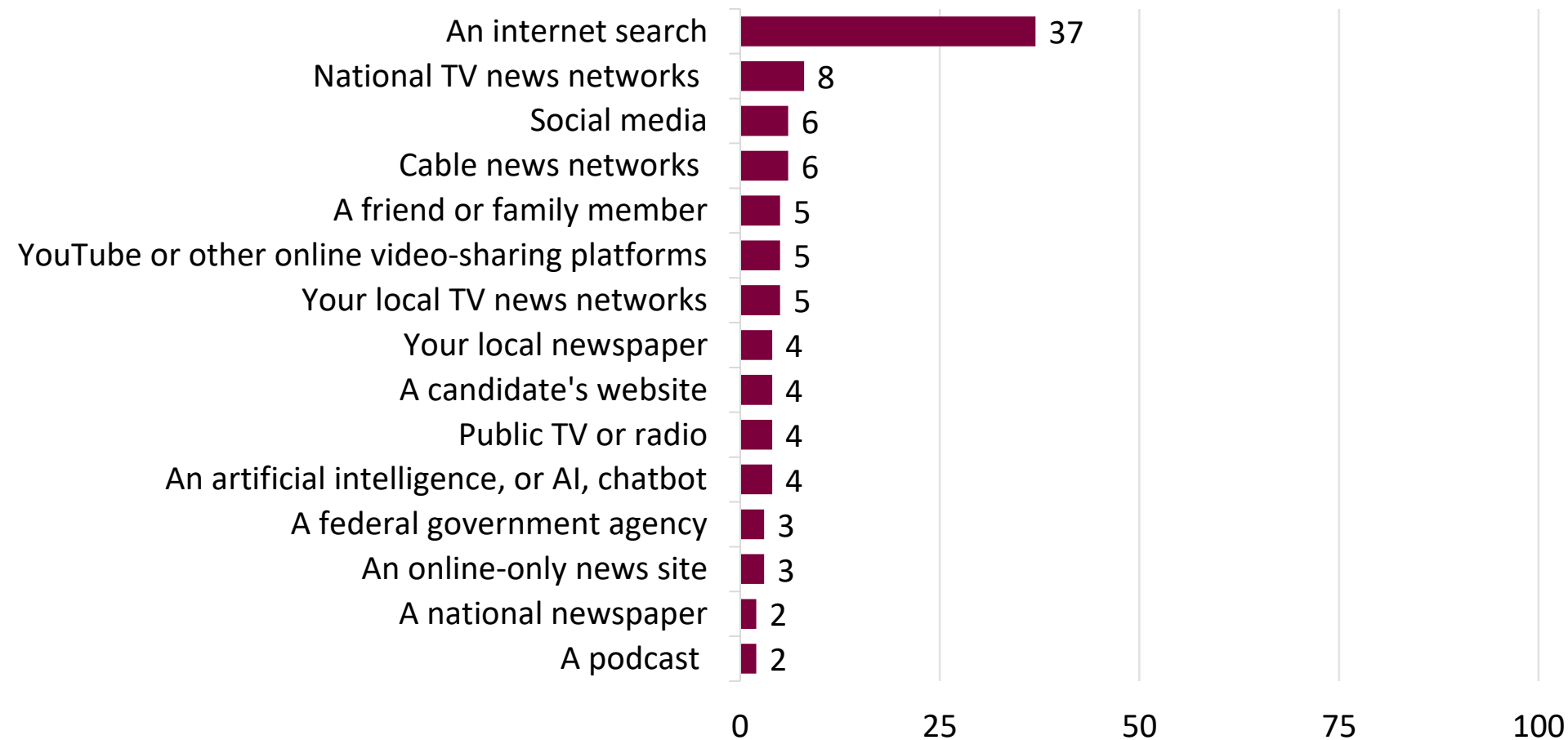
Percent of adults



Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts polls conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults, and July 29-August 8, 2024, with 1,019 adults.

Internet search dominates as the go-to fact checking tool to verify midterm election news.

