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Center for American Progress
National Poverty Survey

February 2021

N = 2,000 registered voters
Conducted February 2-7, 2021 via online web panel
Margin of error = +/- 2.2 percentage points

- Whether facing wage stagnation, struggling to find job opportunities, or figuring how to pay for basic living necessities, many Americans are hurting economically – particularly women, younger voters, and people of color.

- Consequently, voters broadly support funding government services to help provide basic living standards.

- Voters overwhelmingly see public education and access to clean water as fundamental human rights that should be guaranteed by government, and to a lesser degree food and housing. Childcare and broadband access are seen as important, but less essential as government ensured rights.

Figure 3

Key Findings

- Voters widely support the federal government stepping in to ensure state governments can continue to provide aid in face of the pandemic.

- Infrastructure investment, paid sick days & paid family leave, and food & housing assistance are widely popular proposals to strengthen our economy, across partisan lines. But even weakest proposals garner majority support.

- Framing the pandemic as disproportionately affecting those in poverty drives more voters to back big changes than does a framing based on race.
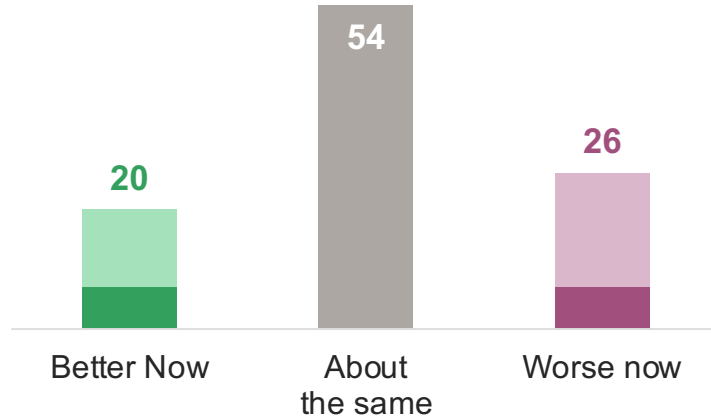
Political And Economic Climate

For Most, Economic Growth Is Stagnant Or Non-Existent
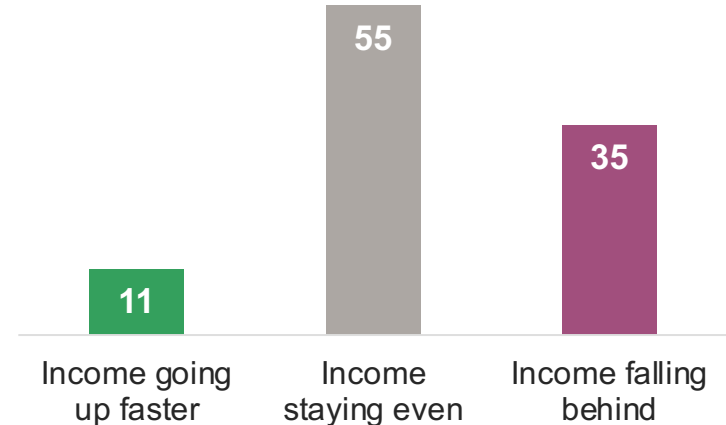
Figure 5

Personal Economic Situation

Thinking back to one year ago, how would you rate your current personal economic situation compared to before the coronavirus pandemic?

Darker shade = Stronger intensity

Better Now	About the same	Worse now
20	54	26

Income vs. Cost Of Living

Do you think your family's income is going up faster than the cost of living, staying about even with the cost of living, or falling behind the cost of living?
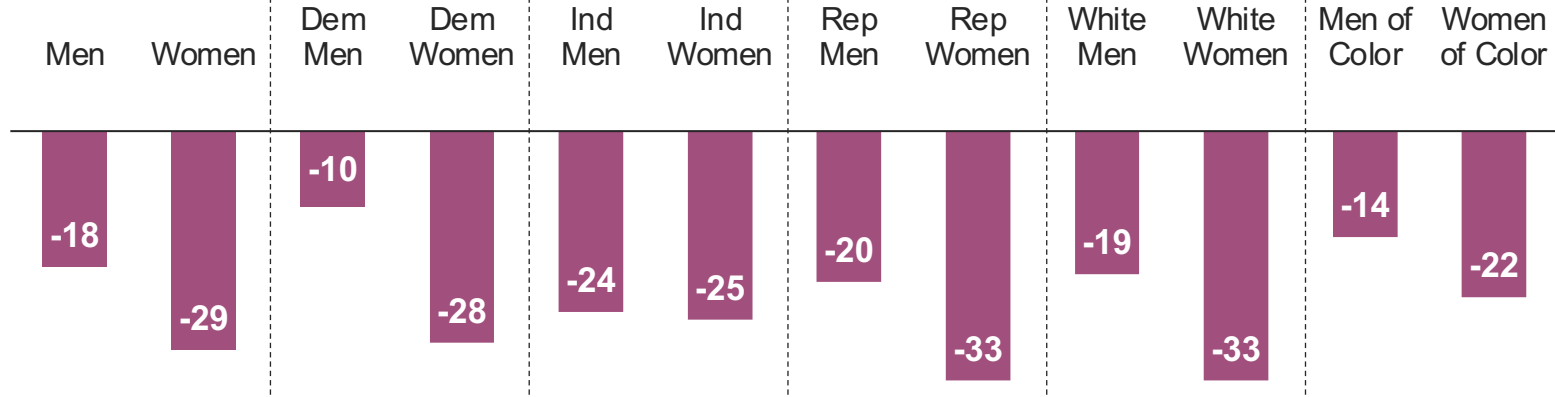
Income going up faster	Income staying even	Income falling behind
11	55	35

Women Are More Likely To Feel Left Behind

Figure 6

Income

% Going up – Falling Behind

Men	Women	Dem Men	Dem Women	Ind Men	Ind Women	Rep Men	Rep Women	White Men	White Women	Men of Color	Women of Color
-18	-29	-10	-28	-24	-25	-20	-33	-19	-33	-14	-22

Pers. Econ.

