



# Public Perceptions of the Health Care System and Health Policy Options



December 2019

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# Executive Summary

- The cost of health care is rapidly increasing for Americans and it remains a top concern.
- In 2018, health care was the top issue for voters and drove Democratic victories in many House races. It remains a top issue going into 2020.
  - Immigration has declined somewhat in importance to voters, while the economy is now a more pressing concern.
- Voters are in agreement that the health care system is in need of significant change and are willing to consider a government-run option, however, many are confused about what different policy options would actually entail.
  - A majority report that they like their own employer-based plans, even as they overwhelmingly believe that costs are too high and the system is in need of overhaul.
  - Many Democratic health care priorities, in particular reducing costs, including the price of prescription drugs, and protecting coverage for pre-existing conditions, are extremely popular.
  - Framing can significantly shift support for even very popular policies, as voters are confused about how health care works and don't fully understand their options.



## Context

Voters in the United States agree that health care is a major problem and increasingly too expensive. The prominence of health care as a major issue in 2018 drove the Democratic victory in November and will continue to be a factor in 2020.

Health care was the top issue for voters in 2018, playing a significant role in Democrats' electoral victories in the House.

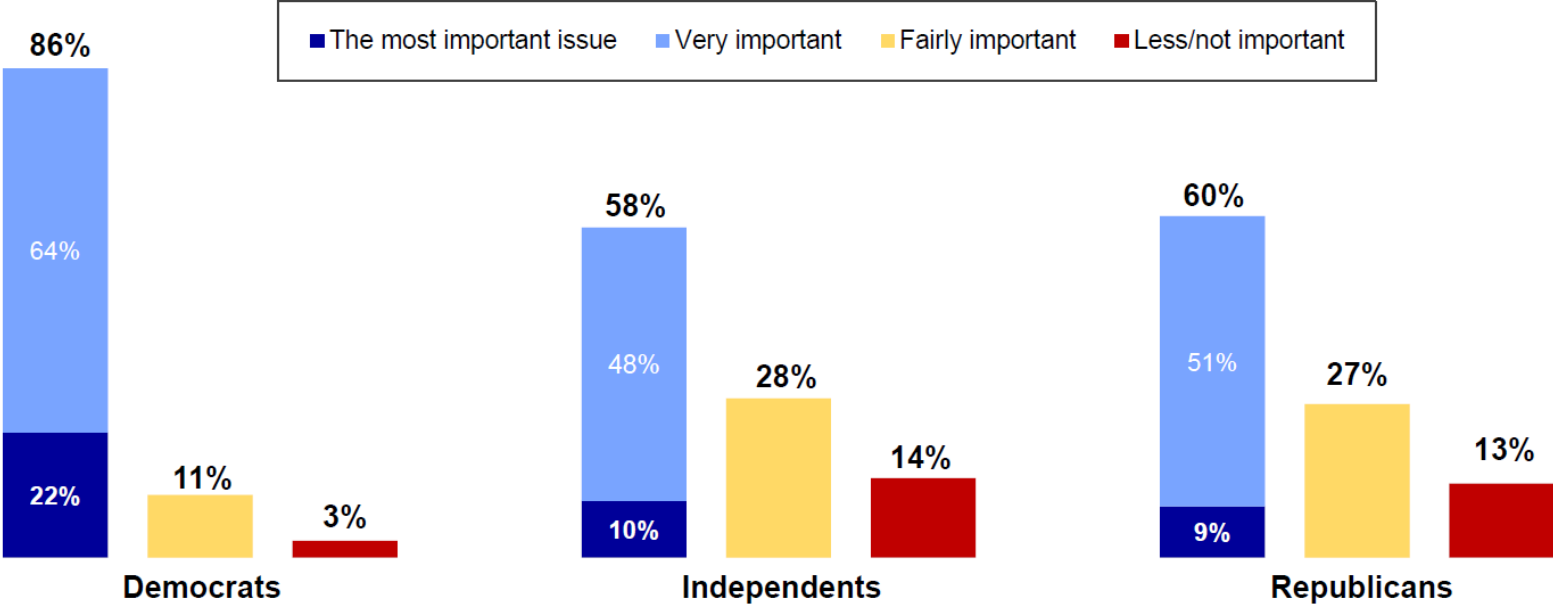
### Most important issue facing the country

	Democrat	Republican	No Answer
Health care <b>41%</b>	75%	23%	2%
Immigration <b>23%</b>	23%	75%	2%
Economy <b>22%</b>	34%	63%	3%
Gun policy <b>10%</b>	70%	29%	1%