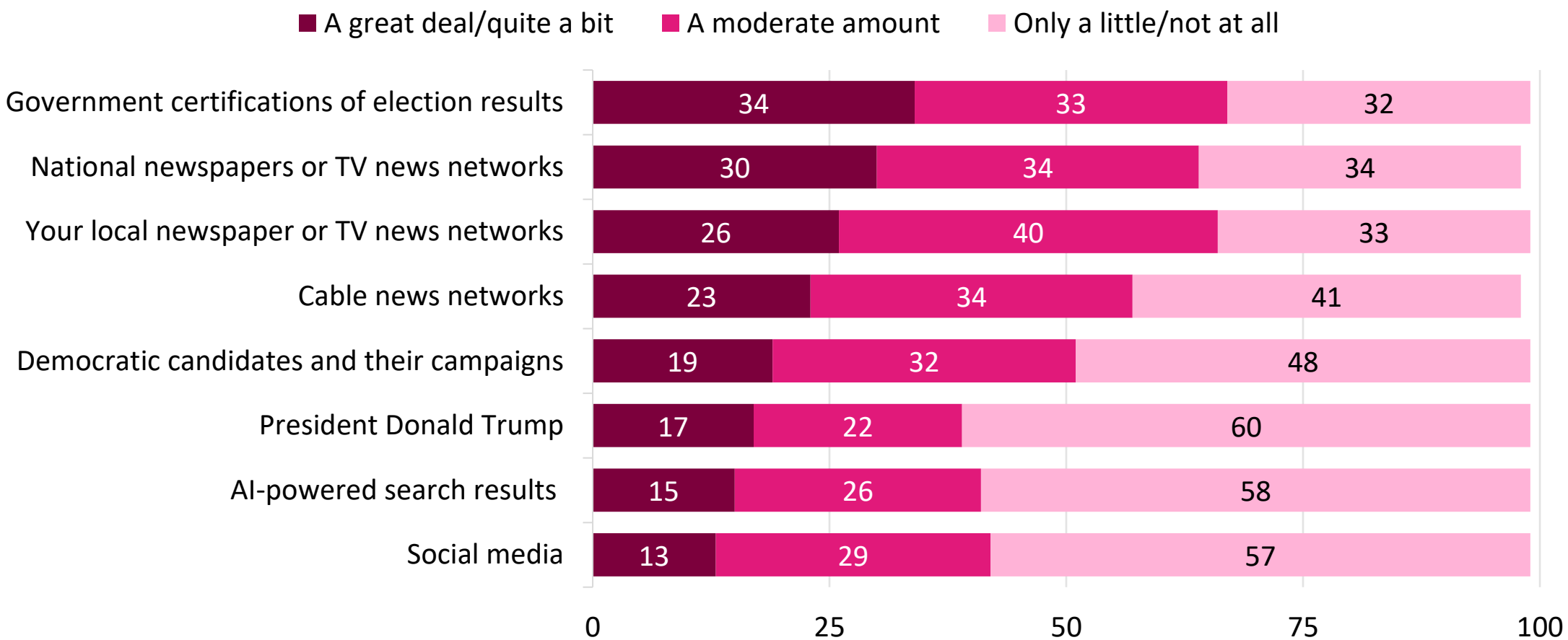
When you see news about the upcoming midterm elections and you want to find out if it is true or not, where do you generally go first to check?
Percent of adults



Americans place greater trust in government certifications and news organizations than in AI, social media, or the candidates themselves for information about the 2026 midterm elections.

Thinking about the midterm elections this November, how much do you trust the following sources to provide accurate information about the outcome of the 2026 midterm elections?