% Better now – Worse now

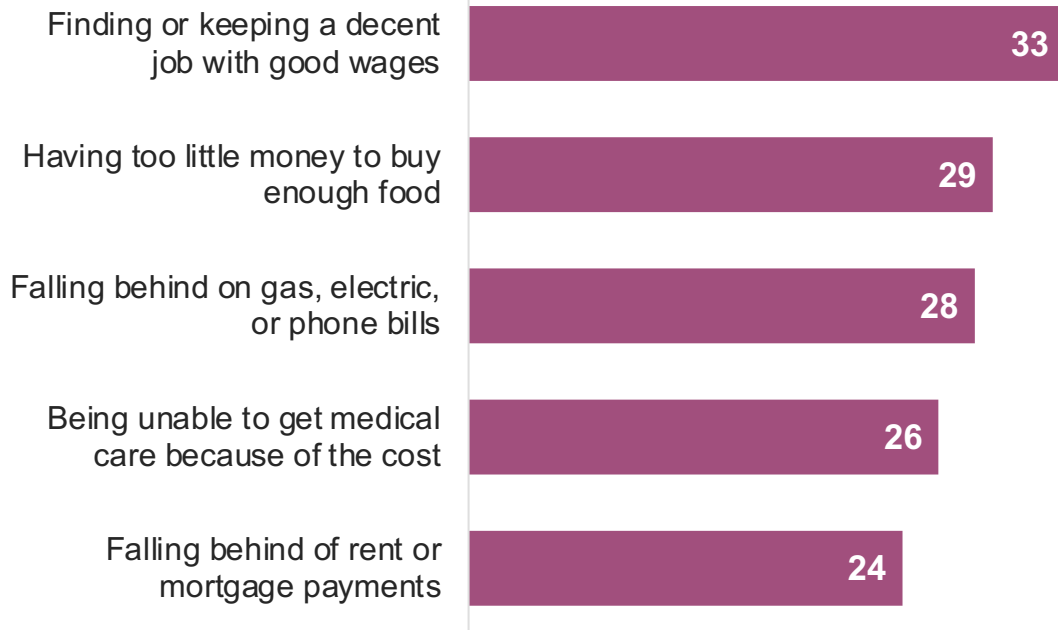| Men	Women	Dem Men	Dem Women	Ind Men	Ind Women	Rep Men	Rep Women	White Men	White Women	Men of Color	Women of Color
0	-11	2	-12	-6	-8	3	-12	-3	-14	6	-5
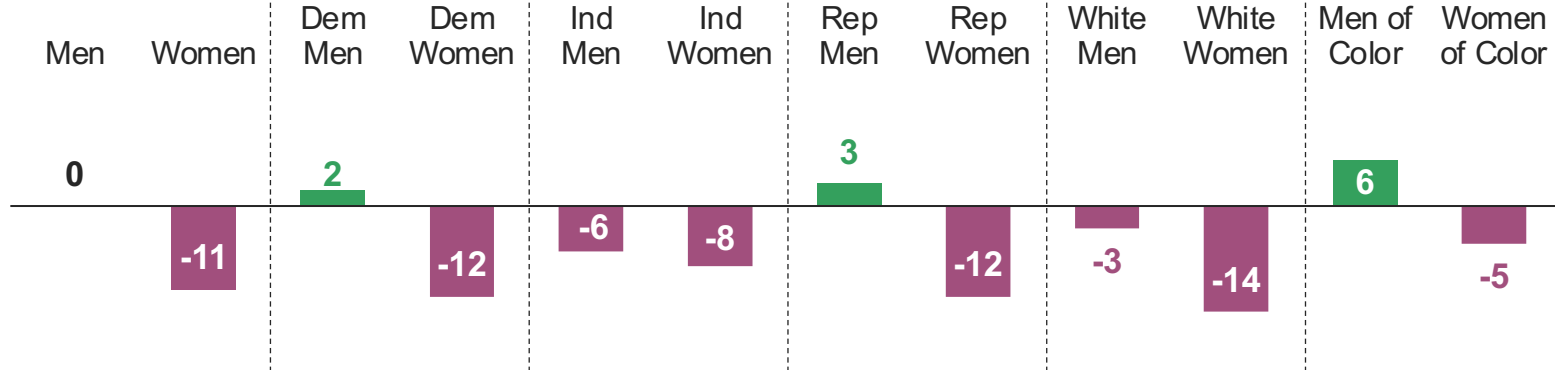
Nearly Half Of Voters Are Experiencing Economic Difficulties Finding A Job Or Paying For Basic Needs
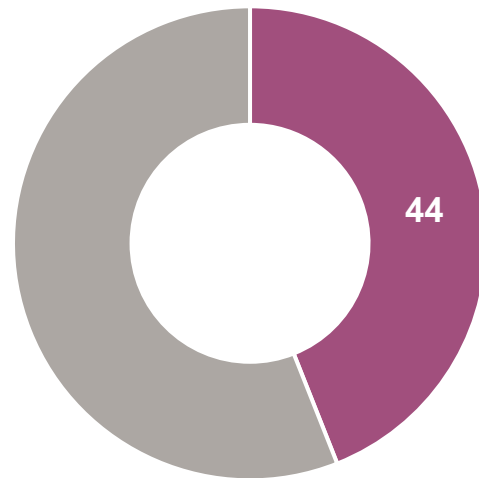
Figure 7

Economic Problems

Below is a list of economic challenges facing many Americans today. Have you or a member of your immediate family had a serious problem with this issue over the past year?

% Total yes

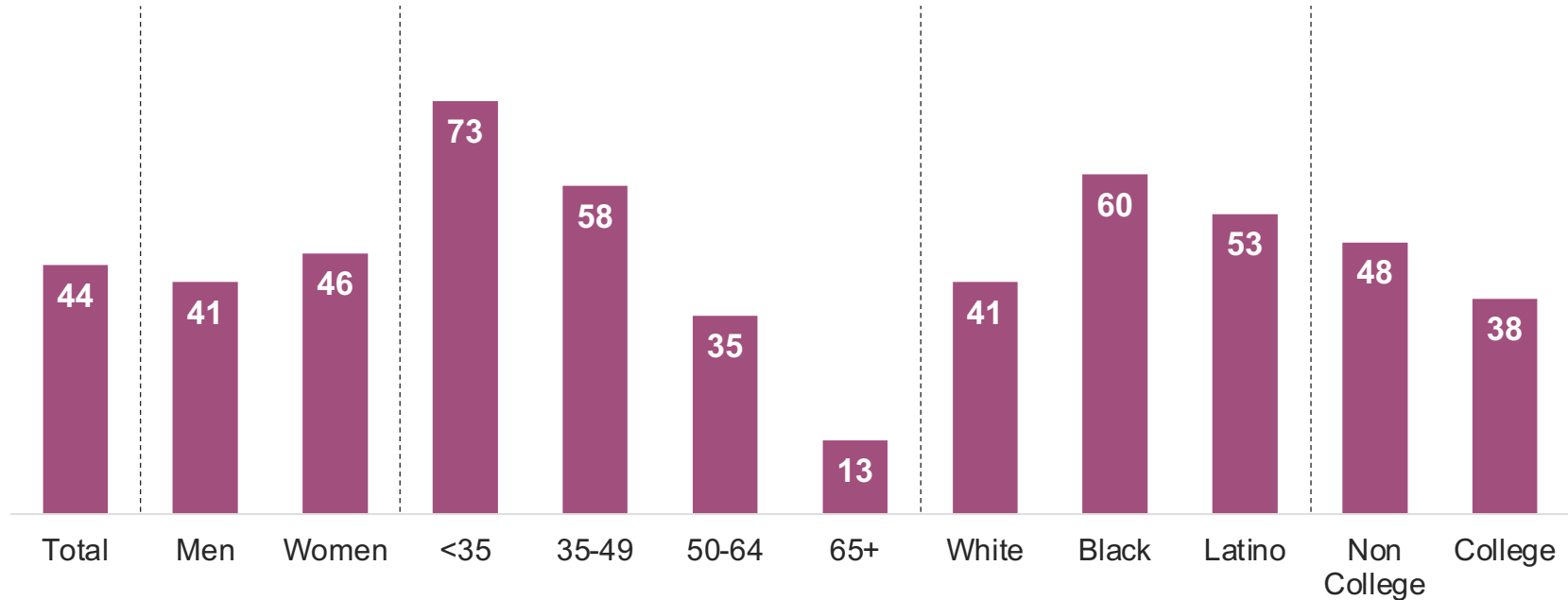|	
Finding or keeping a decent job with good wages	33
Having too little money to buy enough food	29
Falling behind on gas, electric, or phone bills	28
Being unable to get medical care because of the cost	26
Falling behind of rent or mortgage payments	24

% Experiencing at least 1 problem

44

Younger Voters And Voters Or Color Are More Likely To Face Economic Difficulties In Finding A Job And Paying Bills

Figure 8

Economic Problems

% Experience at least one economic challenge in their family

| Total	Men	Women	<35	35-49	50-64	65+	White	Black	Latino	Non College	College
44	41	46	73	58	35	13	41	60	53	48	38