18778 Respondents

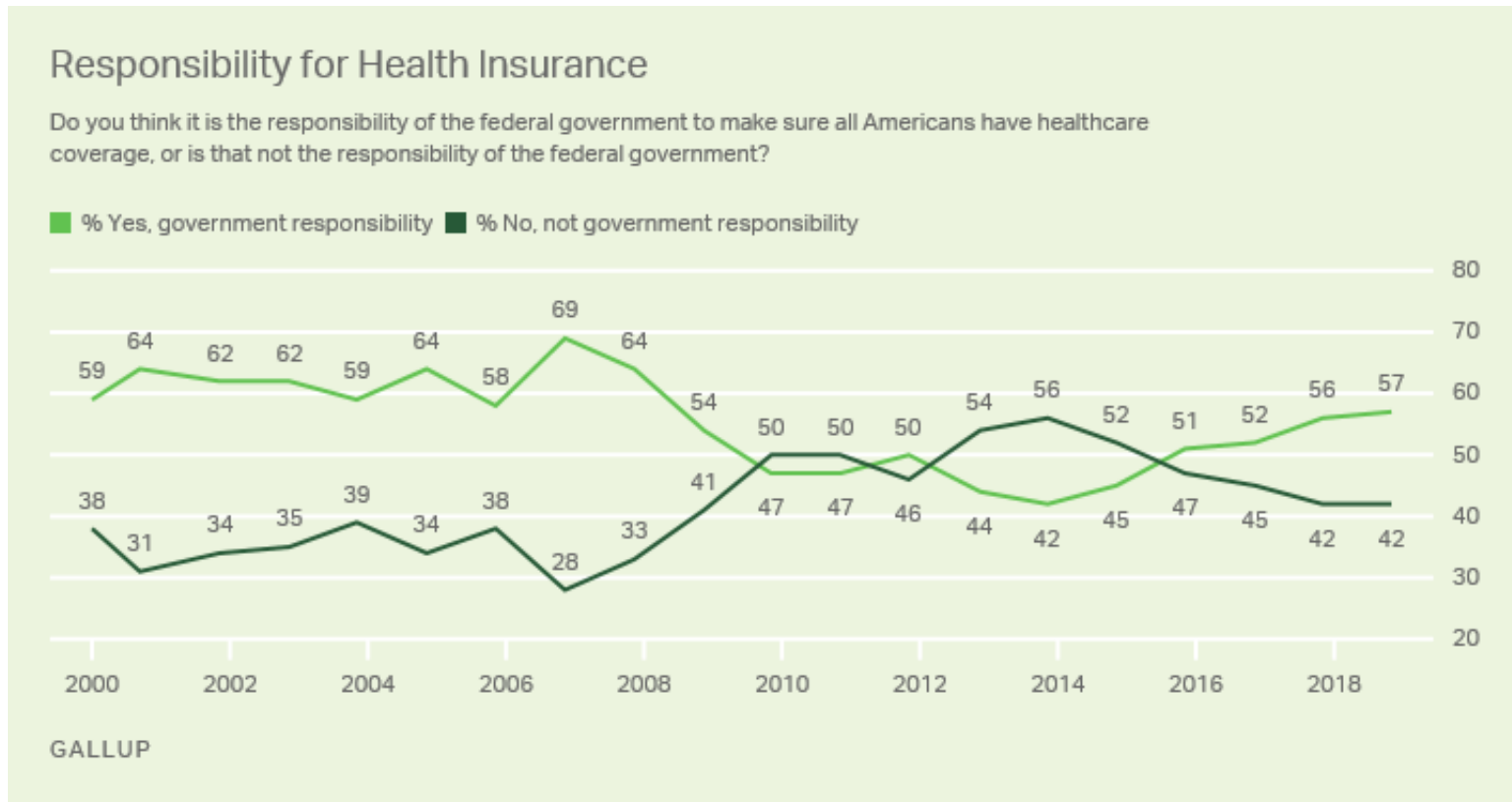
Source: 2018 election exit polls (via CNN)

Majorities across party said health care was a very important issue when deciding who to vote for. However, Democrats were most likely to say it was the most important issue for them.