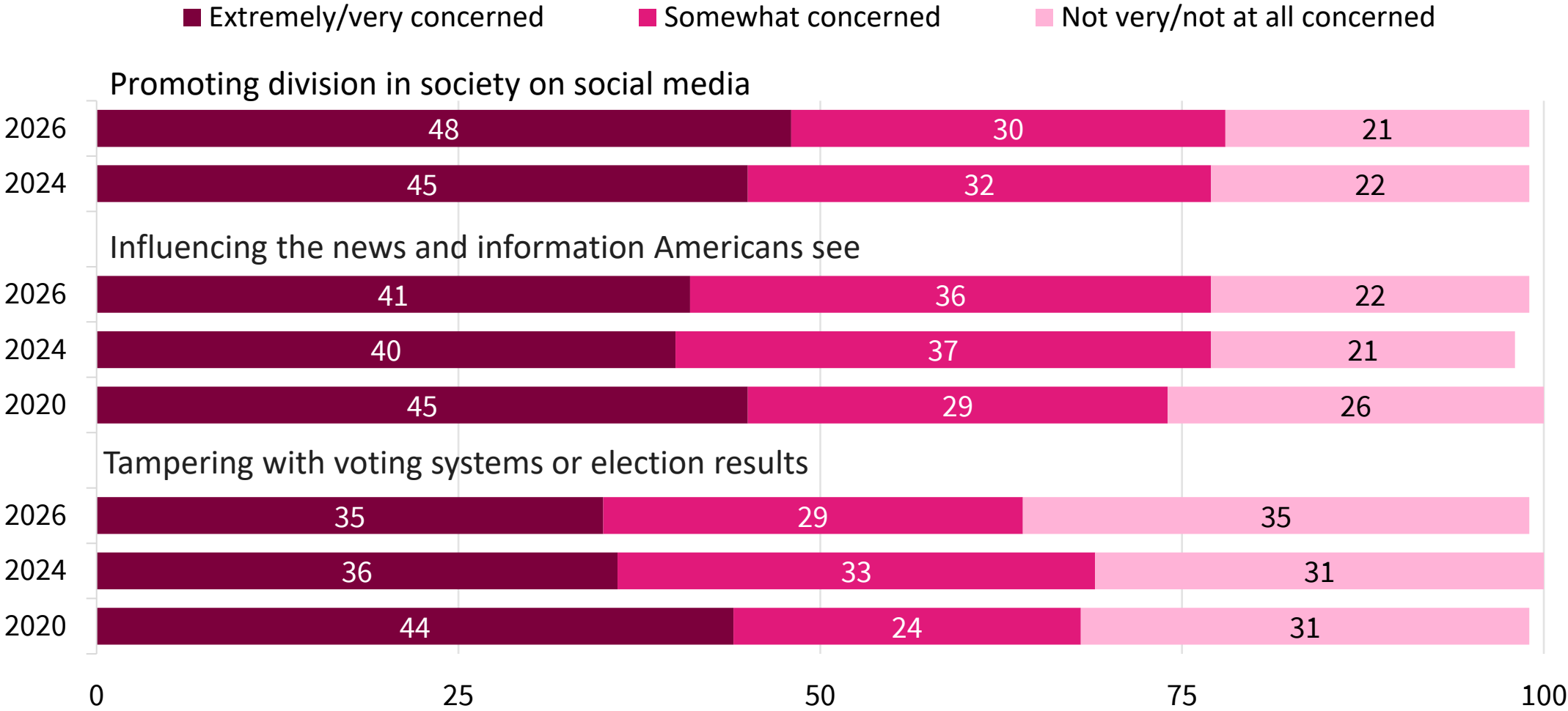
Percent of adults



Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults.

Nearly half are concerned about foreign governments dividing Americans using social media, compared with about 1 in 3 for vote tampering.

