



The **LIFE, LIBERTY, and** **HAPPINESS PROJECT**

THE STATE OF THE NATION, 242 YEARS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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THE CENTER FOR SURVEY RESEARCH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two hundred and forty-two years ago, on July 4th, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was adopted. In the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson famously wrote that life, liberty, and happiness are unalienable rights for all to pursue. July 4th provides an opportunity to celebrate these rights. Yet, it also represents an opportunity to take stock of our progress. From the founding of the country to today, part of the American ideal has been to ensure everyone has the same opportunity to seek life, liberty, and happiness. The goal of the ECU Life, Liberty, and Happiness Project is to provide an ongoing examination of our progress as a country toward achieving life, liberty, and happiness for all Americans. This report serves as our inaugural contribution.

Indeed, in an era that feels increasingly partisan and polarized, this project's purpose is to highlight shared experiences among Americans as well as identify differences.

Headed by the ECU Center for Survey Research in the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences, the Life, Liberty, and Happiness Project is a recent nationwide survey of more than 1,100 adults who were contacted through mail, internet, or phone (for more information about the survey methodology, see the Appendix of the report). Indicators of life, liberty, and happiness were selected by a team of experts at ECU.

One of the report's primary findings is that:

Despite political divisions, most Americans are satisfied with their lives. However, finances, age, and approval of President Trump reveal differences.

- Those struggling with their monthly finances report the lowest levels of life satisfaction.
- Older Americans are the most likely to express satisfaction with their lives.
- Those who approve of President Trump's job performance are more likely than those who disapprove to report being satisfied with their lives.

More highlights from the Life, Liberty, and Happiness sections of the survey appear on the next two pages.



Life

The pursuit of health, safety, and well-being

The findings show common areas of well-being, but also some evidence that not all Americans have the same opportunity to achieve a long, healthy life.

More Americans are optimistic that they will live longer than their parents as compared to those who think they will live the same length or shorter lives than their parents.

However, there are stark divides by financial status, and race and class.

Most Americans feel included and connected to others.

A majority of the public reports that they “hardly ever” lack companionship, feel left out, or feel isolated from others.

- However, nearly one-quarter of those who do not have enough money to make ends meet to pay their monthly bills report “often” feeling left out compared with only 8% of those who have money left over at the end of the month to buy extras or save.

Drug abuse and access to healthcare are top health concerns among Americans.

When asked to answer what the most serious health problem was that faced people in their community, the most common responses were drug abuse (including prescription drug abuse) and access to healthcare.

Many Americans cannot afford prescription medication.

Almost three out of ten (29%) Americans report that there was a time in the past 12 months when they needed prescription medication, but could not afford it.

Liberty

The pursuit of freedom

The findings reveal some unity, but many political divisions remain.

There is unity on taxes.

Three-fifths of Americans (60%) believe that taxes are too high on those who earn middle incomes, an opinion shared by majorities of those who approve of President Trump (64%) and those who disapprove (58%).

Divisions exist on free speech, guns, and marijuana.

Significant partisan and generational differences exist on issues of freedom of expression, gun control policy, and the legalization of recreational marijuana.

But, there is some agreement on gun policy.

While mostly divided on gun control policy, there is unity on two proposals: denying gun sales to those who fail mental health background checks and those convicted of domestic violence.

A majority of Americans are critical of the press, with Republicans and Independents especially critical.

Less than a quarter of Americans (23%) have “a great deal” or “a lot” of trust in the mass media to report the news accurately. The results also show that 35% of Republicans and 28% of Independents have “no trust at all” in the media to report the news accurately, compared to 8% of Democrats.

Happiness

The pursuit of a life well lived

The findings reveal overall successes in achieving this unalienable right, but also stark divides.

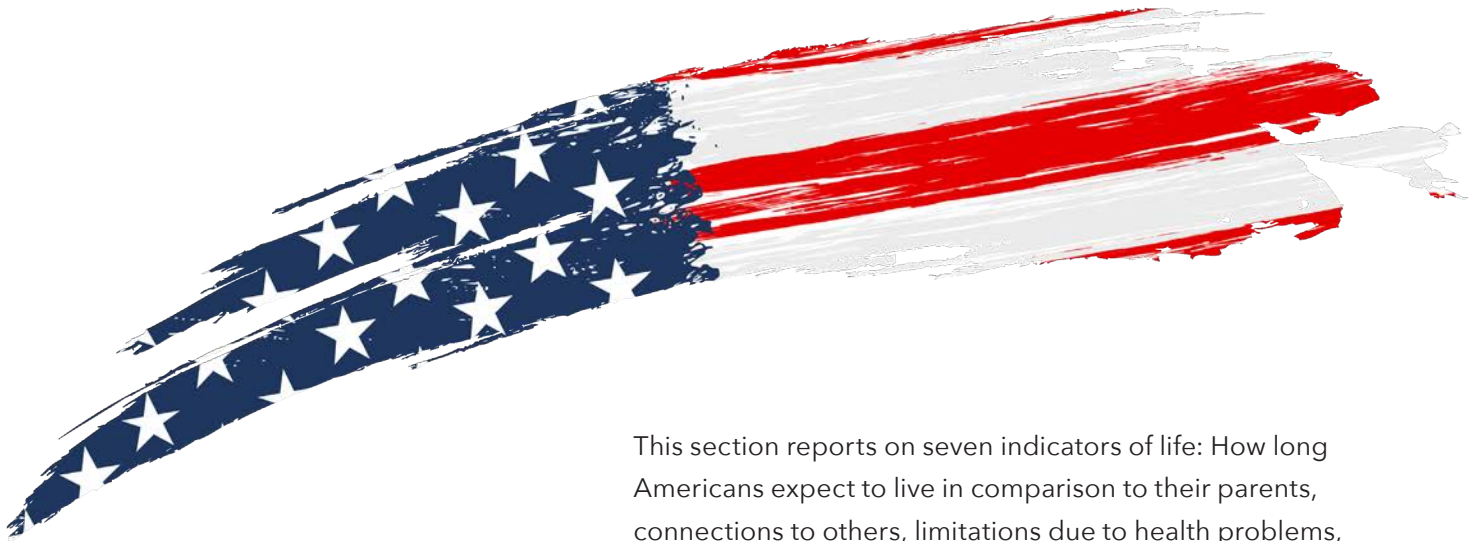
In addition to high percentages of Americans reporting that they are satisfied with their lives, the results also show that a large majority of adults (65%) report that they have gotten the important things that they want in life.

Yet, that assessment is not equally shared by Americans.

- Those struggling financially and those who are younger are the most likely to report that they have not gotten the important things that they want in life.
- Those who approve of President Trump’s job performance are more likely than those who disapprove to report that they have gotten the important things that they want in life.

Life

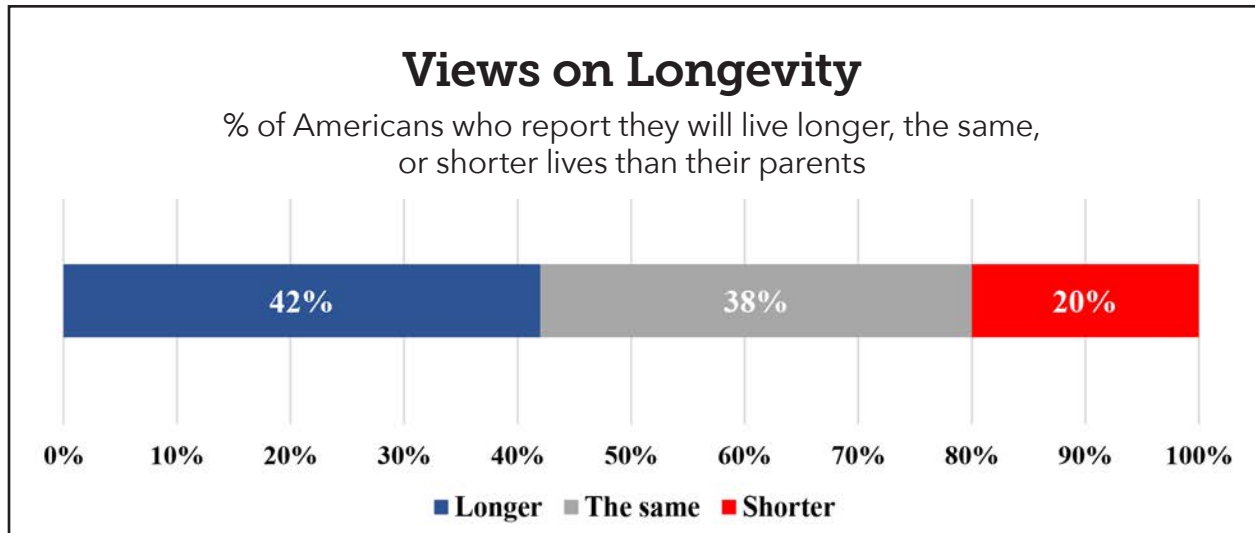
The pursuit of health, safety, and well-being



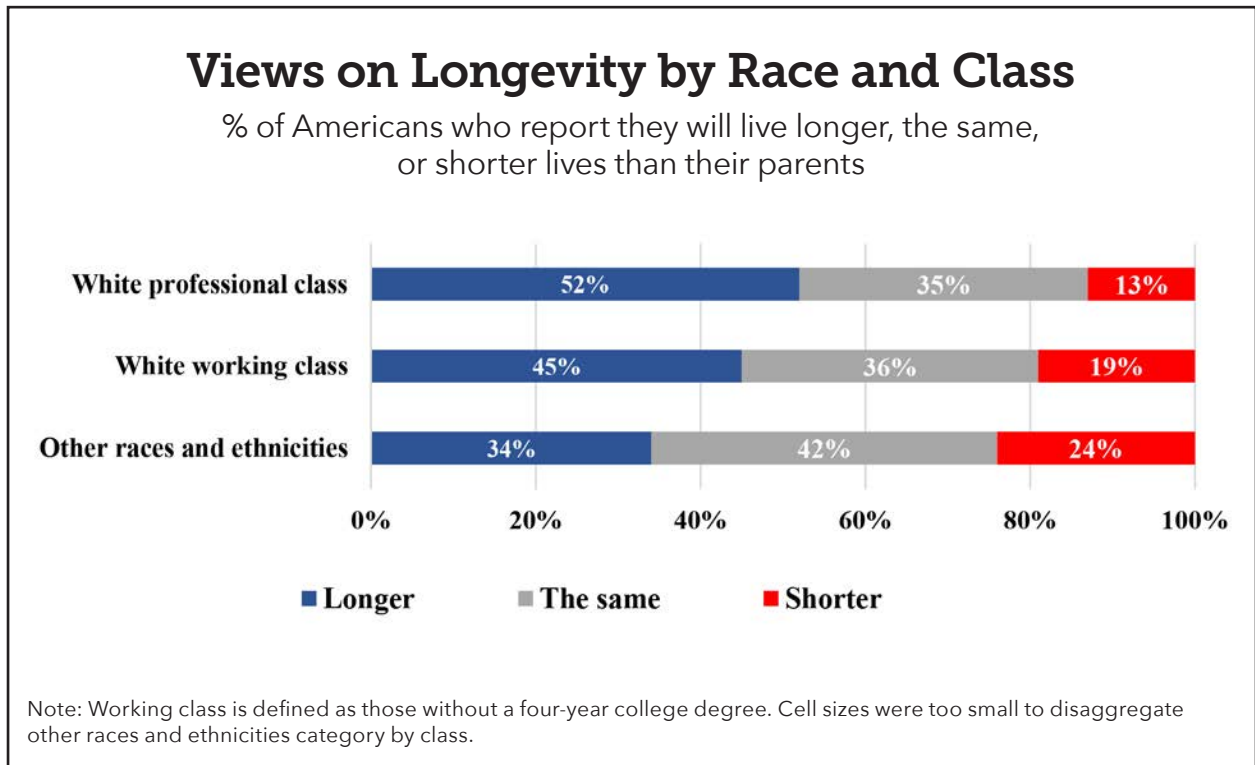
This section reports on seven indicators of life: How long Americans expect to live in comparison to their parents, connections to others, limitations due to health problems, health concerns in American communities, opioid prescriptions, and the presence of loaded and unlocked firearms in households (which potentially places family members at greater risk of unintentional shooting and intentional self-harm).