Over Half Facing Economic Challenges Identify The Pandemic As The Primary Cause

Figure 9

Cause: Self

*(If facing economic problems) Did **you** face these economic pressures before the COVID pandemic, or do you feel the COVID pandemic was the primary cause of the economic pressures you faced?*

Faced before the pandemic	Pandemic was primary cause	Not sure
43	51	6
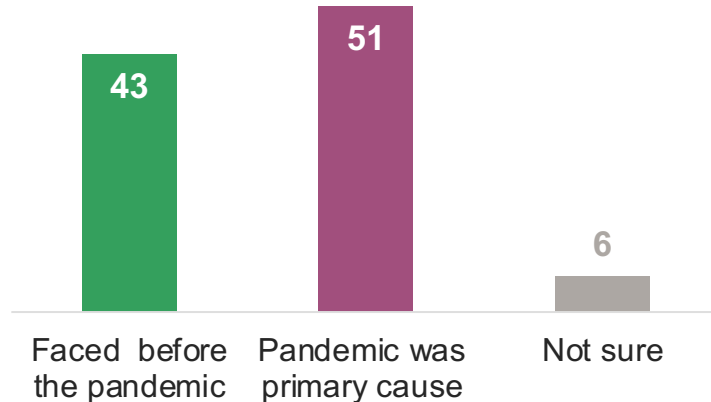
Cause: Family Members

*(If family faced economic problems) Did **your family member(s)** face these economic pressures before the COVID pandemic, or do you feel the COVID pandemic was the primary cause of the economic pressures they faced?*
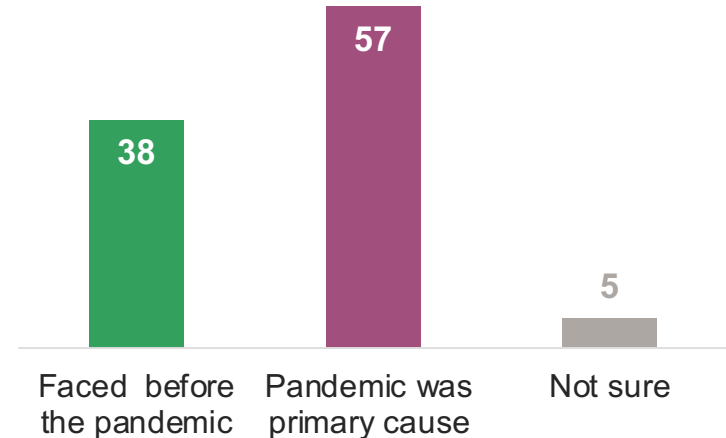
Faced before the pandemic	Pandemic was primary cause	Not sure
38	57	5

Social Safety Net

4-in-10 Currently Receiving Or Know Family Receiving Assistance, Including Over Half Of Black Voters And Voters Under 35
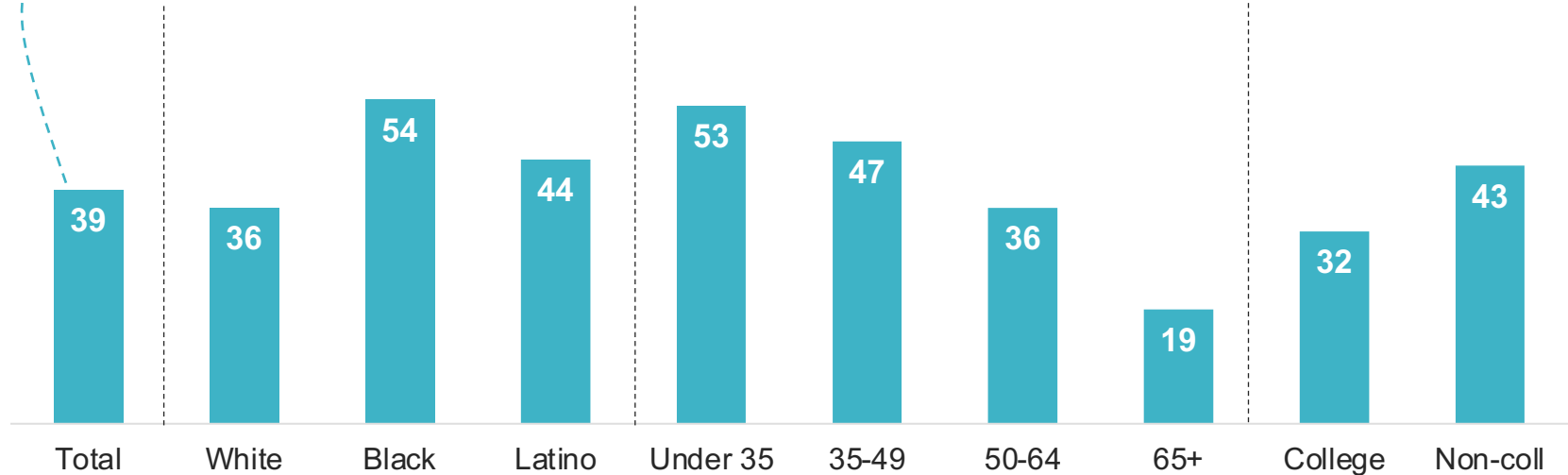
Figure 11

Benefits

Thinking about your own family - both your immediate family living with you, as well as other close relatives like aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on - as far as you know, is anyone in your family currently receiving government assistance for housing, health care, food, disability, or unemployment?

Self: 19
Immediate family: 15
Close relatives: 14

% Total Yes

| Total	White	Black	Latino	Under 35	35-49	50-64	65+	College	Non-coll
39	36	54	44	53	47	36	19	32	43

Strong Majority Believes People Are Poor Because Of Circumstances Beyond Their Control

Figure 12

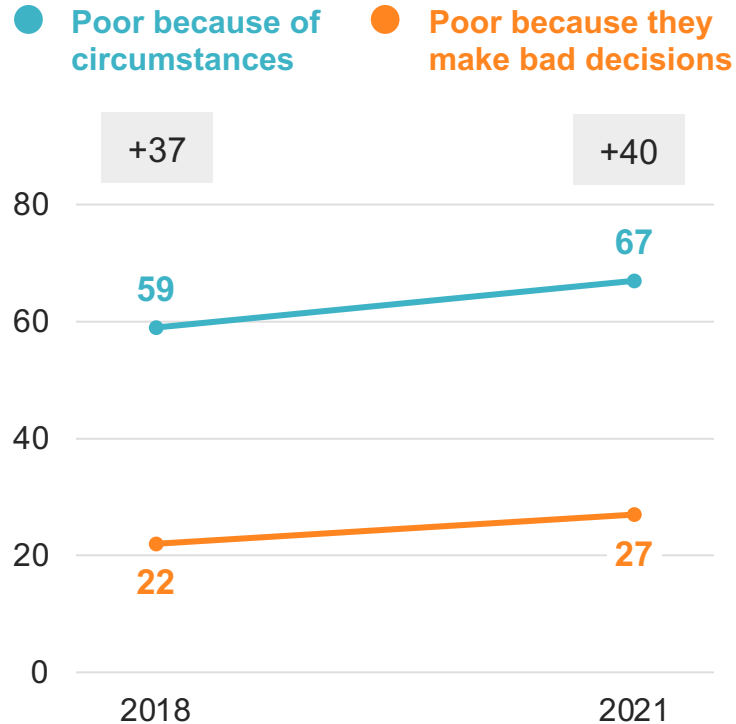*Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.*

● Most people who live in poverty are poor **because their jobs don't pay enough, they lack good health care and education, and things cost too much** for them to save and move ahead.