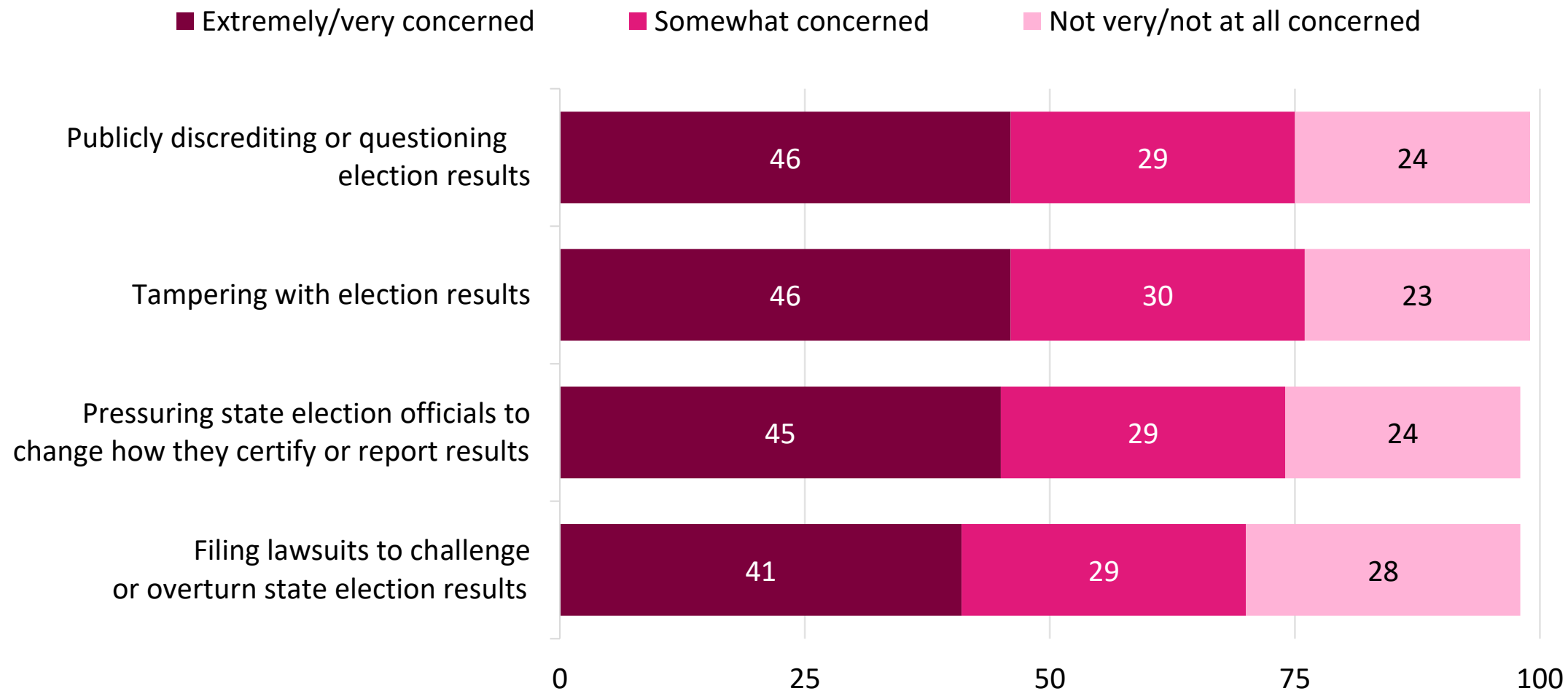
How concerned are you about foreign governments interfering with the 2026 midterm elections by...
Percent of adults



Three-quarters of adults are at least somewhat concerned the federal government will take a range of actions that could undermine the 2026 midterm elections.

Thinking about the 2026 midterm elections, how concerned are you about the federal government doing each of the following?

Percent of adults



Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults.