► **Americans, overall, have a positive view of their longevity.**

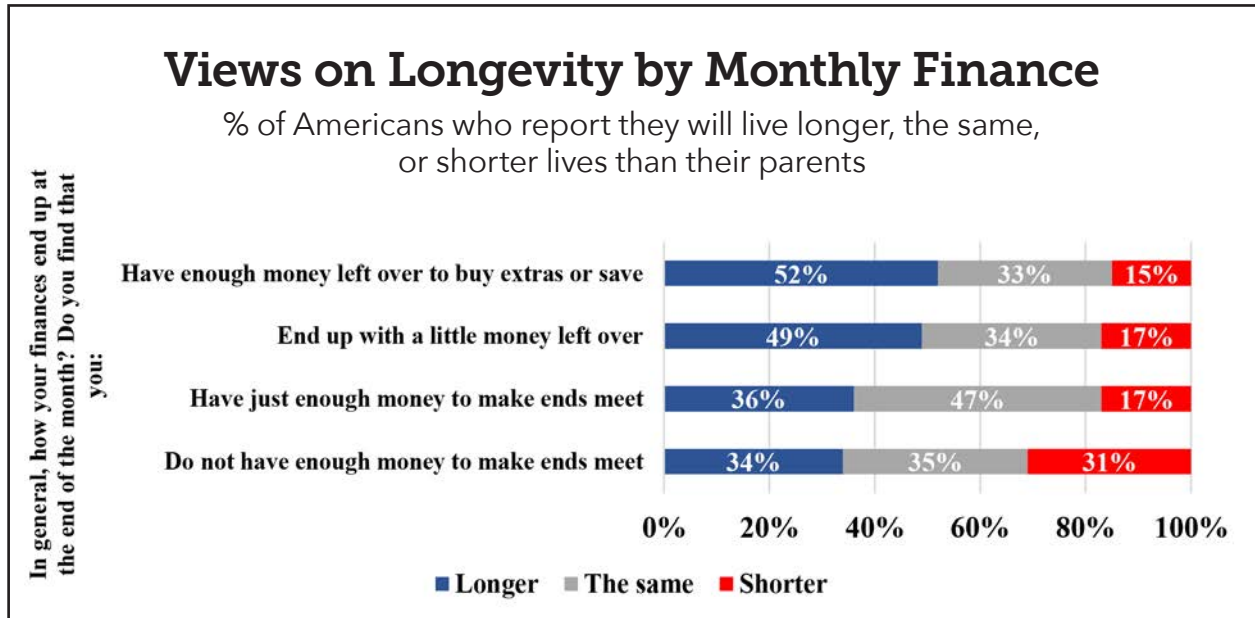
- More Americans believe they will live longer than their parents (42%) than the same (38%) or shorter (20%).



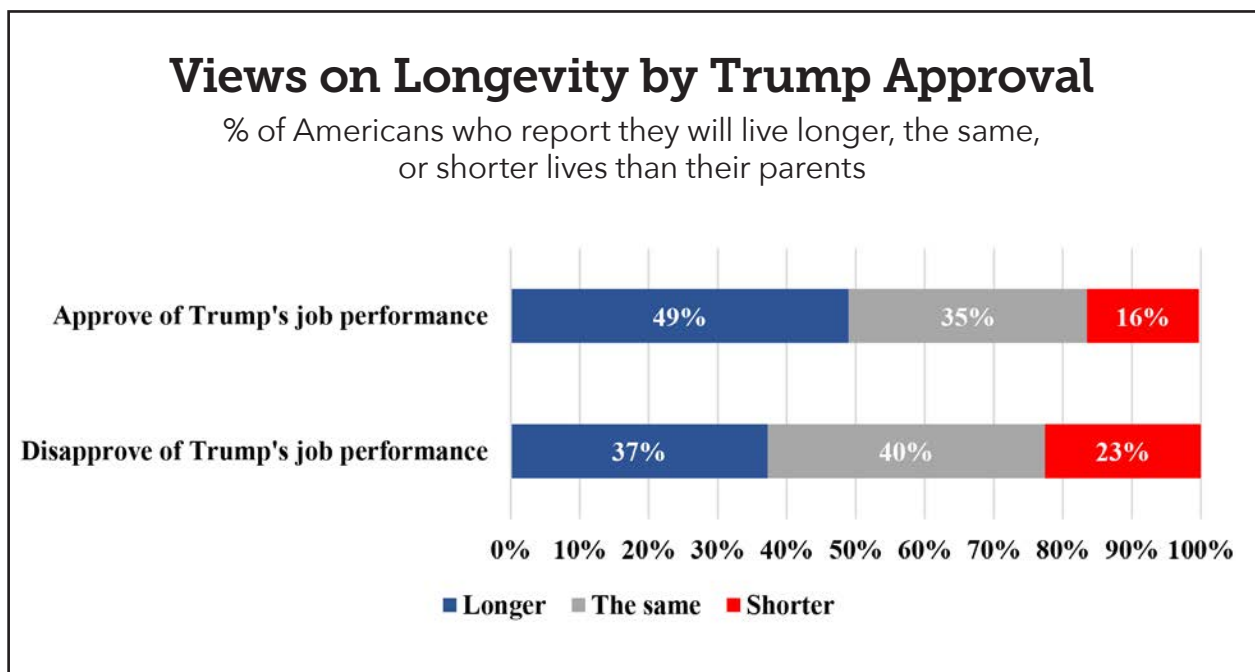
- However, this is sharply divided by race and class.



- Nor is this positive view shared across financial stability. Over half (52%) of Americans who report they end up with enough money left over to buy extras or save at the end of the month expect to live longer than their parents, while only 34% of Americans who report not having enough money to make ends meet expect to live longer than their parents.

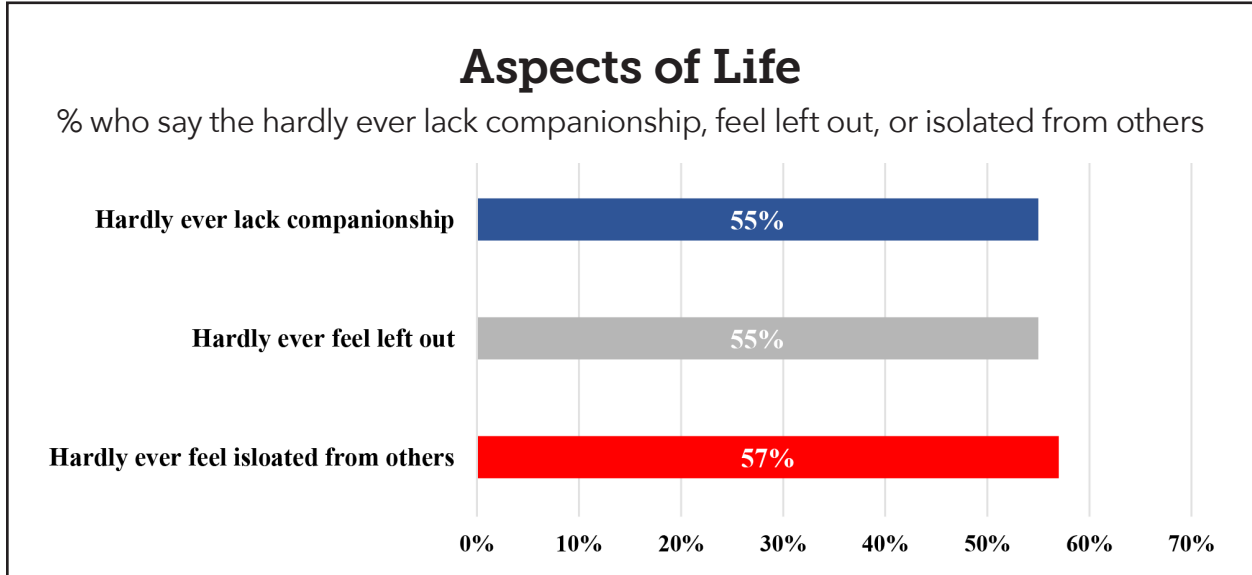


- Among Americans who approve of President Trump’s job performance, 49% think they will live longer than their parents, while only 37% of those who disapprove of his handling think this.

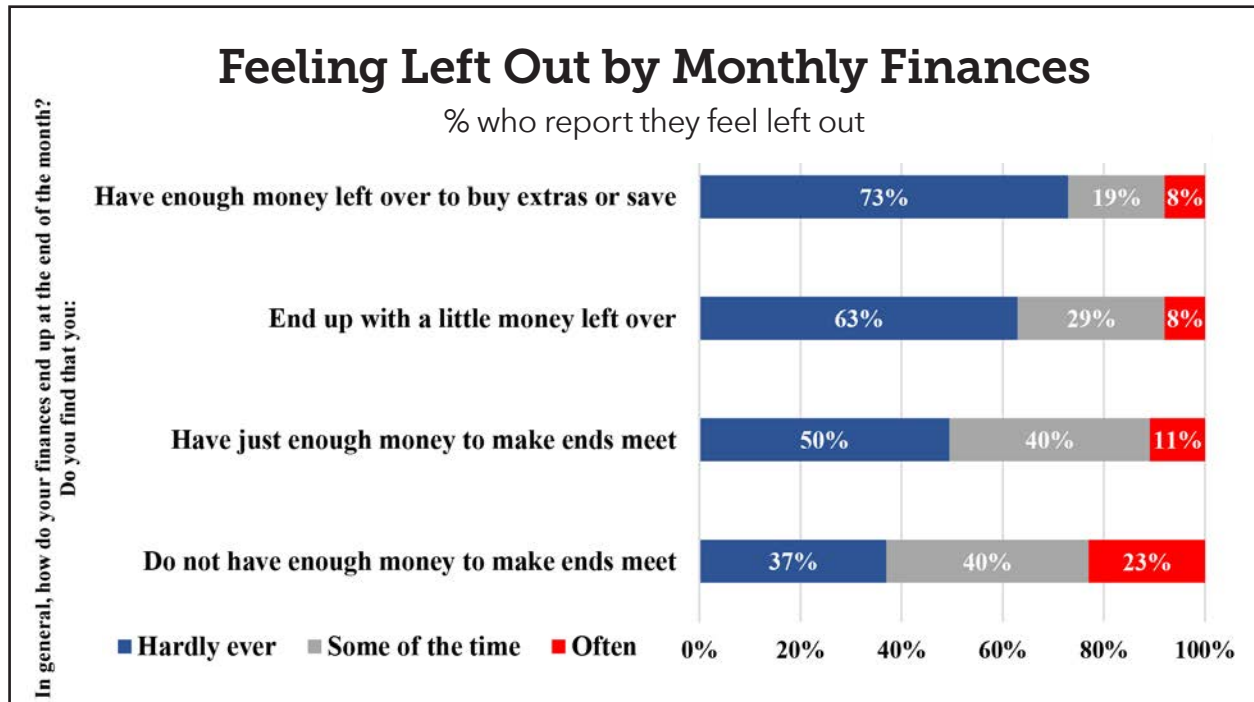


► **A majority of Americans feel connected to others.**

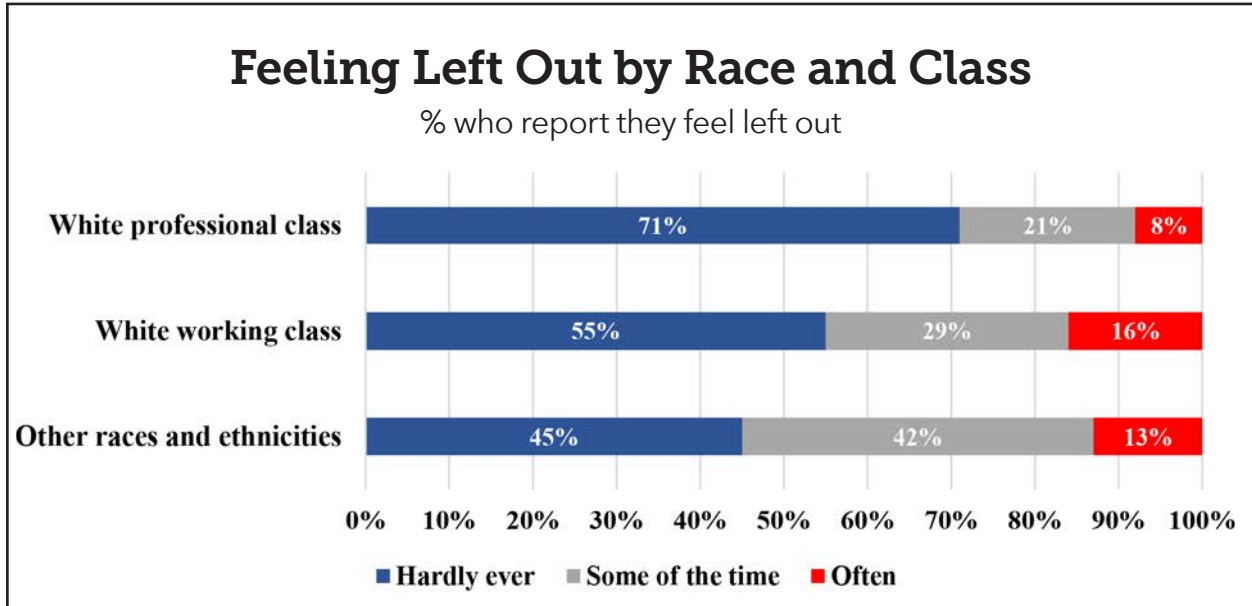
Approximately 55% report that they “hardly ever” lack companionship, 55% hardly ever feel left out, and 57% hardly ever feel isolated from others.