● Most people who live in poverty are poor **because they make bad decisions or act irresponsibly** in their own lives.
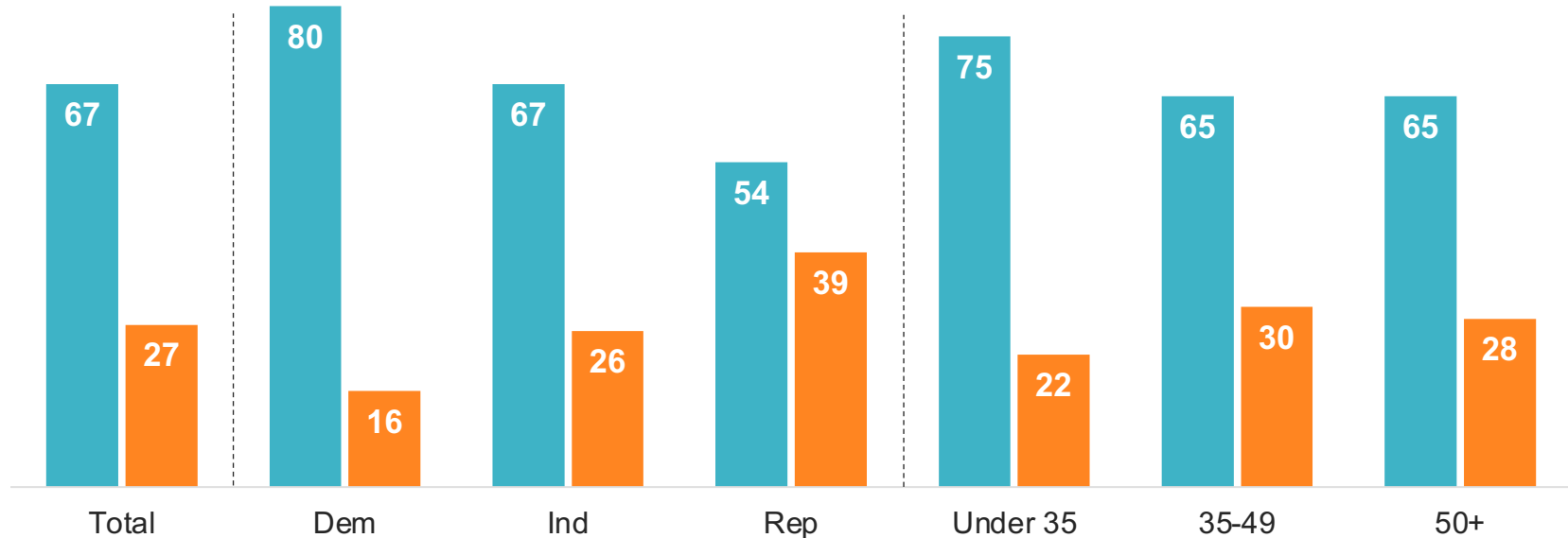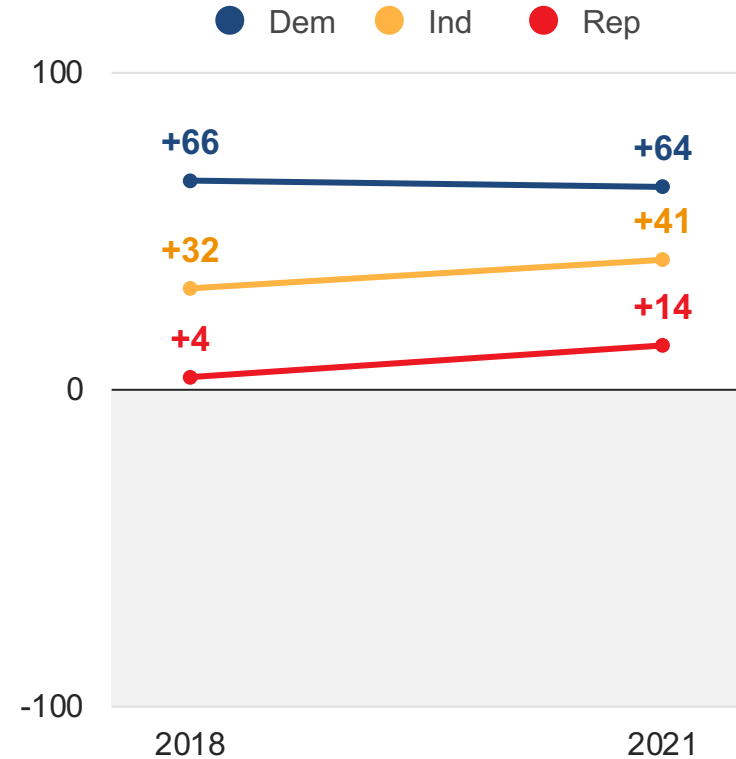
Independents And Republicans Are Increasing Likely To Believe Poverty Is Cause By A Person's Circumstances Over Bad Decisions

Figure 13

Poverty Cause

- Poor because of circumstances
- Poor because they make bad decisions

+37   +40

67
59
22   27

2018   2021

Circumstances – Bad Decisions Margin

- Dem
- Ind
- Rep

+66   +64
+32   +41
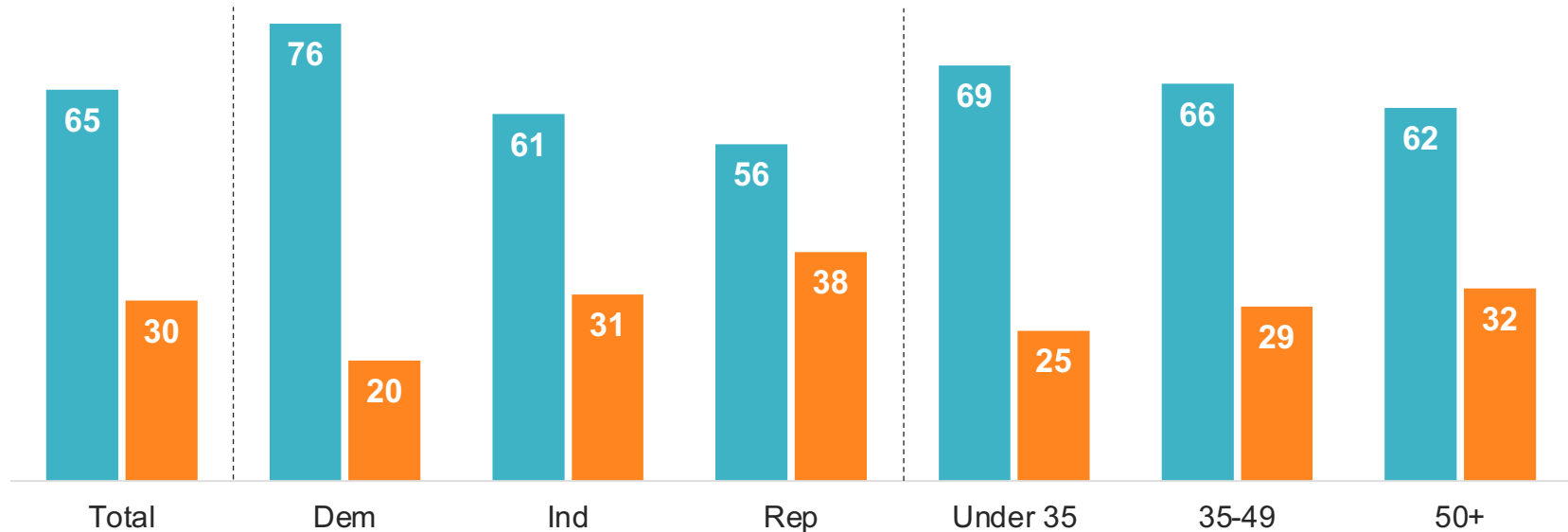+4   +14

100

0

-100

2018   2021

Support For Government Services Still Spans Party And Age Lines

Figure 14

Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

● Whether I need them now or not, **I'm glad our society provides government services to ensure basic living standards** for when times get tough.