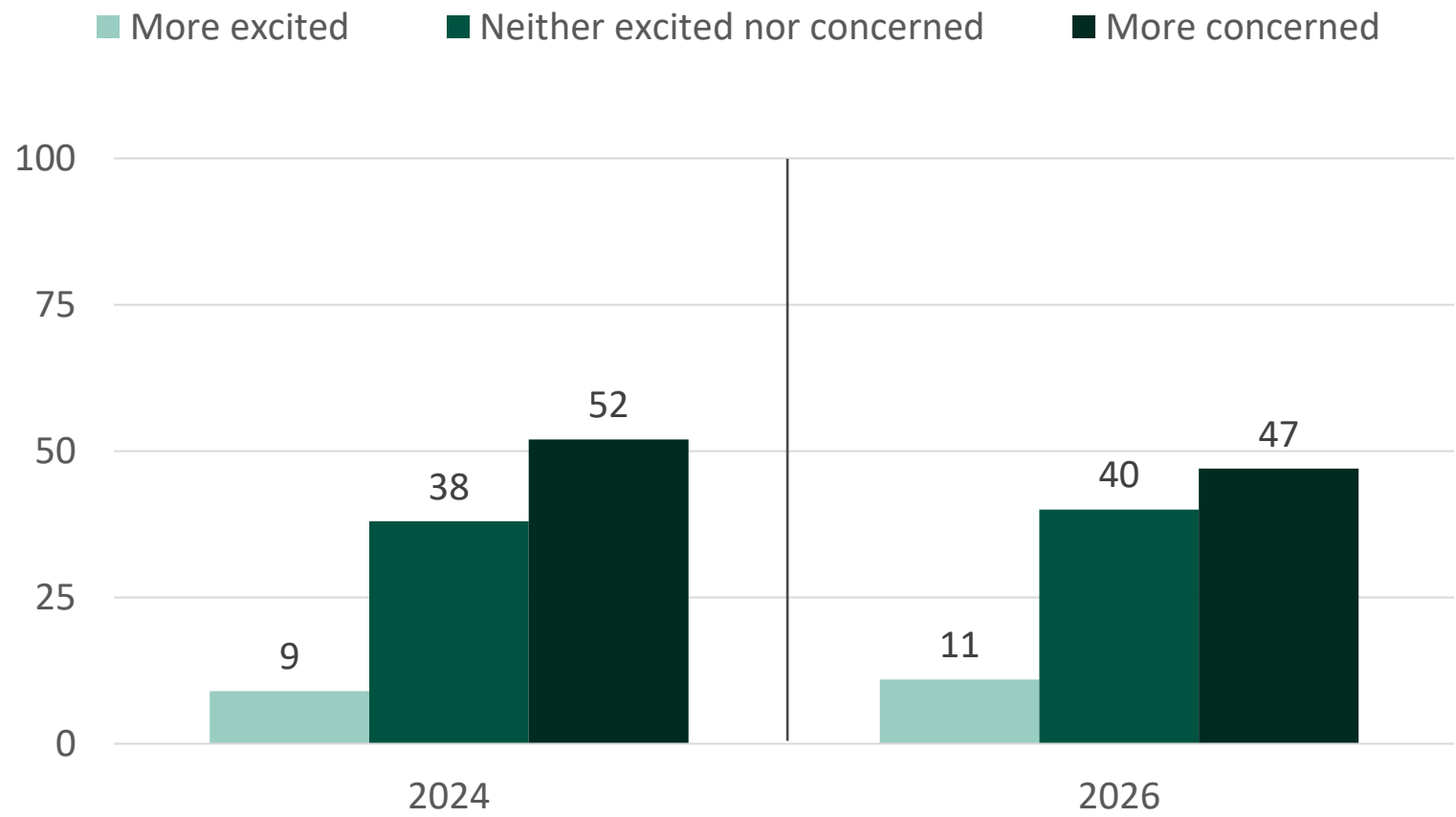
Artificial intelligence and attitudes toward its future



Similar to 2024, about half of adults feel more concerned than excited about the future impact of AI tools.

Thinking about the future impact of artificial intelligence, or AI, tools on how you get information, would you say you feel [more excited, more concerned], or neither excited nor concerned?