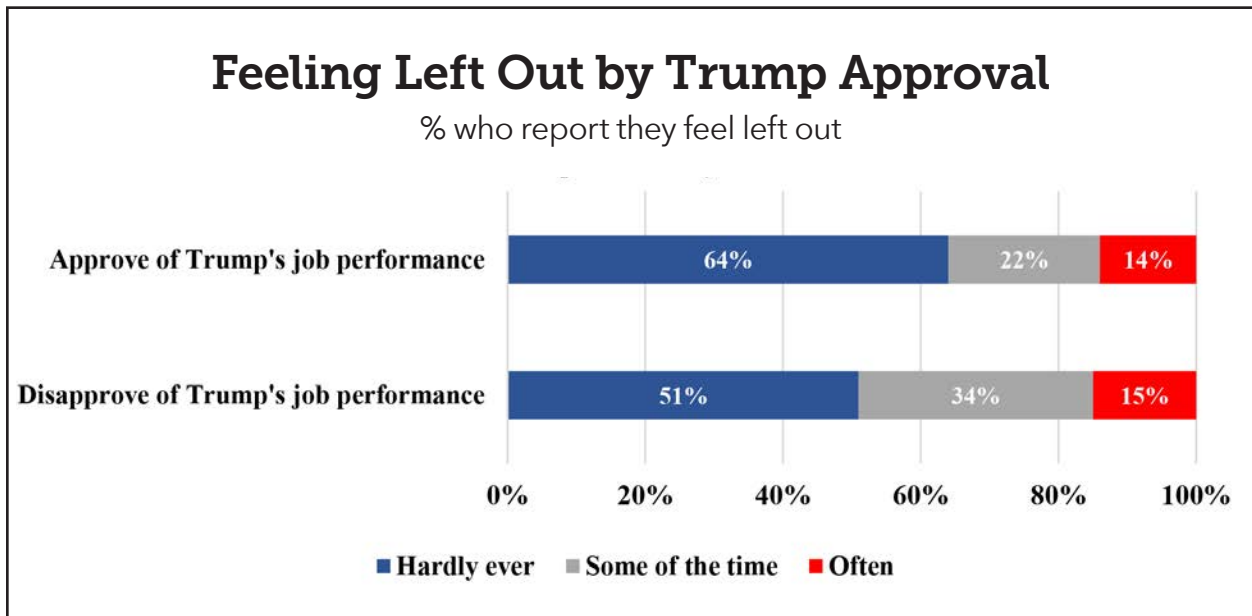
- However, a lack of companionship, feeling left out, and feeling isolated from others are higher among some groups, including those who are struggling financially. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of those who do not have enough money to make ends meet report “often” feeling left out compared with only 8% of those who usually have money left over at the end of the month.



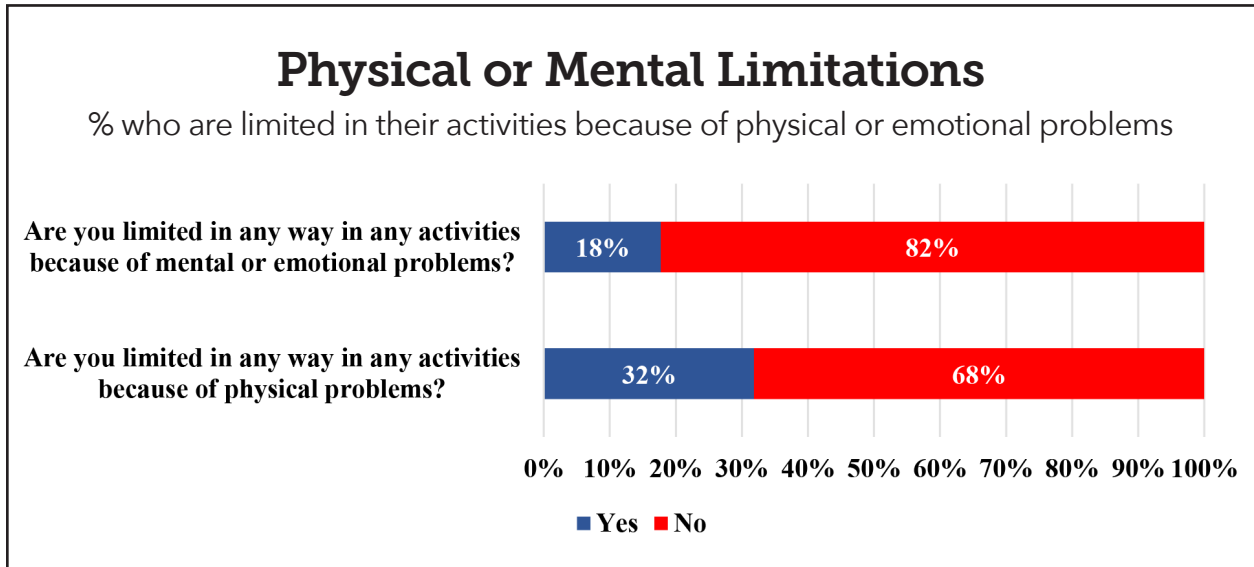
- White working-class adults and adults of other races are more likely to often feel left out (16%, 13%) compared with white professionals (8%).



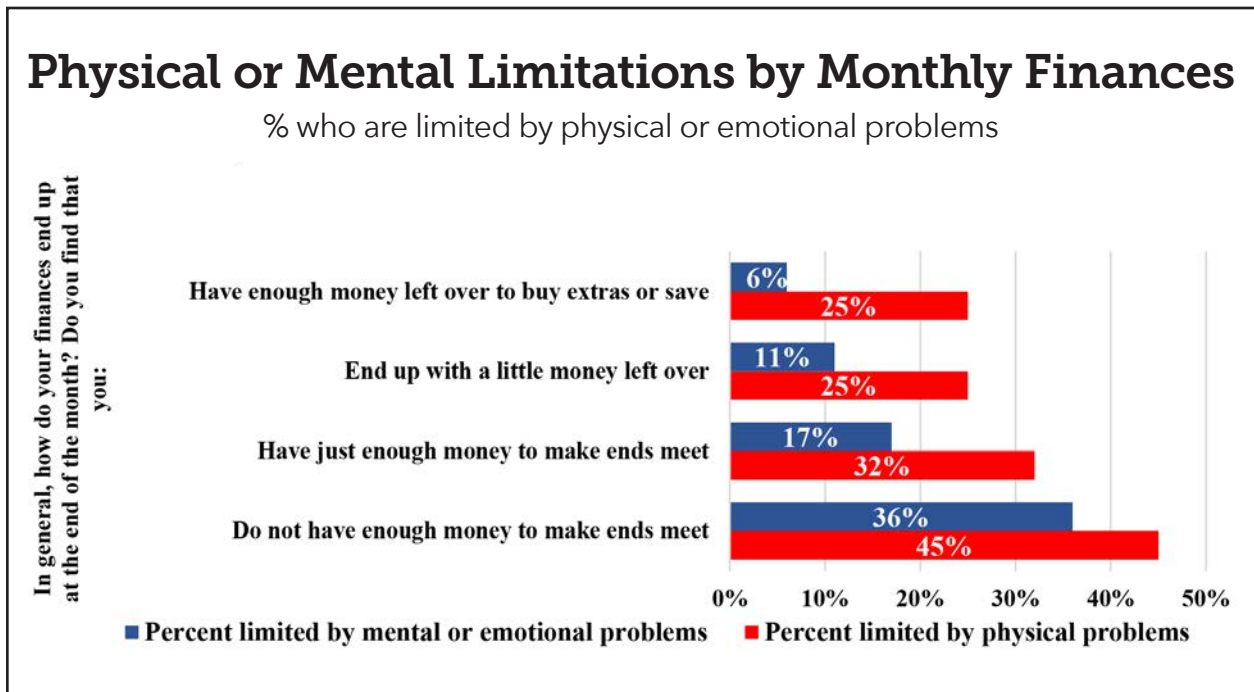
- Those who approve of President Trump’s job performance are equally likely to often feel isolated from others compared with those who disapprove (14% versus 15%). However, those who approve of President Trump’s job performance are more likely to report that they “hardly ever” feel isolated from others (64%) compared those who disapprove of President Trump’s job performance (51%).



- ▶ *Nearly one-third of American adults (32%) are limited in some way in their activities because of physical problems, and 18% are limited because of mental or emotional problems.*

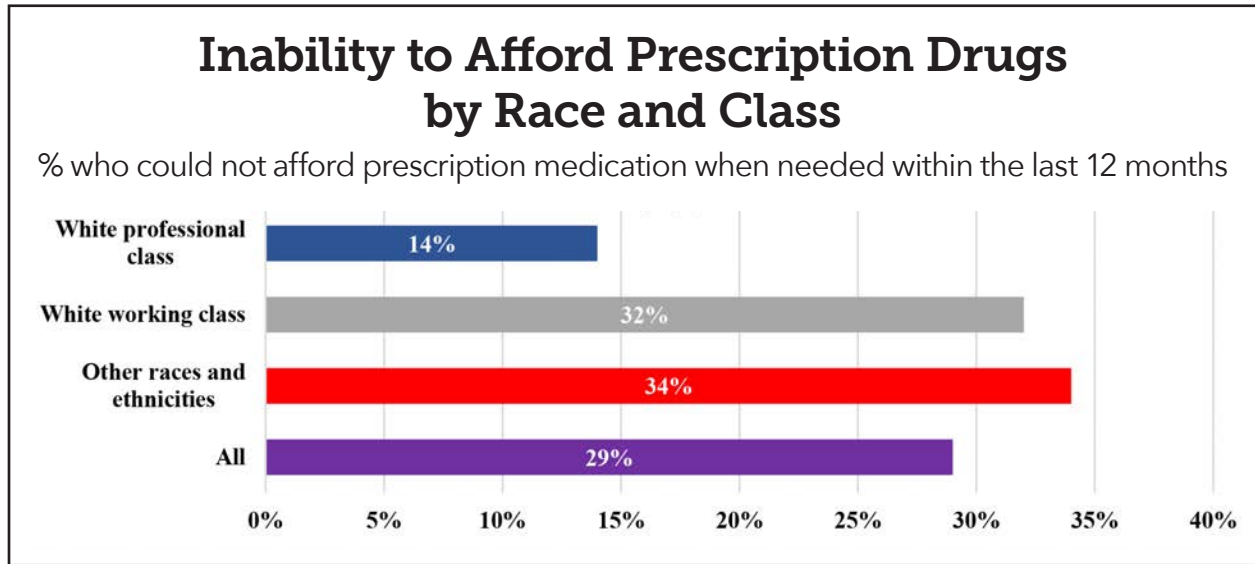


- Those who do not have enough money to make ends meet are more likely to be limited by both physical and mental problems than those better off.