● **I don't envision ever being in a position where I would need or want to use** the health care, nutrition, housing, or income support provided by the government.

	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep	Under 35	35-49	50+
Glad society provides	65	76	61	56	69	66	62
Don't envision needing	30	20	31	38	25	29	32

Role Of Government

Voters Prioritize Government Assistance Over Spending Cuts – Even Half Of Republicans

Figure 16

Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

● **It is more important to me that the government help provide basic living standards** like housing, nutrition, and health care for those struggling to make ends meet.

● **It is more important to me that the government address large budget deficits** by reducing overall spending on government assistance programs for low-income people.

	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep	Under 35	35-49	50+
Basic living standards	65	83	63	48	72	66	62
Budget deficits	29	14	29	45	22	30	31
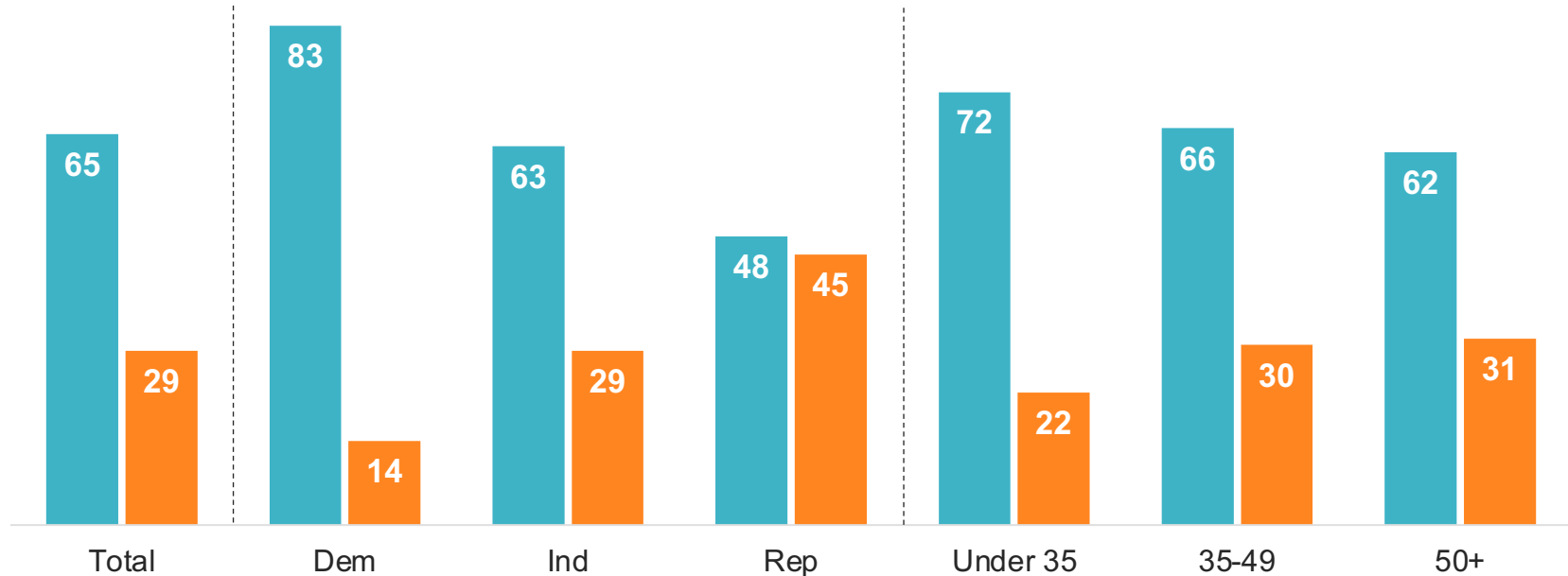
Dependency Fears Deter Many Republicans From Supporting Government Assistance

Figure 17

Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

● The government should help **ensure that all families have access to basic living standards** like health care, nutrition, and housing if their wages are too low or they can't make ends meet.

● **Welfare programs trap people in poverty** by leaving them dependent on the government and penalizing work.

	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep	Under 35	35-49	50+
Basic living standards	58	78	57	38	69	64	51
Trap people in poverty	36	17	36	57	28	31	42
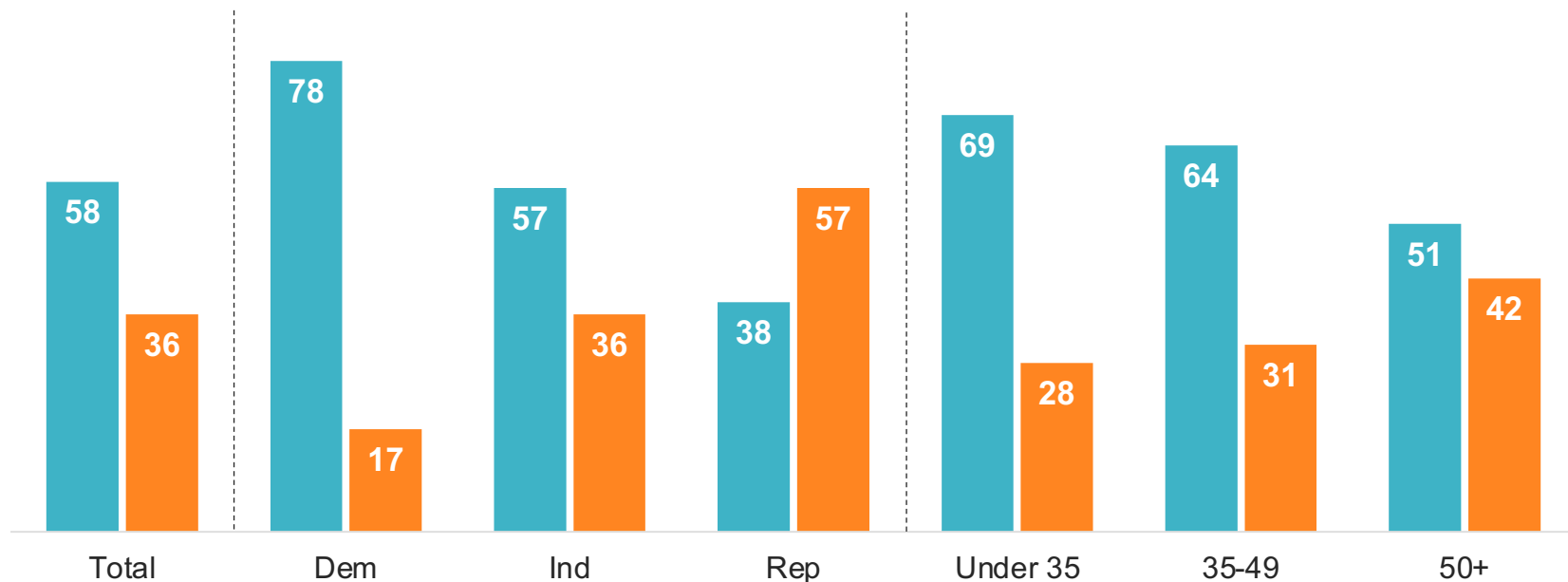
Voters Broadly Support The Federal Government Stepping In To Ensure Support From State Governments In Face Of Pandemic