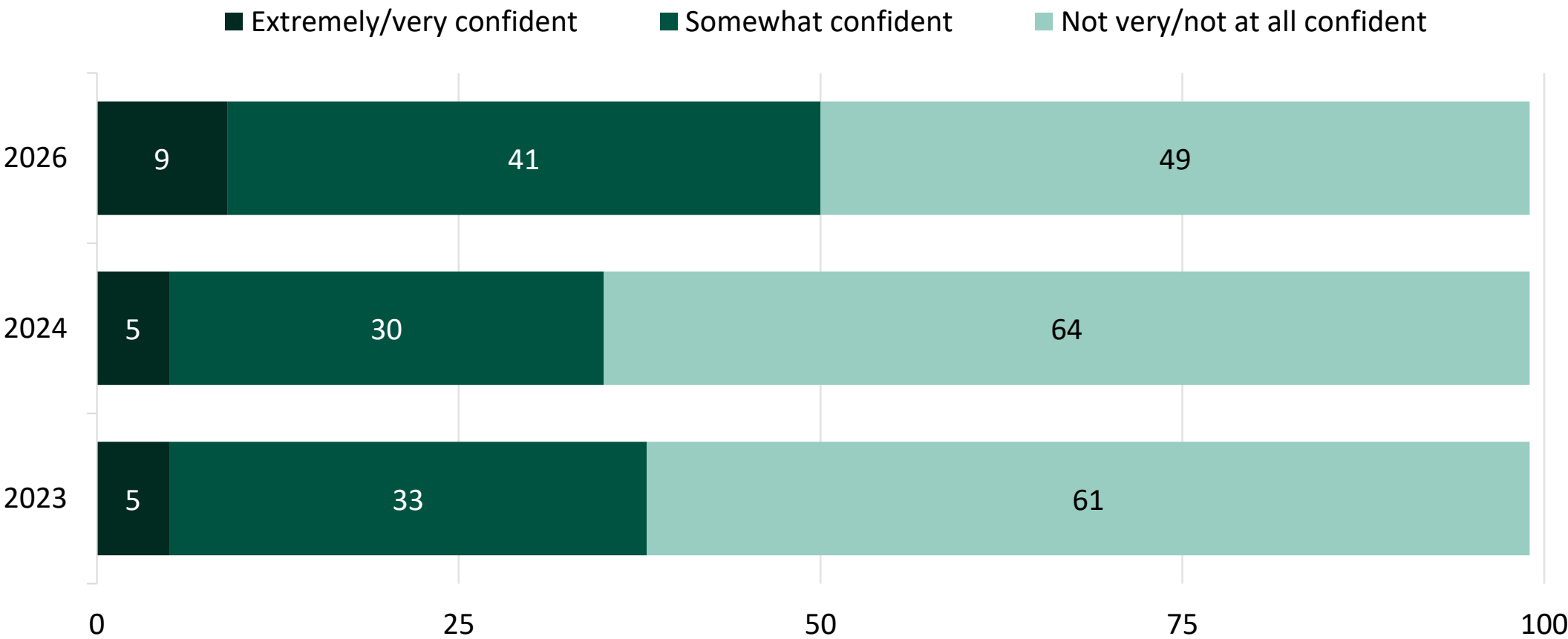
Percent of adults



Confidence in AI-generated information has risen since 2024, though few are extremely or very confident.

How confident are you that information from artificial intelligence, chatbots or search results, is reliable and factual?