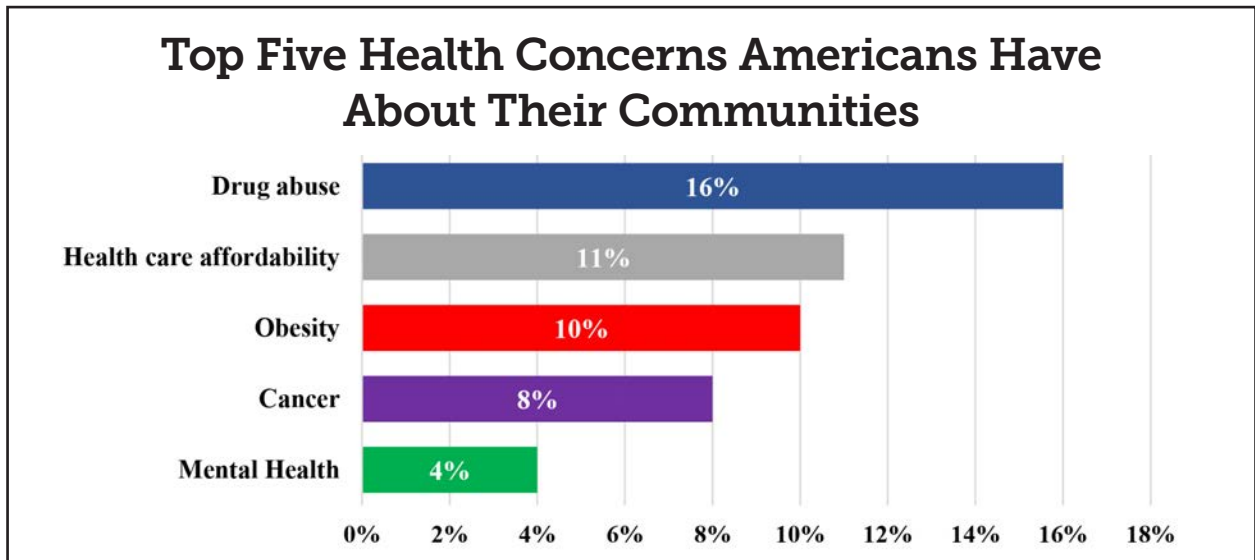
► **Almost 3 in 10 Americans said there was a time in the past 12 months when they needed a prescription medication but could not afford it.**

- This experience is shared among Americans who approve and disapprove of President Trump’s job performance (30% and 28%, respectively). However, both working-class white Americans and Americans of other races and ethnicities are more likely to report this than white professionals.



► **Drug abuse and healthcare affordability are the major concerns Americans have about health in their communities.**

- When asked an open-ended question, “Think about your community. What do you think is the most serious health problem in your community?”, the most common response was drug abuse/addiction (including prescription drug abuse) given by 16% of participants, followed by healthcare (including availability of affordable healthcare) given by 11% of participants, and obesity by 10% of participants.



► ***More than a quarter of Americans (26%) reported being given an opioid prescription in the past 12 months, while 38% of all Americans report never having an opioid prescription.***

- Yet, there are significant differences in who reports receiving an opioid prescription. Just 15% of those who have enough money left over at the end of the month to buy extras or save report being given an opioid prescription in the past 12 months compared to 46% of those who do not have enough money to make ends meet.
- There are also differences by race/ethnicity and class. While 17% of white professionals report an opioid prescription in the past 12 months, 32% of those of other races or ethnicities and 24% of white working-class participants report an opioid prescription.

► ***Almost 4 in 10 U.S. adults (38%) live in a household with at least one firearm, and among them one-quarter have one or more loaded and unlocked firearms present in the household.***

- Firearm presence in the household is associated with financial status. The proportion with at least one gun in their household decreased from 54% among those in households with excellent financial situations to 20% among those living in households with very poor financial situations.
- Gun presence does not vary by mental health problems: 39% of those who reported that they are limited by mental or emotional problems reported the presence of one or more firearms in their home compared with 37% among those with no mental health limitations. However, among those with guns in their homes, those with mental limitations are more likely to have a loaded and unlocked firearm compared with those without mental limitations (40% vs. 21%).
- Those who approve of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president are more likely to have a gun in their household compared to those who disapprove (49% vs. 28%), but among those with firearms those who approve of President Trump and those who disapprove are equally likely to report at least one loaded and unlocked gun.

Liberty

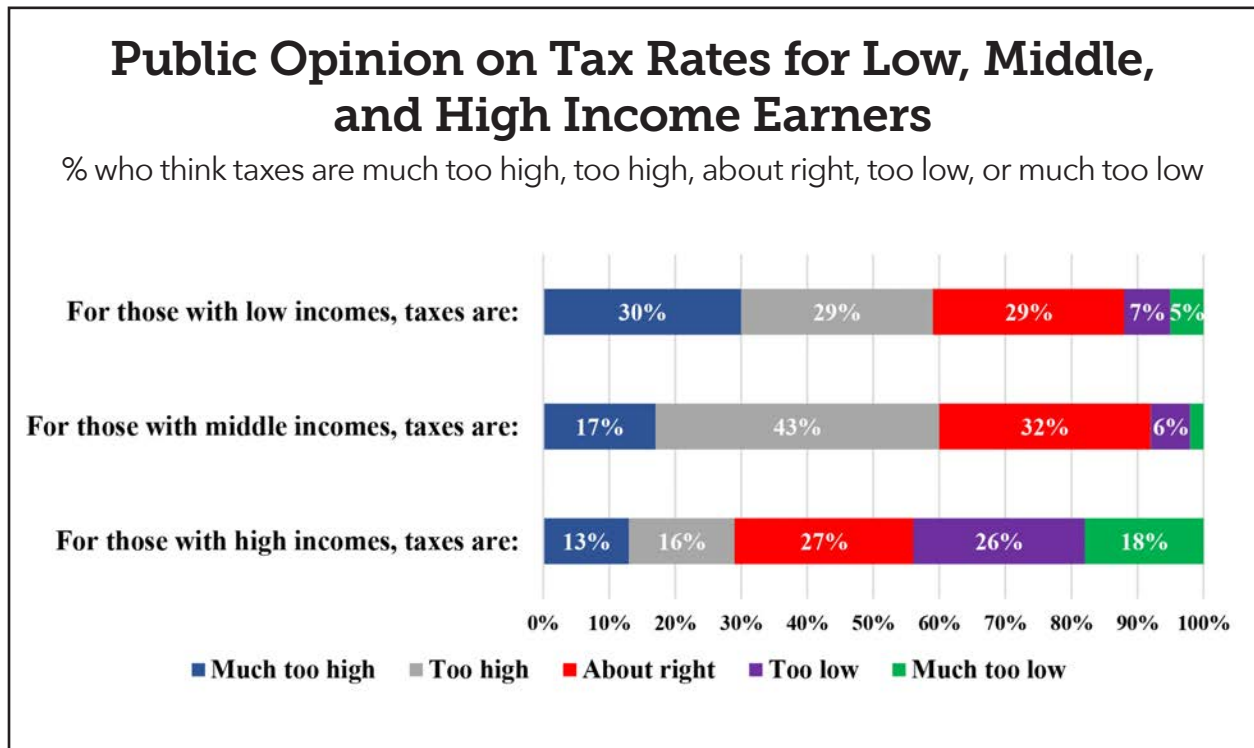
The pursuit of freedom



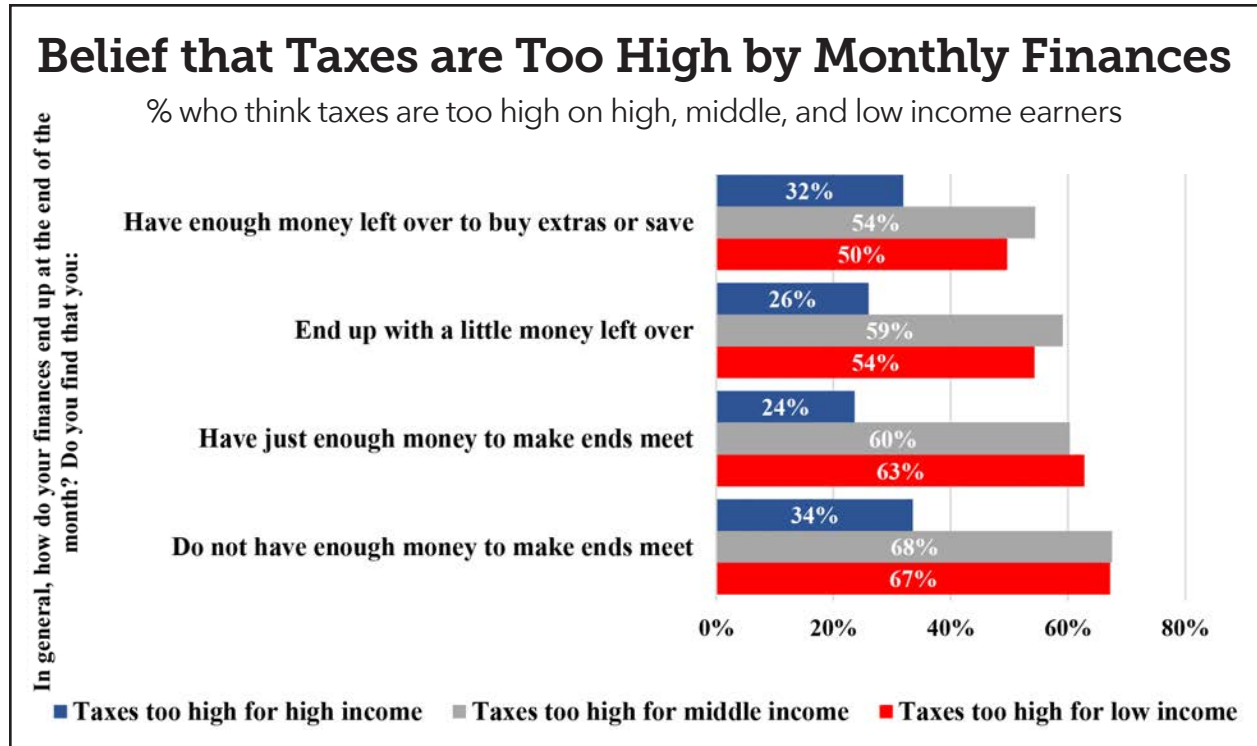
This section reports on the following indicators of liberty: taxes, freedom of expression, gun policy, issues of personal freedom (marijuana legalization for recreational purposes and legalized sports gambling), and issues related to free press and media.

► **Americans largely agree the middle class and the poor are over-taxed and the rich are under-taxed.**

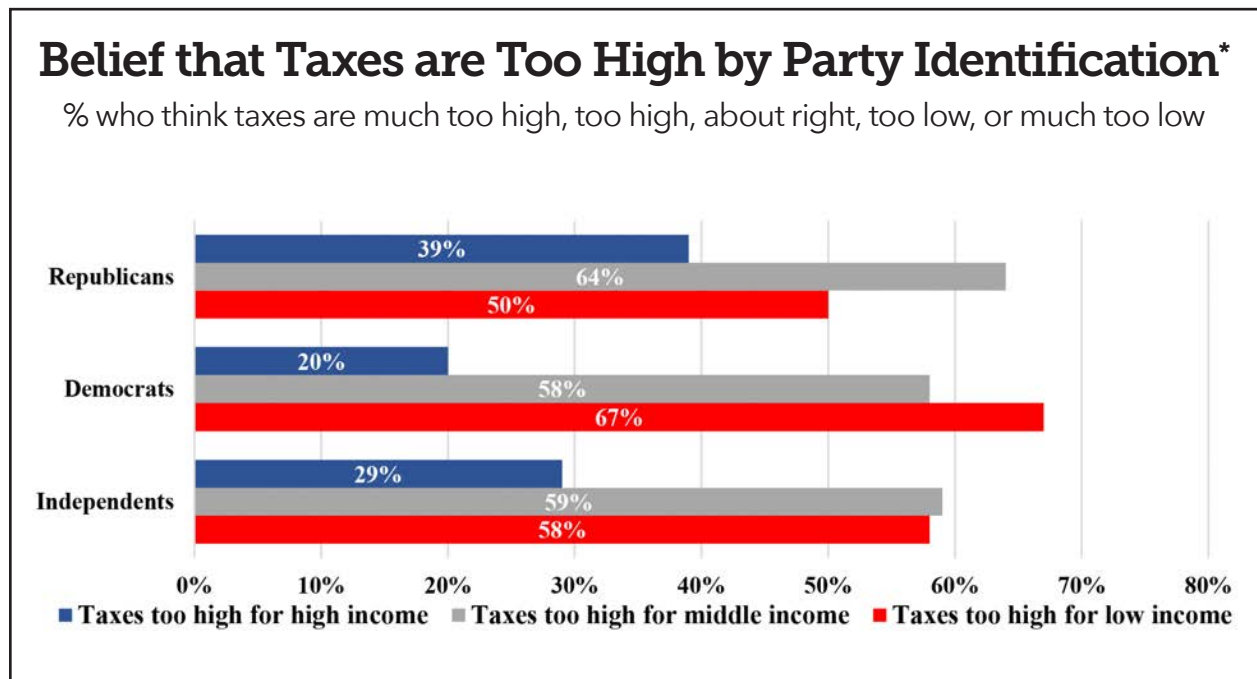
A majority of Americans believe those with middle incomes pay taxes that are too high (60%). More than two out of five Americans (44%) think taxes on the wealthy are too low, while only 28% think they are too high. Only 12% of Americans believe that taxes are too low on those with low incomes.



- Somewhat surprisingly, a person’s household finances show no clear patterns on opinions about whether the wealthy pay too much in taxes; however, patterns do emerge for opinions about taxes on the middle class and the poor. Those under the most financial stress are the most likely to report that taxes are too high for those with middle or low incomes.