Figure 18

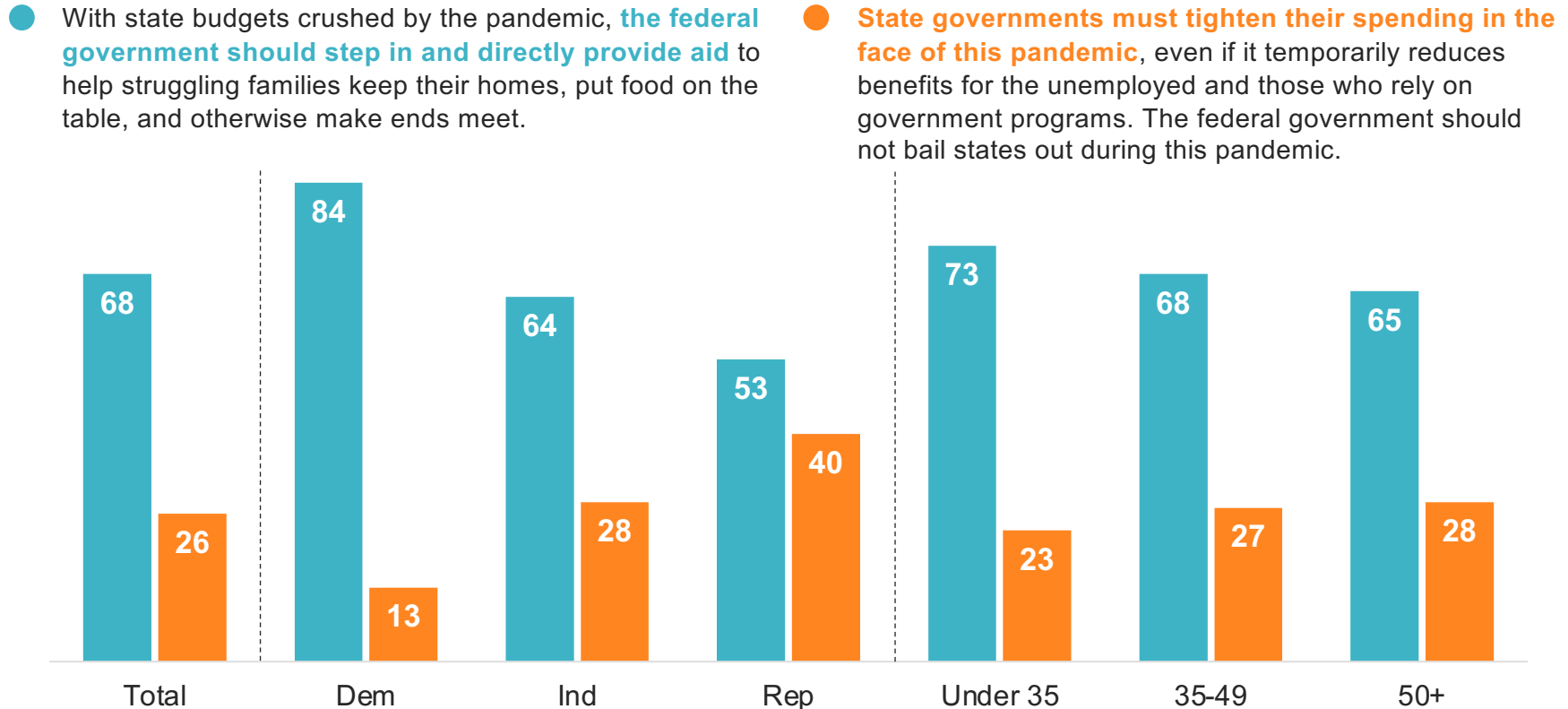*Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.*

● With state budgets crushed by the pandemic, **the federal government should step in and directly provide aid** to help struggling families keep their homes, put food on the table, and otherwise make ends meet.

● **State governments must tighten their spending in the face of this pandemic**, even if it temporarily reduces benefits for the unemployed and those who rely on government programs. The federal government should not bail states out during this pandemic.

	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep	Under 35	35-49	50+
Federal aid	68	84	64	53	73	68	65
Tighten spending	26	13	28	40	23	27	28

Majorities See A Clear Role For Government In Guaranteeing Clean Water, Education, And Nutrition

Figure 19

Role in Basic Needs

On a scale from 0 to 10 what role you think government should play in meeting the need on each of these issues, where 10 means it is a basic human right that should be guaranteed to everyone in the U.S. and 0 means it is an issue that government should not be involved in at all and should be left completely to the free market.

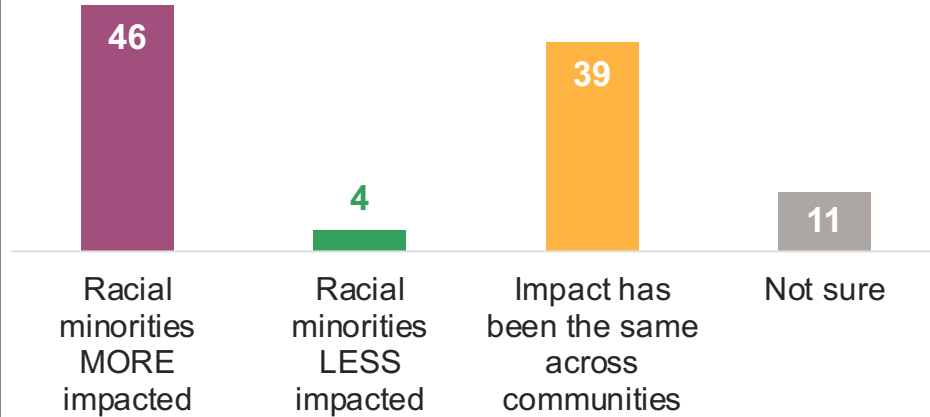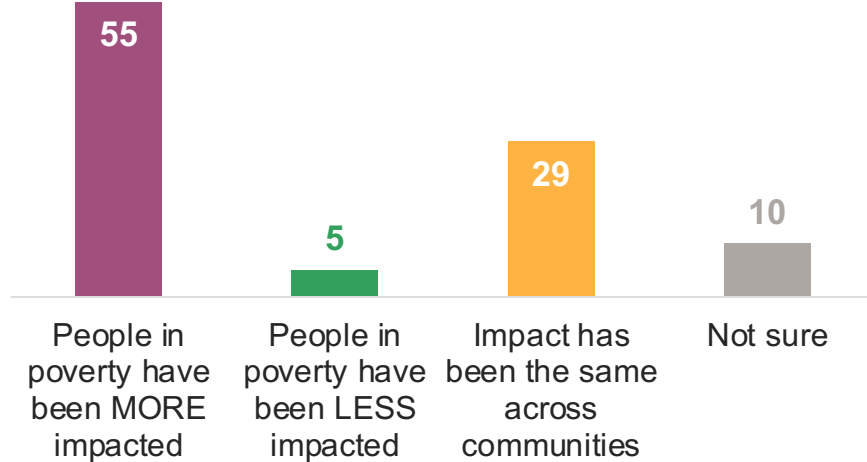| % Strong role (8 to 10)		Dem	Ind	Rep
Access to clean water	74	78	75	68
Quality public education	64	71	64	57
Access to adequate, nutritional food	54	69	53	38
Access to safe, affordable housing	48	62	46	33
Affordable, quality child care	40	54	39	27
Broadband internet access	32	43	30	22

Pandemic Impact

Voters Believe That Economic Inequality Is More Prevalent Than Racial Inequality When It Comes To The Impact Of COVID

Figure 21

Impact On Those In Poverty

Impact On Racial Minorities

(Split) Which of the following comes closest to your own view about those impacted by the coronavirus pandemic?