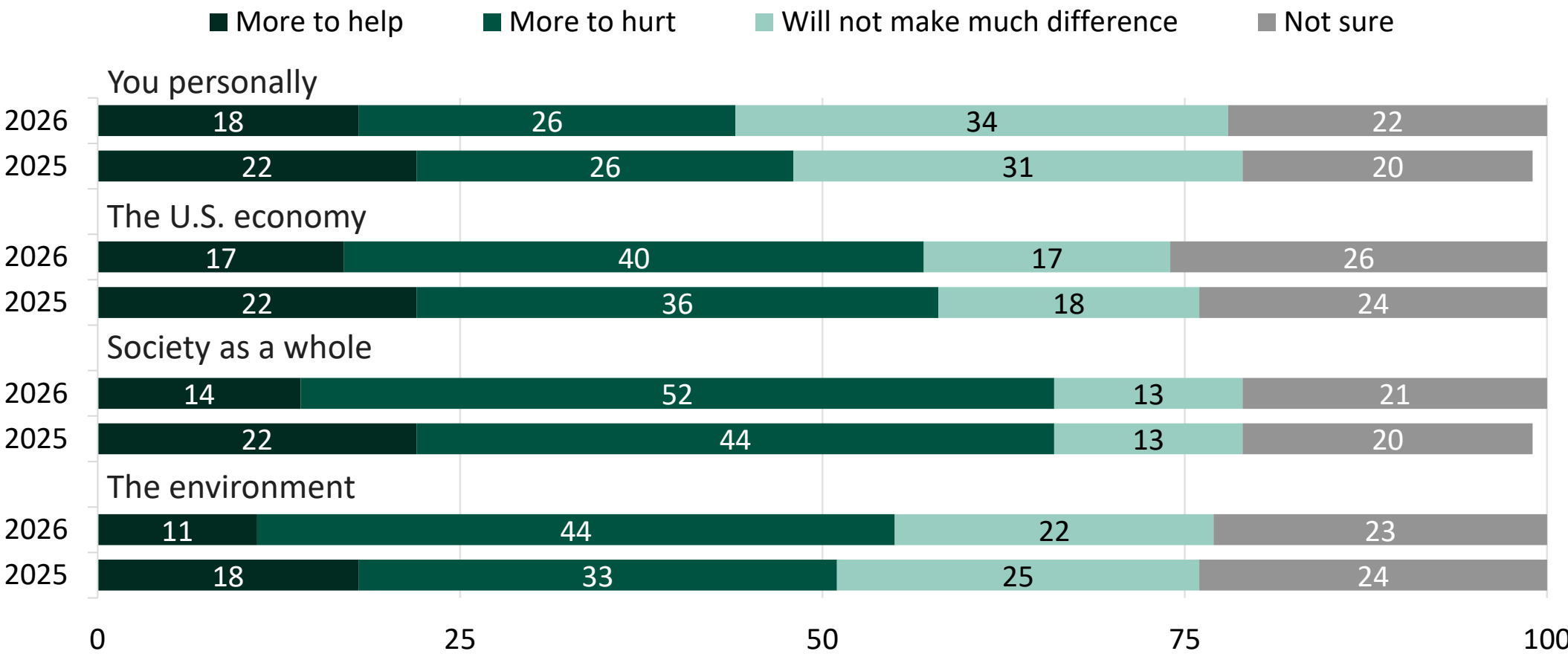
Percent of adults



Adults are more likely to think that AI will do more to hurt than to help the economy, the environment, and society as a whole.

In the next 10 years, do you think artificial intelligence, or AI, will do more to help or more to hurt each of the following, or will it not make much of a difference? If you're not sure, you can say that too.

Percent of adults

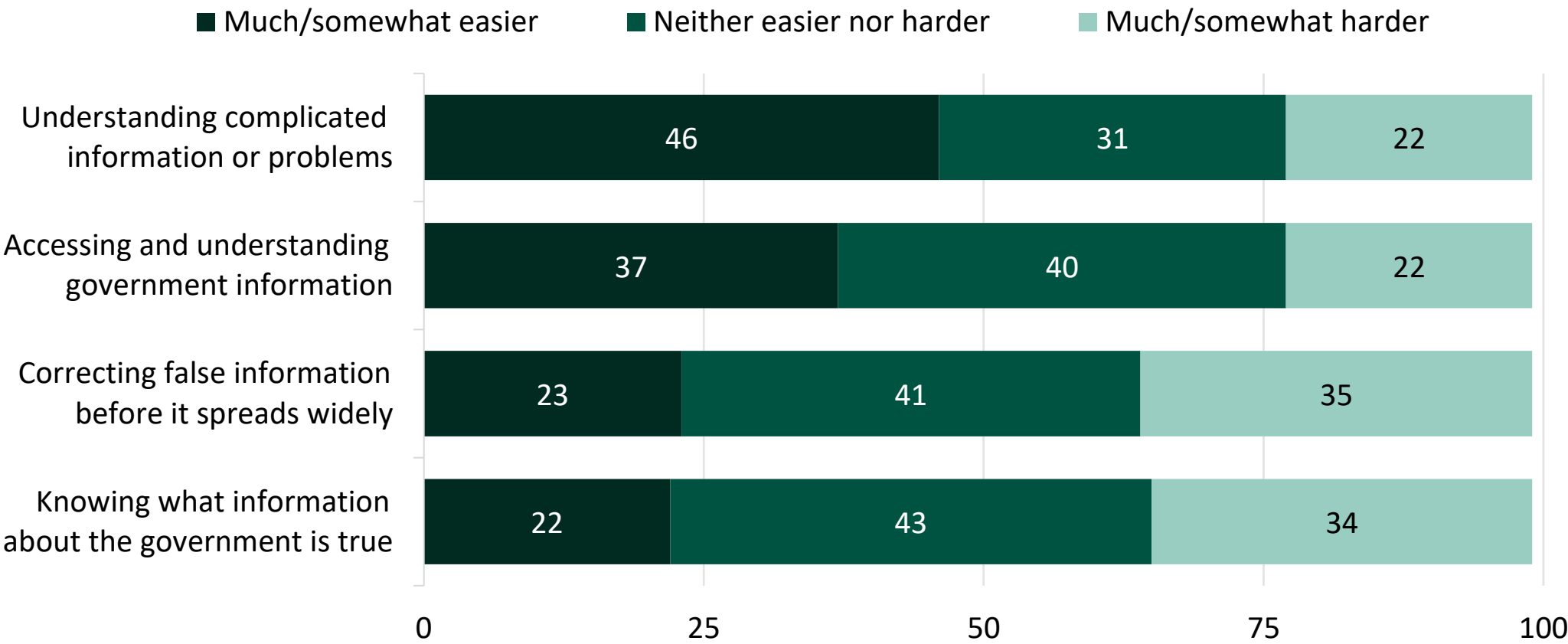


Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults, and EPIC poll conducted September 2-18, 2025, with 3,154 adults.

Almost half of adults think AI will make it easier to understand complicated information, while one-third think it will make correcting false information harder.