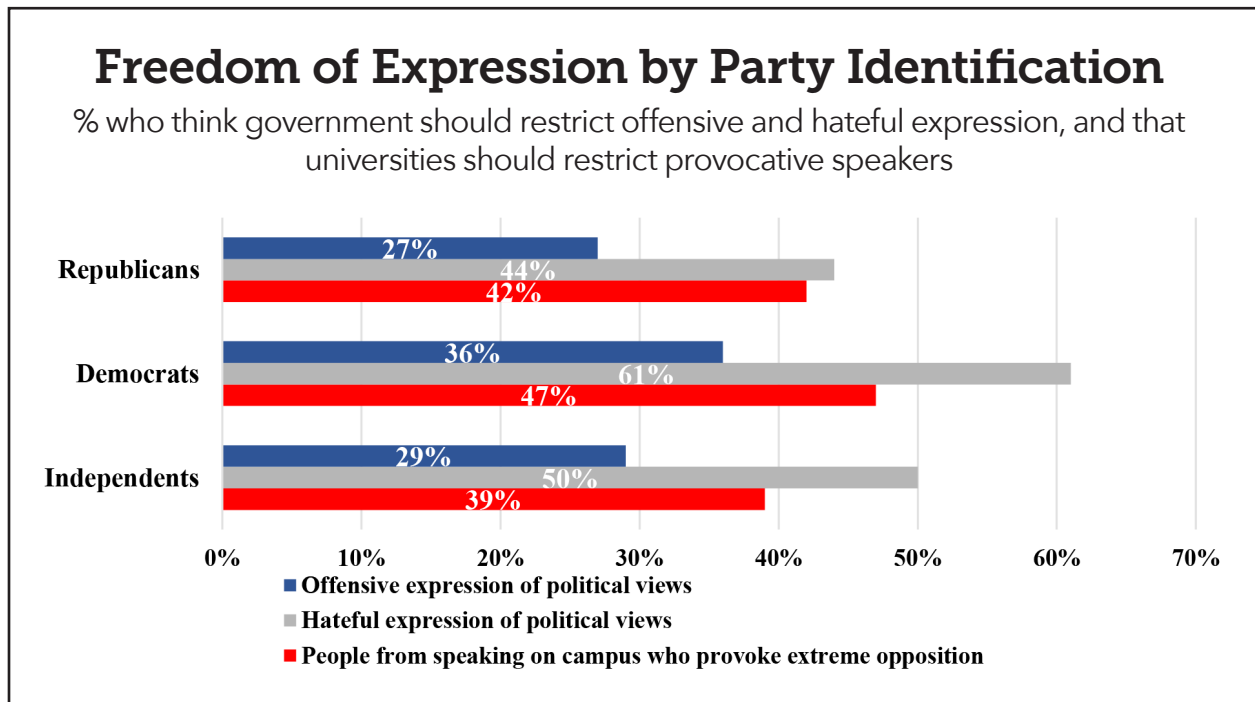
- Along partisan lines, we also see some general agreement that taxes are too high for those with middle income.



* Note: Independents who lean Republican are classified as Republicans. Independents who lean Democrat are classified as Democrats. Independents are those who identify as Independents and do not lean toward either party.

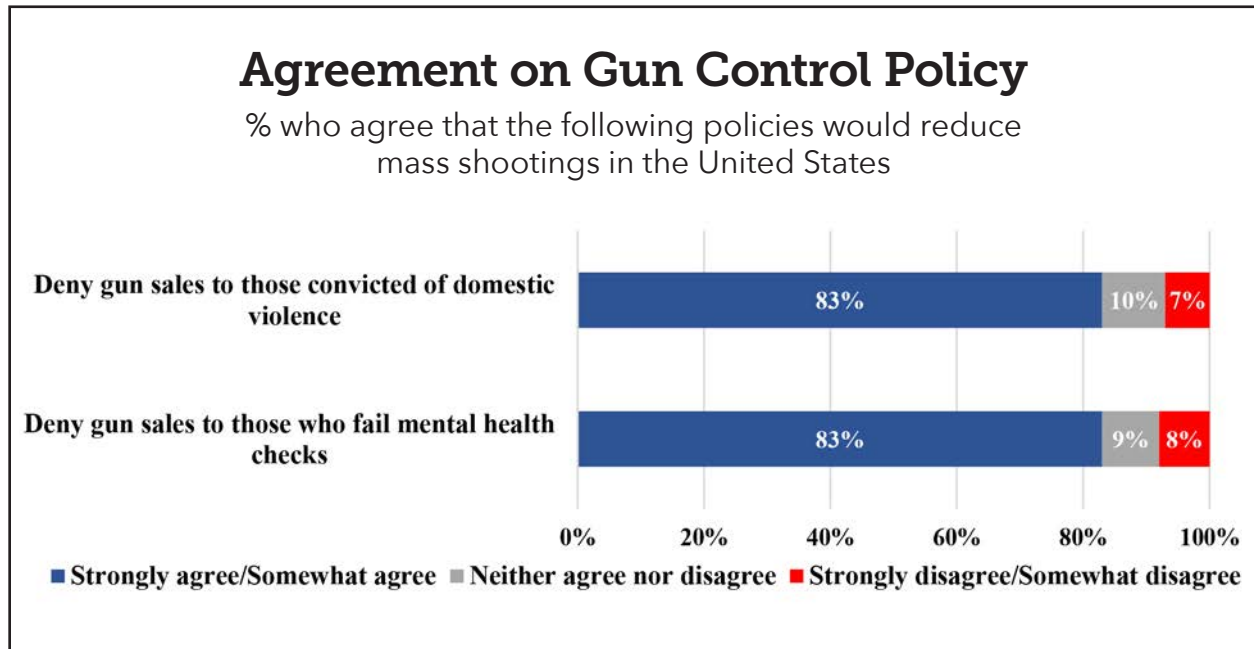
► **Democrats are more supportive of government restriction of offensive and hateful speech.**

Thirty-six percent of Democrats say the government should restrict the expression of political views that are offensive to certain groups, compared to only 27% of Republicans. Sixty-one percent of Democrats say the government should restrict the expression of political views that are hateful to certain groups, compared to 44% of Republicans. Forty-seven percent think college campuses and universities should restrict speakers who have a history of provoking extreme opposition, compared to 42% of Republicans.



► *There is some agreement on gun control policy, but clear divides remain.*

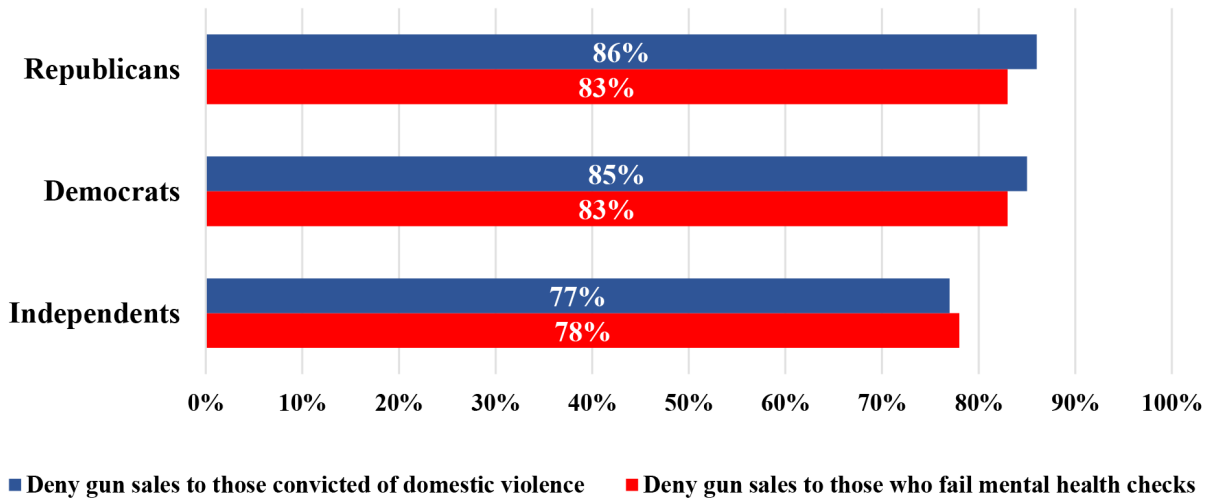
The vast majority of Americans agree (83%) that denying gun sales to those who fail mental health checks and to those convicted of domestic violence would reduce mass shootings in the United States.



- This is true across partisan and political lines. While there are laws that already cover these provisions, this is nonetheless an area of agreement between Republicans and Democrats on an issue (gun control) that is typically divisive.

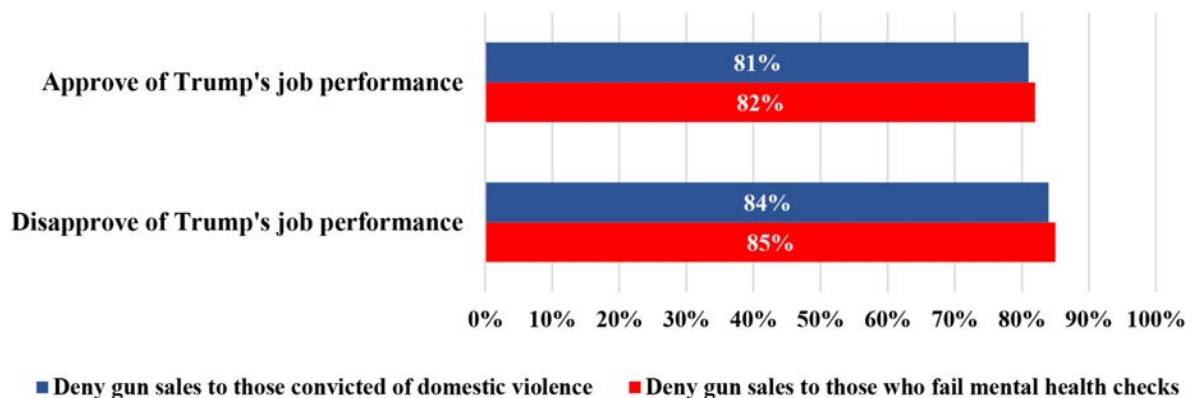
Agreement on Gun Policies by Party Identification

% who agree that the following policies would reduce mass shootings in the United States



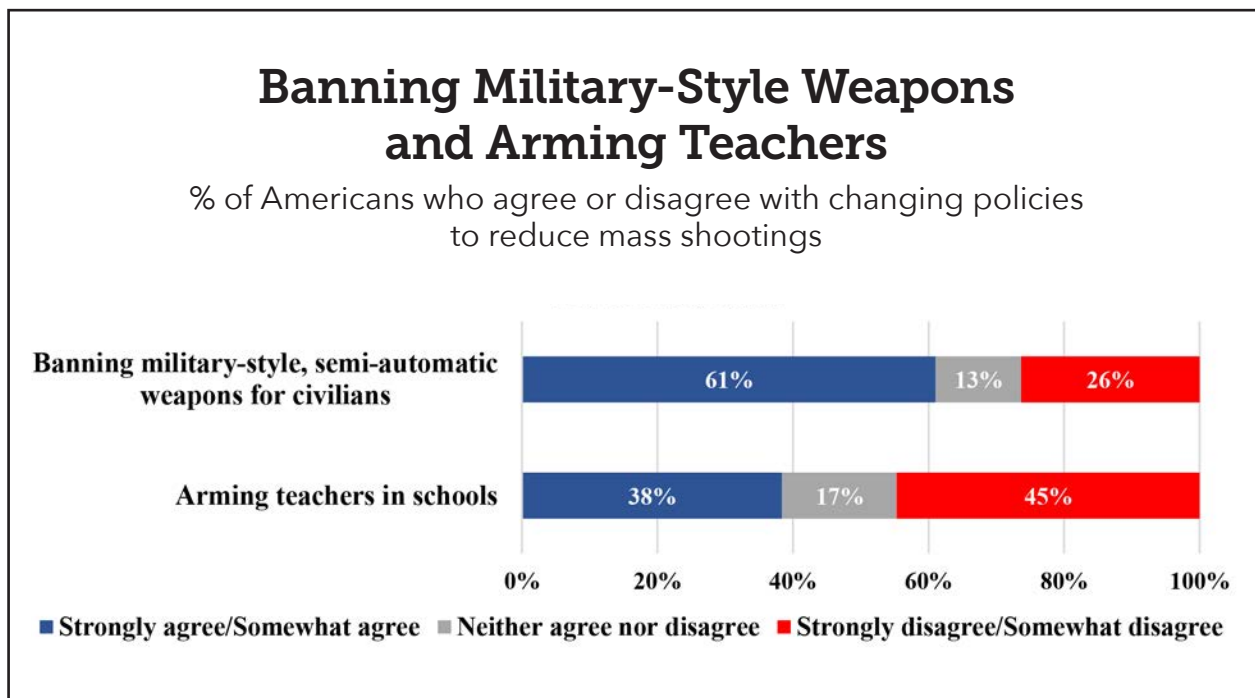
Agreement on Gun Policies by Trump Approval