Impact On Those In Poverty

- People in poverty have been MORE impacted: 55
- People in poverty have been LESS impacted: 5
- Impact has been the same across communities: 29
- Not sure: 10

Impact On Racial Minorities

- Racial minorities MORE impacted: 46
- Racial minorities LESS impacted: 4
- Impact has been the same across communities: 39
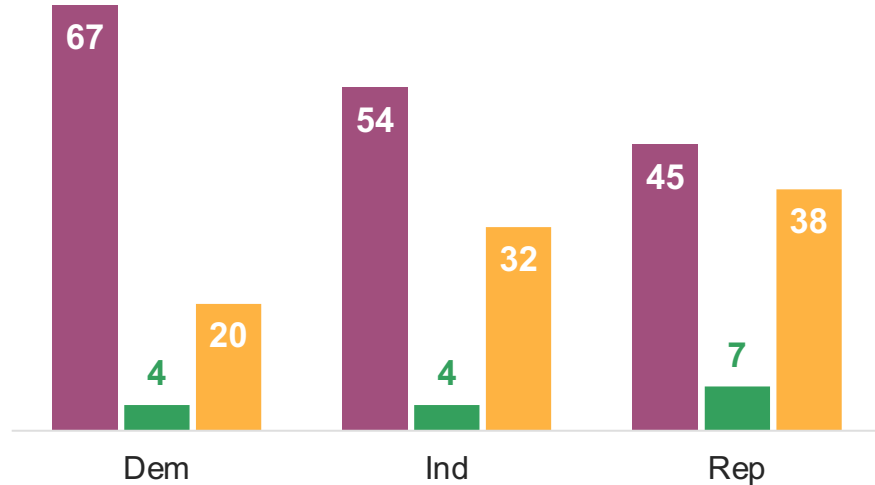- Not sure: 11

Notable Differences With Independents And Republicans When Using Race To Discuss Pandemic Impact

Figure 22

Impact On Those In Poverty

● More impacted   ● Less impacted
● Impact the same

Dem: 67, 4, 20
Ind: 54, 4, 32
Rep: 45, 7, 38

Impact On Racial Minorities

● More impacted   ● Less impacted
● Impact the same

Dem: 65, 6, 24
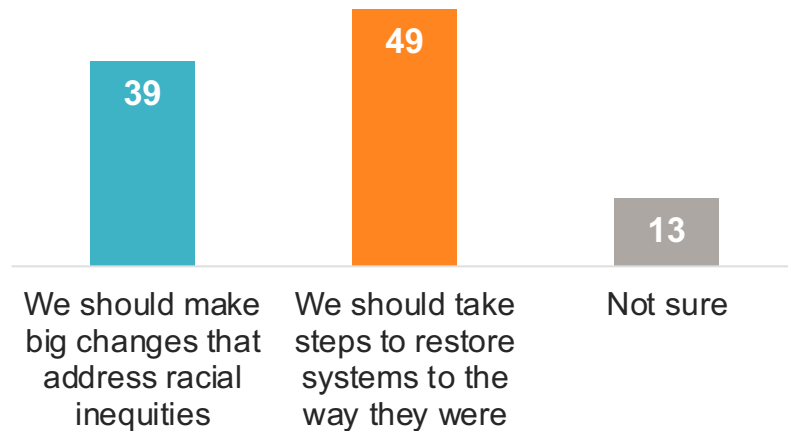**Ind:** 44, 3, 40
Rep: 28, 4, 55
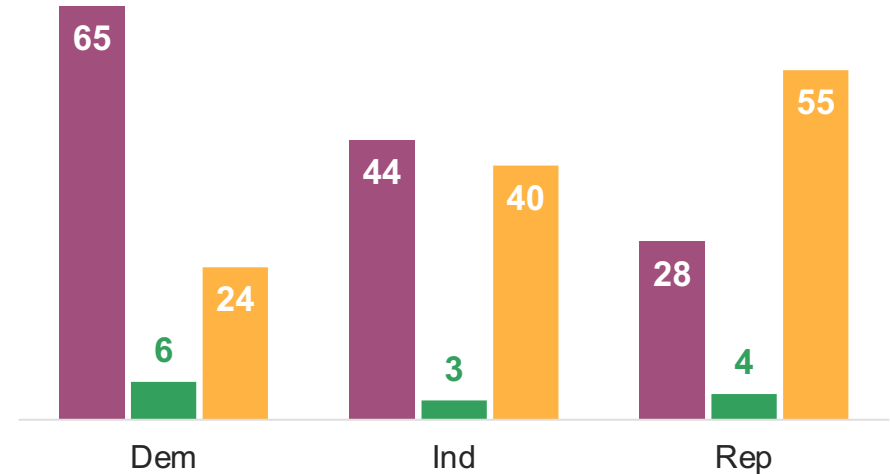
Voters More Likely To Be Receptive To Big Changes With An Economic Inequity Frame

Figure 23

Economic Changes

Racial Changes

(Split) Thinking about how the United States recovers after the pandemic passes, which comes closest to your own view?

Economic Changes

- 46 — We should make big changes that address economic inequities
- 43 — We should take steps to restore systems to the way they were
- 10 — Not sure

Racial Changes

- 39 — We should make big changes that address racial inequities
- 49 — We should take steps to restore systems to the way they were
- 13 — Not sure
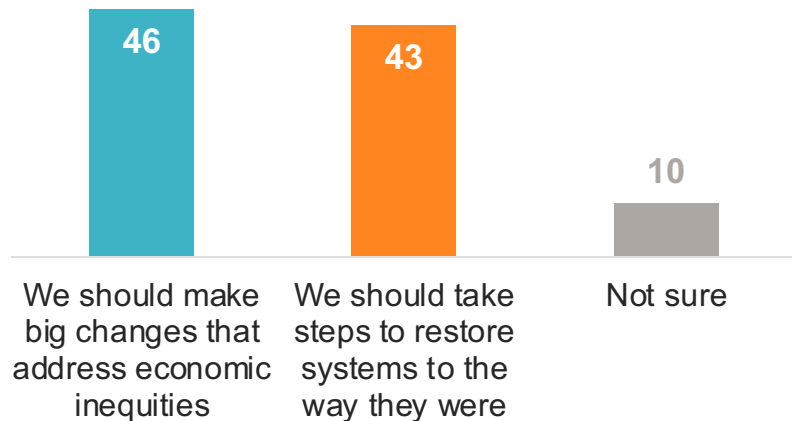
Figure 24

Jobs, Health Care, Economic Insecurity, Medical Conditions Identified As Dominant Factors For Disproportionate Pandemic Impact On Poor

Poverty Impact

*(Split) Below is a list of factors that may affect those **living in poverty** and could explain why they are more impacted by coronavirus than others. Which TWO best explain why **Americans living in poverty are more impacted** by coronavirus than others?*

		Dem	Ind	Rep
They often work in frontline jobs and jobs without work-from-home options	41	45	46	33
They have less access to quality health care	31	40	29	24
They often struggle to make ends meet, and the loss of income has a bigger impact than on those with savings	30	28	33	30
They often have more serious underlying medical conditions	28	25	30	29
They lack the financial resources to get the needed treatment	24	28	18	23
They took warnings about the virus less seriously and put themselves in danger	15	13	11	19
They are overrepresented in the prison population where the outbreak is very high	9	8	8	10