Thinking about the future of AI, do you think AI will make each of the following easier, harder, or neither easier nor harder?

Percent of adults

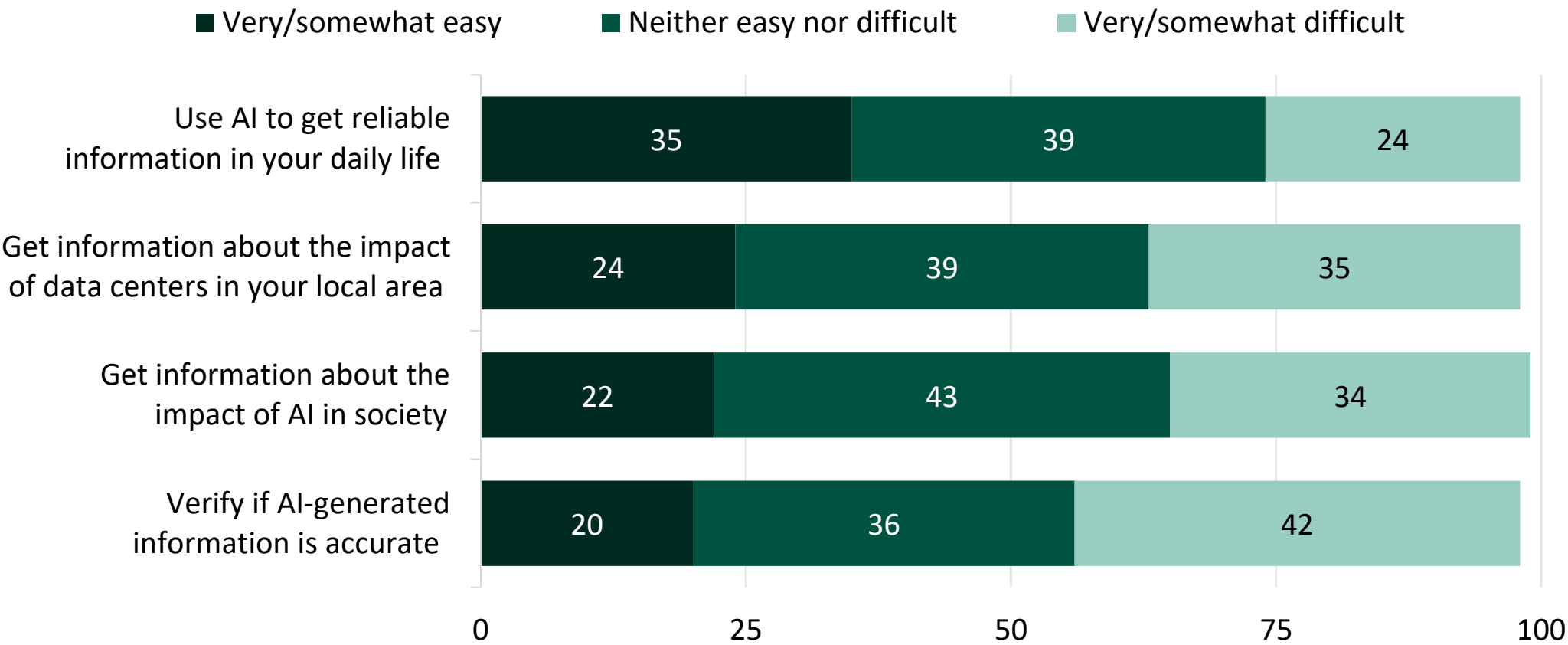


Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted July 29-August 10, 2026, with 1,036 adults.

A third find AI useful for getting reliable information, but many struggle to verify whether AI-generated information is accurate.

When it comes to each of the following, would you say it is easy, difficult, or neither easy nor difficult, for you to...

Percent of adults



Methodology

State of the Facts Poll 2026

- Poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from USAFacts.
- Nationwide poll of 1,036 adults conducted July 29-August 10, 2026 using AmeriSpeak®
 - AmeriSpeak is NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population.
 - 1,017 interviews conducted via the web and 19 via telephone.
 - Interviews conducted in English and Spanish.
- The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points.
- The AAPOR Response Rate 3 is 10.3%.
- Complete topline and methodology is available at www.apnorc.org