% who agree that the following policies would reduce mass shootings in the United States



► ***There is disagreement, however, on two of the most popularly discussed reforms: banning military-style, semi-automatic weapons for civilians and arming teachers in schools.***

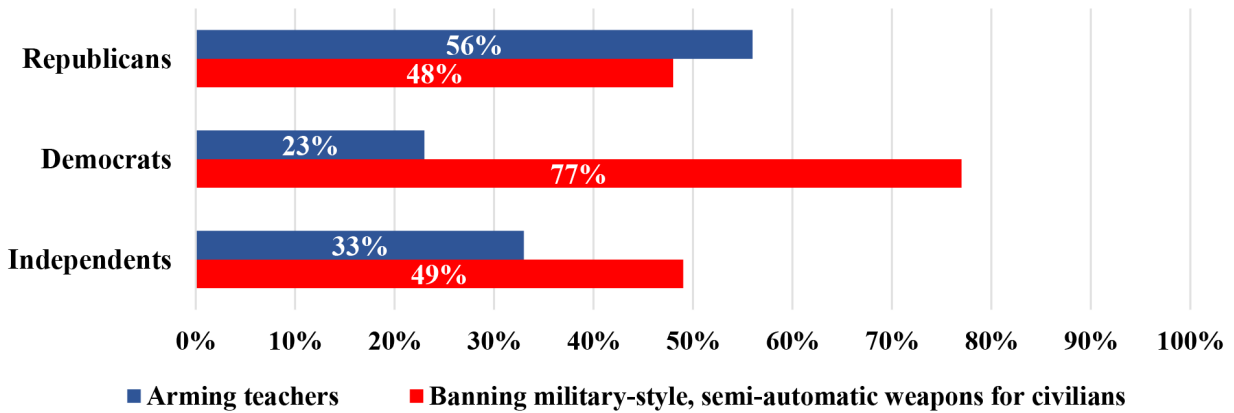
A majority of Americans (61%) agree that a ban on military-style, semi-automatic weapons for civilians would reduce mass shootings in the United States. Opinion on arming teachers in schools receives comparatively less support, with 38% support in agreement that this would reduce mass shootings in the United States compared to 45% who disagree.



- These divisions are, not surprisingly, partisan. Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to agree that banning military-style, semi-automatic weapons for civilians would reduce mass shootings in the United States. Conversely, Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to agree that arming teachers in schools would reduce mass shootings in the United States.
- These divisions are also significant when comparing those who approve and those who disapprove of Donald Trump’s job performance. Much like partisan identification, those who approve of President Trump’s job performance are less likely than those who disapprove of President Trump’s job performance to agree that banning military-style, semi-automatic weapons for civilians would reduce mass shootings in the United States. Likewise, those who approve of President Trump are more likely to agree that arming teachers would reduce mass shootings in the United States compared to those who disapprove of his job performance.

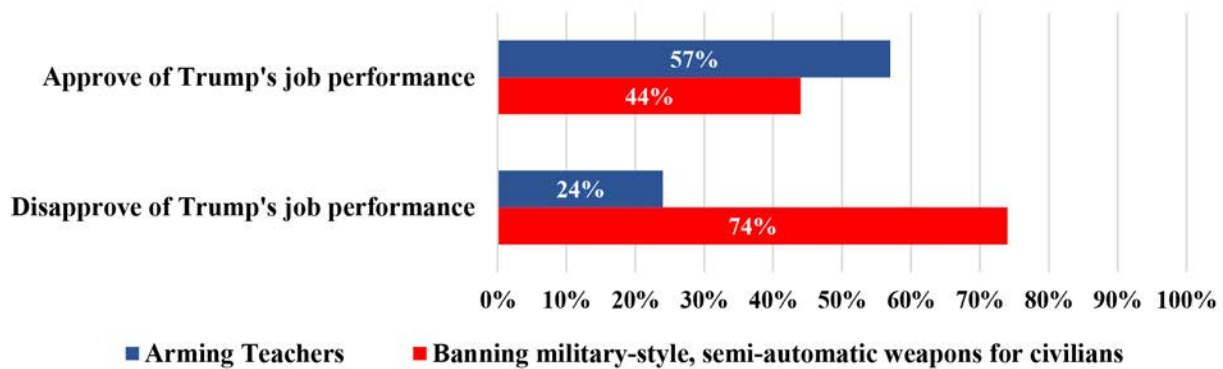
Disagreement on Gun Policies by Party Identification

% who agree that the following policies would reduce mass shootings in the United States



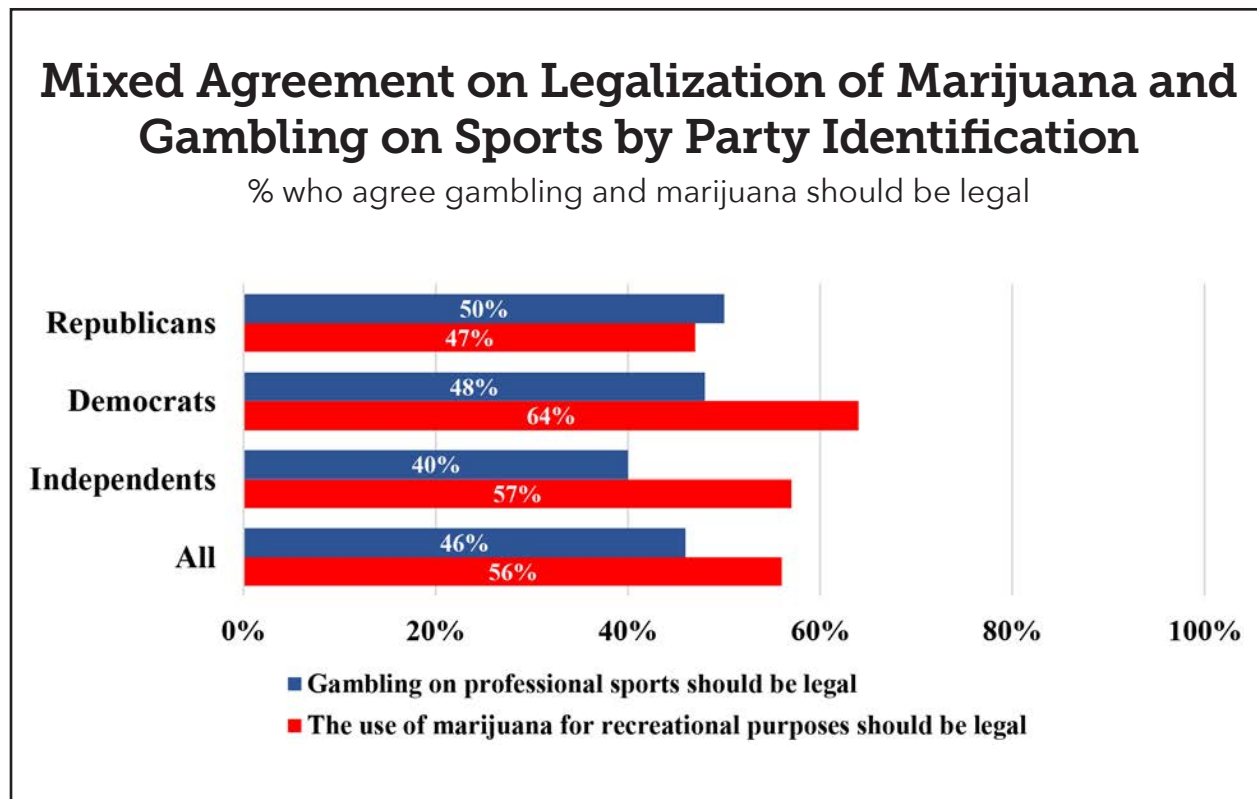
Disagreement on Gun Policies by Trump Approval

% who agree that the following policies would reduce mass shootings in the United States



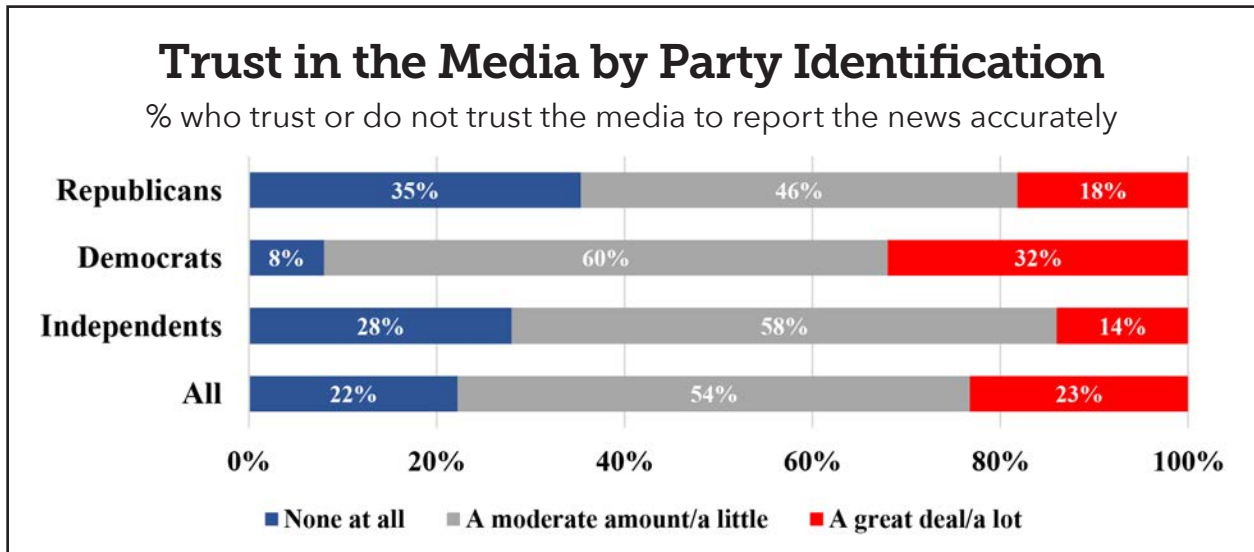
► **Support for the legalization of recreational marijuana and professional sports gambling is mixed.**

A small majority of Americans agree that recreational marijuana should be legal (56%), but the support is mixed. Sixty-four percent of Democrats agree with legalization, compared to only 47% of Republicans. Support for legalized gambling on professional sports is lower. Less than half agree that professional sports gambling should be legal (46%). Forty-eight percent of Democrats agree with legalizing sports gambling, compared to half of Republicans (50%).

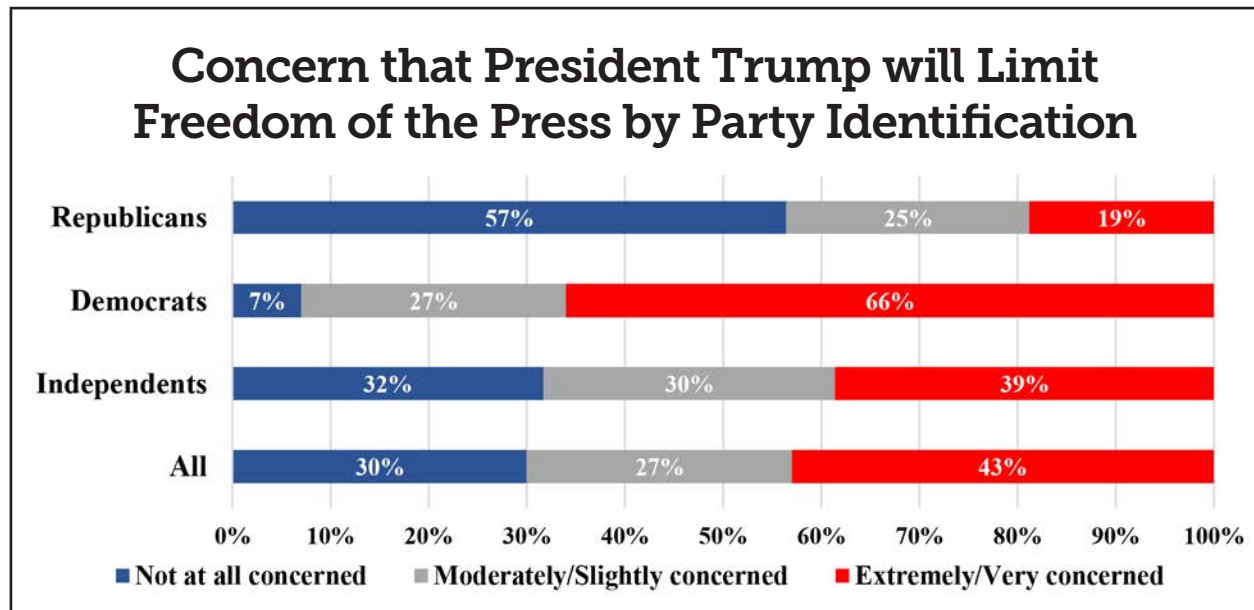


► ***There is a deep divide on trust in the media, and concerns that President Trump will limit freedom of the press.***

Less than a quarter of Americans (23%) have “a great deal” or “a lot” of trust in the mass media to report the news. Thirty-two percent of Democrats have a great deal/lot of trust, compared to only 19% of Republicans. Also, 35% of Republicans have no trust at all in the media, compared to only 8% of Democrats.