Policy Proposals

Investment In Infrastructure Jobs, Expanding Food Assistance, And Paid Sick & Family Leave Receive Strongest Backing From Voters

Figure 26

Policy Proposals

● Strongly support   ● Total support

Create good jobs and make American businesses more **competitive by investing $1 trillion in our nation's infrastructure**, including roads, bridges, railroads, broadband, and expanded production of clean energy.
- 41
- 79

Require all employers to provide workers with **guaranteed paid time off** if they are sick.
- 39
- 74

Increase the level of food assistance provided via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps) to ensure that those who need help keeping food on the table don't run out of benefits and adequate food before the month is over.
- 37
- 72

Create a national paid family and medical leave plan that would provide workers part of their wages when they need time off for the birth of a child or to care for a sick or elderly family member.
- 35
- 71

Strong Support Across Partisan Lines For Infrastructure And Sick Leave

Figure 27

Policy Proposals

Please indicate whether you would support or oppose this policy proposal to strengthen our economy. **Showing % Total Support**

	Dem	Ind	Rep
Create jobs by investing $1 trillion in infrastructure	88	77	72
Guaranteed paid time off when sick	84	74	63
Increase the level of food assistance	86	71	57
Create a national paid family and medical leave plan	86	68	58

Housing And Child Tax Credit Proposals Also Receive Broad Support

Figure 28

Policy Proposals

● Strongly support   ● Total support

(Split) Put a **moratorium on all housing evictions** for the duration of crises such as the current coronavirus pandemic.
33 — **69**

(Split) **Increase direct rental and mortgage payment relief** for families during crises such as the current coronavirus pandemic.
31 — **69**

(Split) During crises such as the current coronavirus pandemic, **provide direct housing payments to landlords or banks to prevent evictions or penalties** on low-income families.
29 — **68**

Increase the Child Tax Credit and provide an extra boost for families with children under the age of five to help them make necessary investments during the critical early years of life.
29 — **65**

Majority Support Across Party For Housing Assistance And Child Tax Credit

Figure 29

Policy Proposals

*Please indicate whether you would support or oppose this policy proposal to strengthen our economy. **Showing % Total Support***
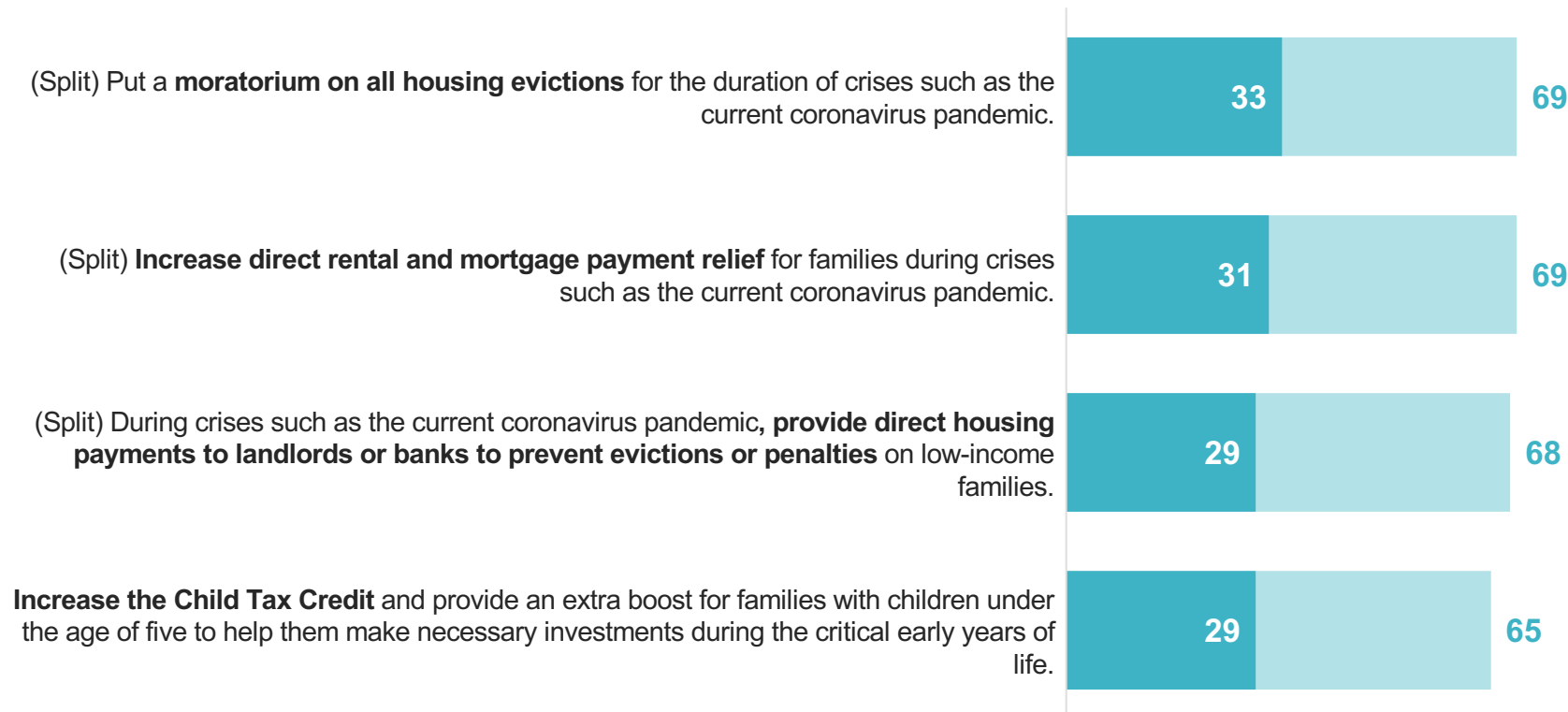
	Dem	Ind	Rep
Moratorium on all evictions	80	66	60
Increasing direct rental and mortgage payments	80	69	57
Provide direct housing payments to landlords or banks	83	65	56
Increase the Child Tax Credit	76	64	53

Even Weakest Proposals – Direct Payments, Min Wage, And EITC – Earn Majority Support

Figure 30

Policy Proposals

● Strongly support   ● Total support

(Split) Increase the total amount of housing assistance offered to low-income families and include all families facing unaffordable housing costs.
- 26
- 65

During crises such as the current coronavirus pandemic, **automatically increase weekly unemployment payments to help meet basic living costs** and extend unemployment insurance for the duration of the crisis rather than to a specific date not tied to improved conditions.
- 32
- 65

(Split) Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the governmental income support program for working people, to include up to $1,500 per year for low-income single people without children.
- 31
- 62

(Split) Increase the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour, make sure it rises with inflation, and extend the minimum wage to include groups like tipped workers and workers with disabilities, who are currently allowed to be paid less than the full minimum wage.
- 34
- 59

(Split) Provide direct monthly payments to middle-class families up to $3,000 per year for single people earning $50,000 per year or less, and up to $6,000 annually for married people earning $100,000 per year or less.
- 27
- 54

Deep Political Division On Lower Tier Proposals, Especially Min Wage

Figure 31

Policy Proposals

Please indicate whether you would support or oppose this policy proposal to strengthen our economy. **Showing % Total Support**

Policy Proposal	Dem	Ind	Rep
Increase housing assistance to low-income families	83	64	45
Increasing weekly unemployment payments	82	62	48
Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit	76	62	47
Increase the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour	84	56	35
Provide direct monthly payments to middle-class families	70	52	39

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