- When respondents were asked how concerned they were that President Trump would limit freedom of the press, 66% of Democrats were “extremely concerned” or “very concerned,” compared to 19% of Republicans. The majority of Republicans (56%) were “not at all concerned” that the president would limit freedom of the press, compared to 7% of Democrats.



Happiness

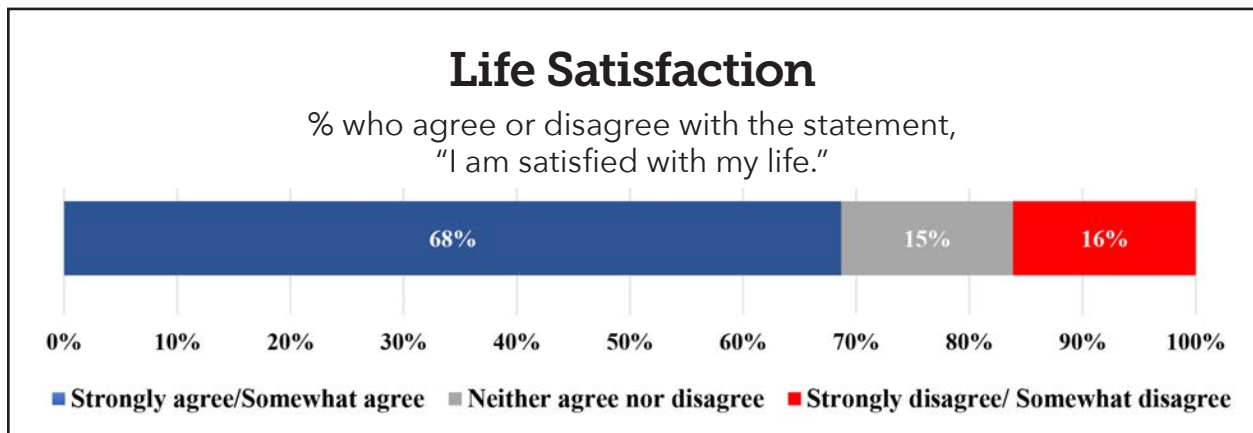
The pursuit of a life well lived



This section reports on two items of happiness: How satisfied people are with their lives and how satisfied people are with obtaining the things that they want in life.

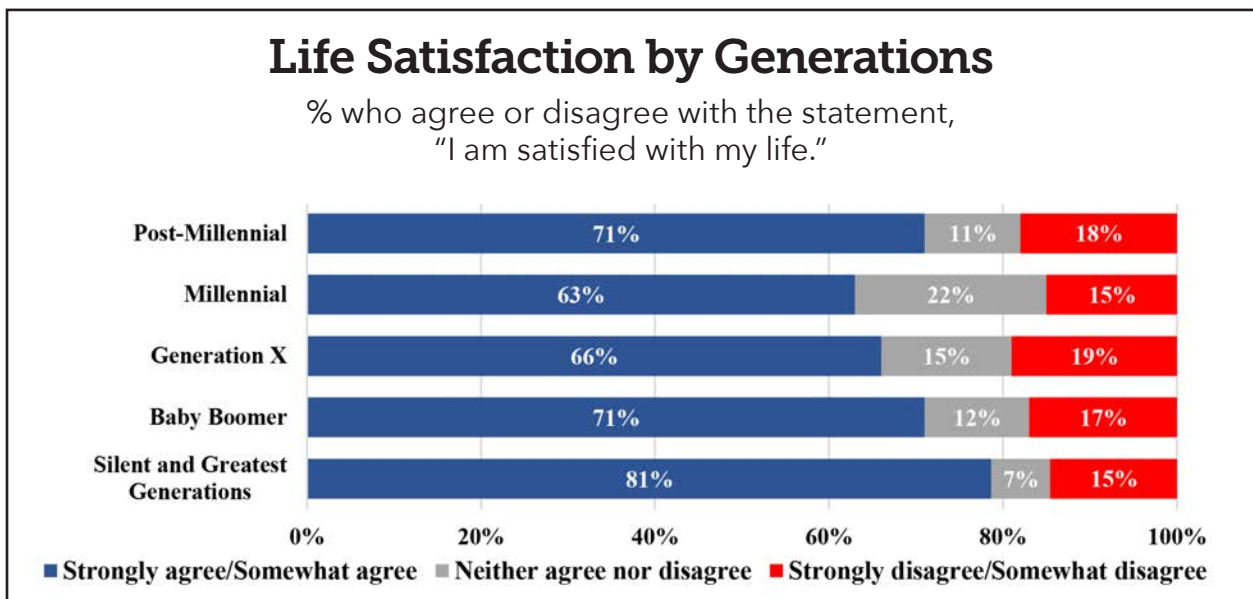
- ▶ **Among many findings, one of the most noteworthy is that Americans overwhelmingly express satisfaction with their lives.**

Specifically, 68% of Americans express agreement with the statement, "Overall I am satisfied with my life."



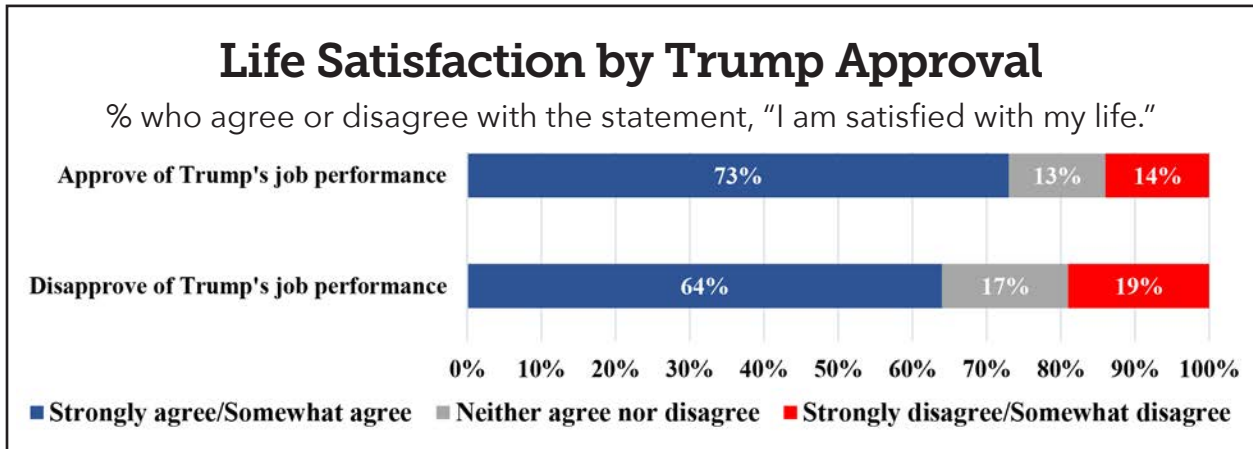
- ▶ **Satisfaction with life also remains high across generational and political divides, though there are differences.**

Members of the Silent and Greatest Generations, defined as those born in 1945 or earlier, are most likely to express life satisfaction (81%). Rates of satisfaction are lowest among members of Generation X (those born between the years 1965 and 1980) at 66% and among Millennials (those born between the years 1981 and 1996) at 63%.



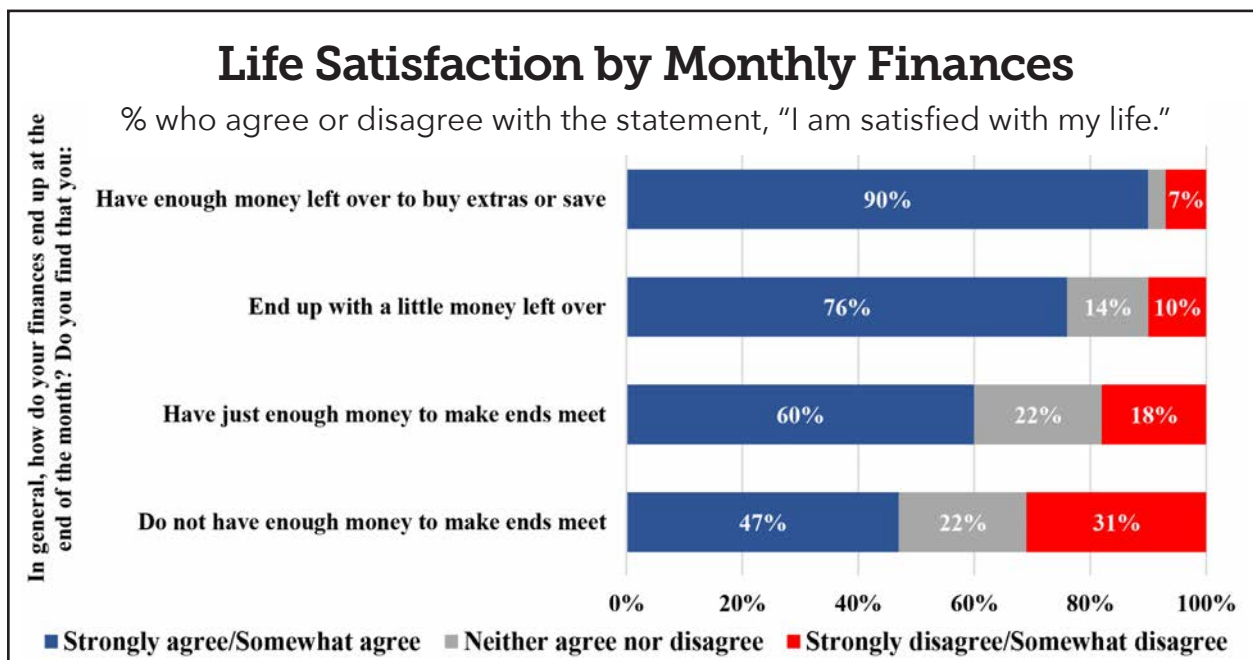
- ▶ **Americans who approve of President Trump’s job performance are more likely to report being satisfied with their lives than those who disapprove of Trump’s job performance (73% vs. 64%).**

But, again, almost two-thirds of Americans, regardless of their views on President Trump, report being satisfied.

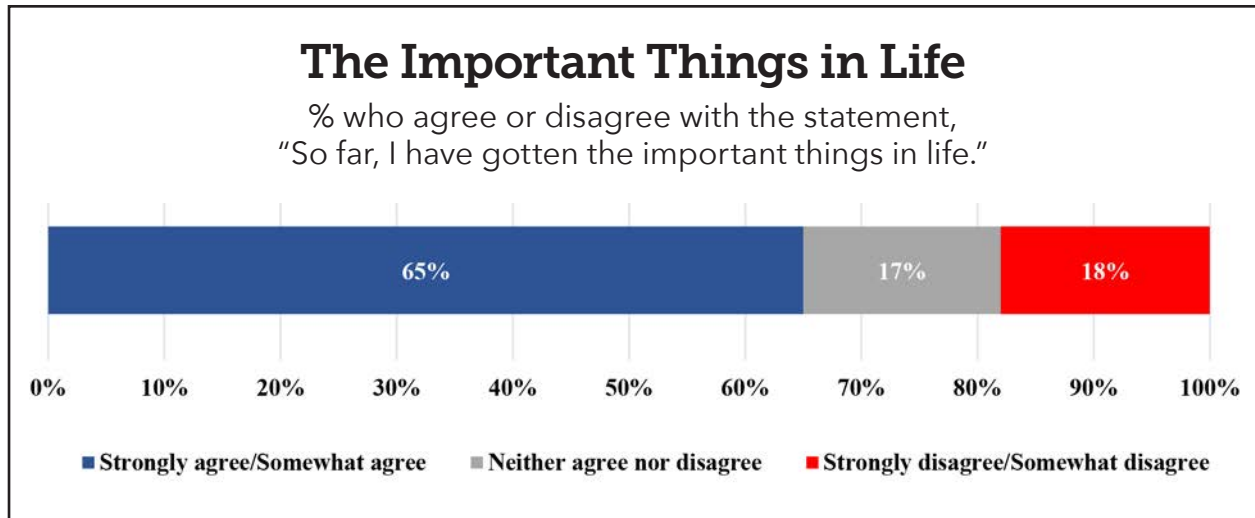


- ▶ **In contrast, life satisfaction varies substantially by Americans’ financial situation.**

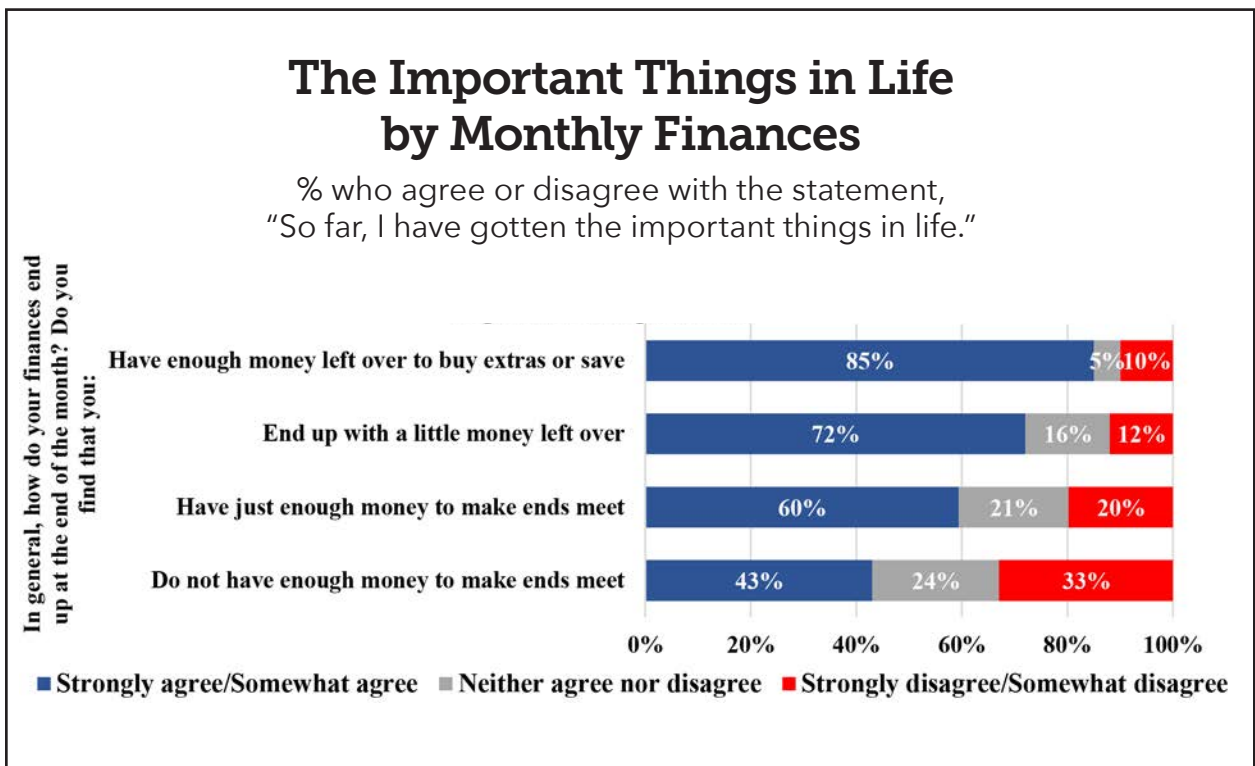
Those who struggle financially are less satisfied than other Americans. Among Americans who are unable to make ends meet each month, less than half are satisfied with their lives (47%) and about one-third are dissatisfied with their lives (31%), almost twice the rate of dissatisfaction compared to Americans as a whole (16%). In contrast, 9 out of 10 Americans who earn enough money to buy extras or save are satisfied and fewer than 1 out of 10 are dissatisfied with their lives.

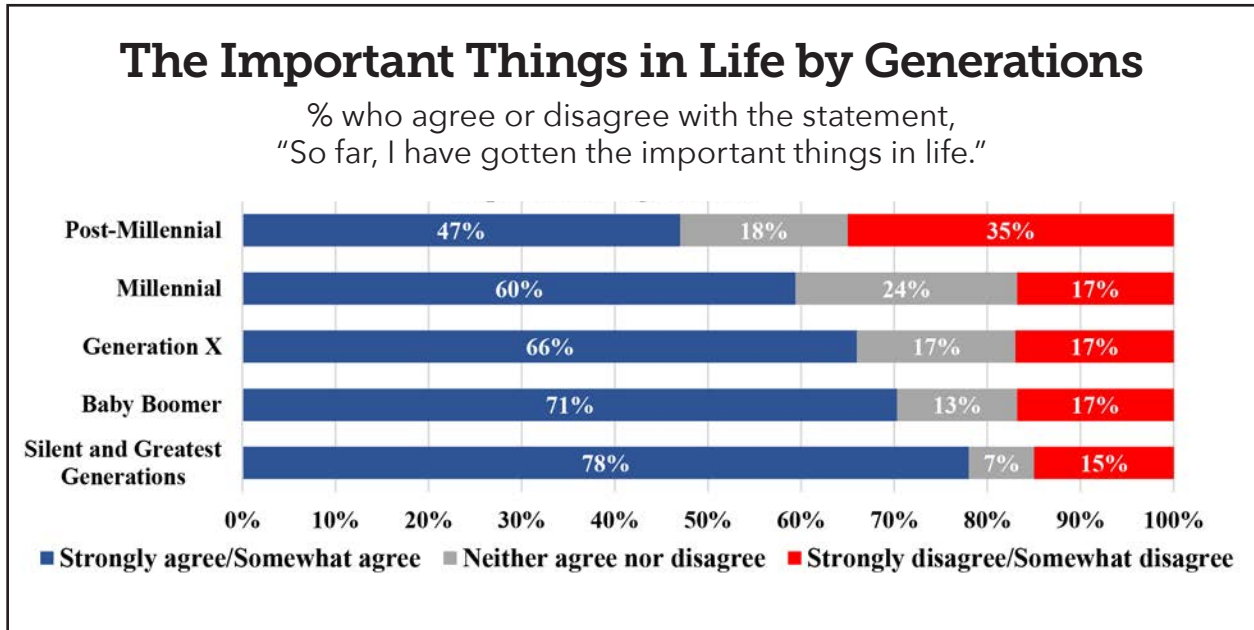


- *In addition to high percentages of Americans reporting that they are satisfied with their lives, the results also show that a large majority of adults (65%) report that they have gotten the important things that they want in life.*

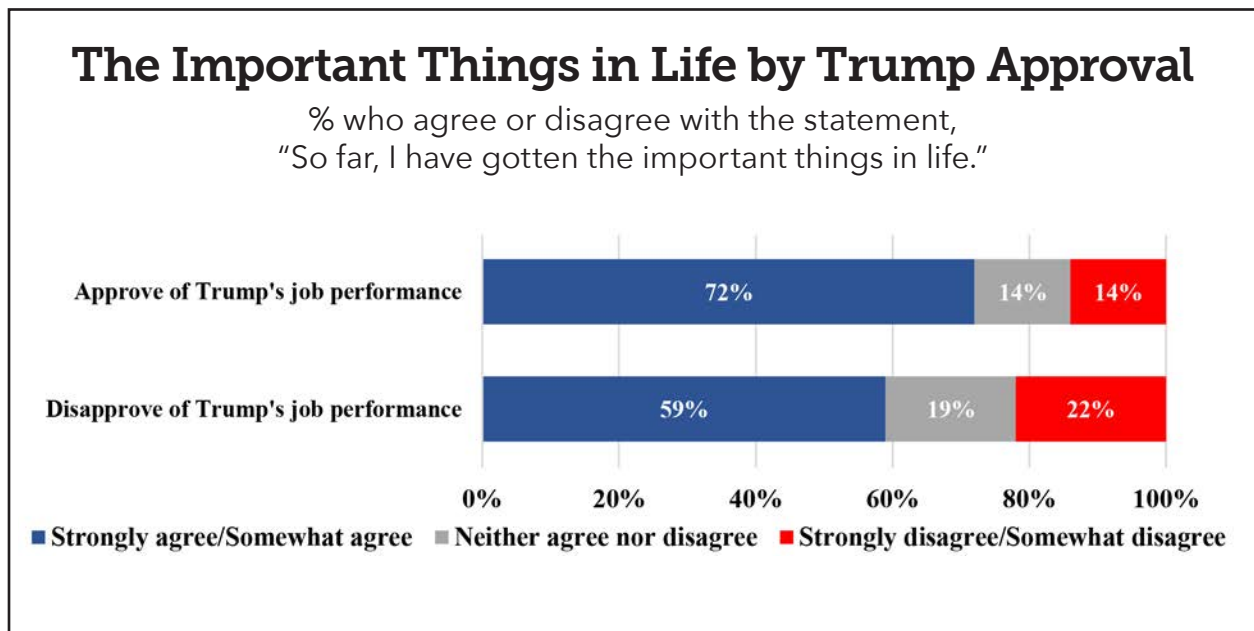


- Yet, that assessment is not equally shared by Americans. Those struggling financially and those who are younger are the most likely to report that they have *not* gotten the important things that they want in life.





- Those who approve of President Trump’s job performance are more likely than those who disapprove to report that they have gotten the important things that they want in life.



APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

The analysis of this report is based on a mixed mode of responses from mail, telephone, and the internet. In total, the sample consisted of completed responses from 1,134 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. The mail surveys were delivered to 1,500 randomly selected addresses in the United States. Ninety-four of these addresses were returned as undeliverable. The addresses were contacted in four waves, starting with an informational postcard that introduced the survey, the survey, a reminder to complete the survey, and a second copy of the survey. One hundred and thirty-eight were filled out and returned at the time of this writing, producing a response rate of 10%. The mail surveys were collected between May 29 and June 20, 2018.

The telephone portion of the survey was conducted by interviewers under the direction of Qualtrics Experience Management. Random digit dialing was used to contact cell phones and landlines (70% cell phone, 30% landline). One hundred and sixty-seven respondents were interviewed on a cell phone, and 71 were interviewed by landline (total phone interviews = 238). The response rate was 5% for the cell phone sample and 9% for landlines. The phone interviews were conducted between May 31 and June 5, 2018.

The margin of error for the mail and telephone portion of the sample is plus or minus 5.1 percentage points (at the 95% level of confidence).

The online portion of the survey was conducted among a national sample of 758 adults age 18 or older, living in all 50 states. Respondents for this portion of the survey were selected from a group of over one million people that participate in the Qualtrics survey platform on a daily basis. Participants self-selected into the survey, rather than random selection. Thus, an estimate of sampling error could not be calculated. To avoid self-selection bias, participants were not told the nature of the survey when asked to participate. The online interviews were conducted between June 1 and June 18, 2018.

The combined sample of mail, telephone, and online respondents were weighted using an iterative proportional fitting algorithm that matches age, sex, gender, and education to population parameters derived from the U.S. Census.

See the comparisons between the unweighted sample and the population parameters from the Census below:

| Age | | |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| | <i>Sample</i> | <i>Census</i> |
| 18-24 | 13% | 12% |
| 25-34 | 17% | 18% |
| 35-44 | 18% | 16% |
| 45-54 | 14% | 17% |
| 55-64 | 16% | 17% |
| 65-74 | 15% | 12% |
| 75 or older | 7% | 8% |

| Sex | | |
|------------|---------------|---------------|
| | <i>Sample</i> | <i>Census</i> |
| Male | 45% | 49% |
| Female | 55% | 51% |

| Race | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | <i>Sample</i> | <i>Census</i> |
| White | 56% | 61% |
| Hispanic/Latino/Spanish | 15% | 17% |
| Black or African American | 14% | 13% |
| Asian | 6% | 6% |
| Other or two or more | 9% | 4% |

| Education | | |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| | <i>Sample</i> | <i>Census</i> |
| Less than high school | 4% | 13% |
| High school/some college/ GED/ technical/trade/vocational | 63% | 48% |
| Associate's Degree | 8% | 8% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 18% | 19% |
| Graduate Degree | 7% | 12% |



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The **LIFE, LIBERTY,** *and* **HAPPINESS PROJECT**



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