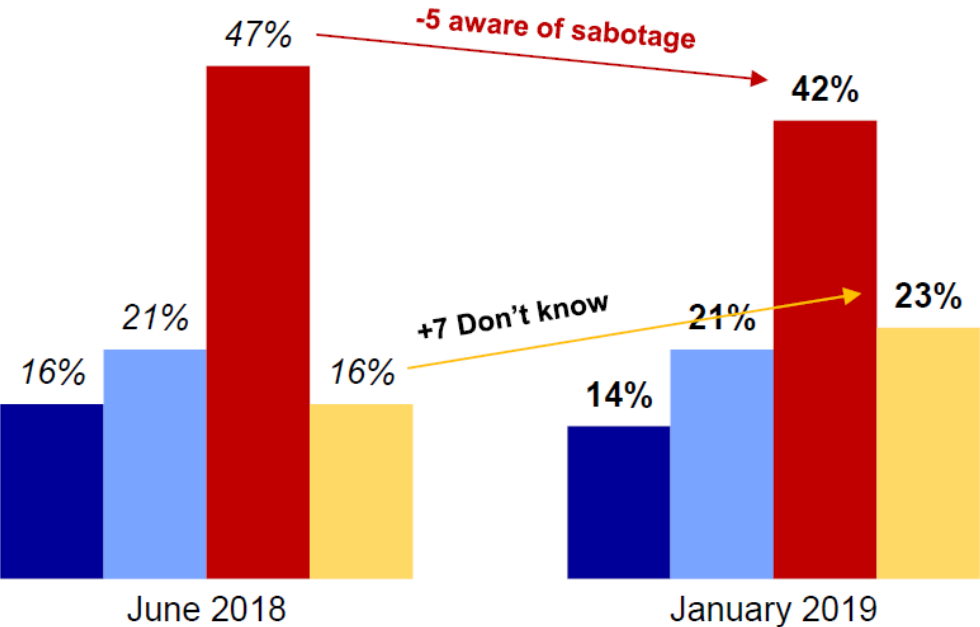
Source: Hart Research survey on behalf of Protect Our Care, January 2019.

The way voters feel about health care has changed from years past: a majority of Americans now feel that the federal government has a responsibility to make sure all Americans have health care coverage.



Source: <http://news.gallup.com/poll/4708/healthcare-system.aspx>

Although a plurality of voters believe Trump is actively trying to sabotage the Affordable Care Act, awareness of this issue was highest last June.



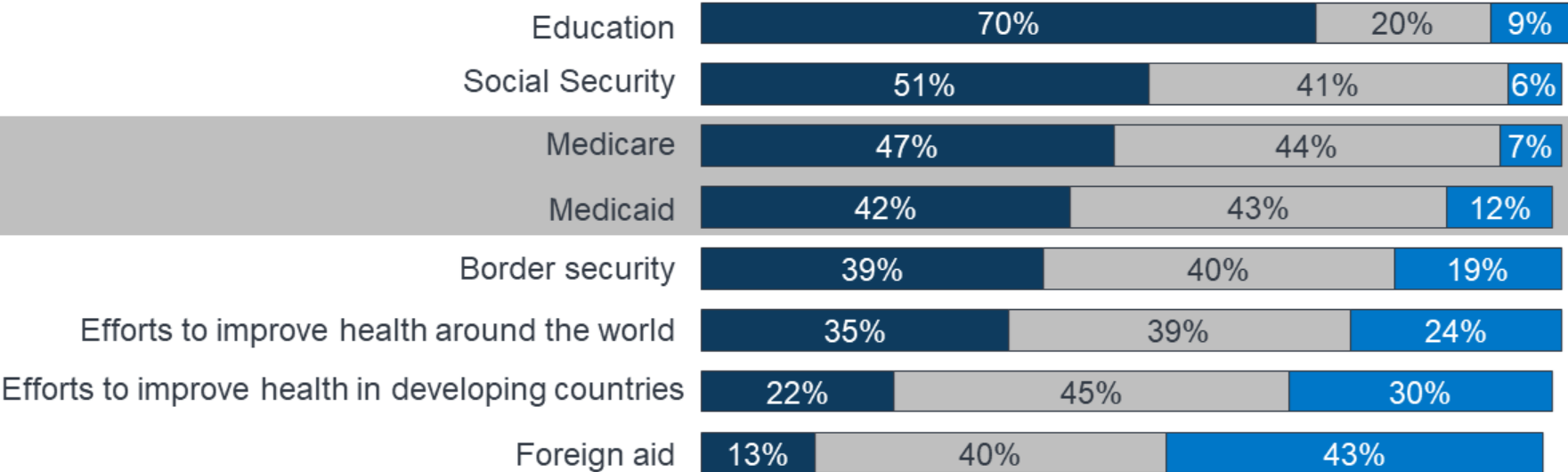
- He is doing what he can to implement the Affordable Care Act and help make it work as intended
- He is not taking any action to help make the Affordable Care Act work, but he is not actively trying to sabotage it to make it fail
- He is actively trying to sabotage the Affordable Care Act, and doing things to make it more likely that it will fail
- Do not know enough to say

Medicare and Medicaid are also popular programs, and the vast majority of voters do not want Congress to decrease spending on either one.

# Few Want Congress To Decrease Spending On Medicare And Medicaid

Do you want to see Congress increase spending on each of the following, decrease spending, or keep it about the same?

■ Increase      □ Keep it about the same      ■ Decrease

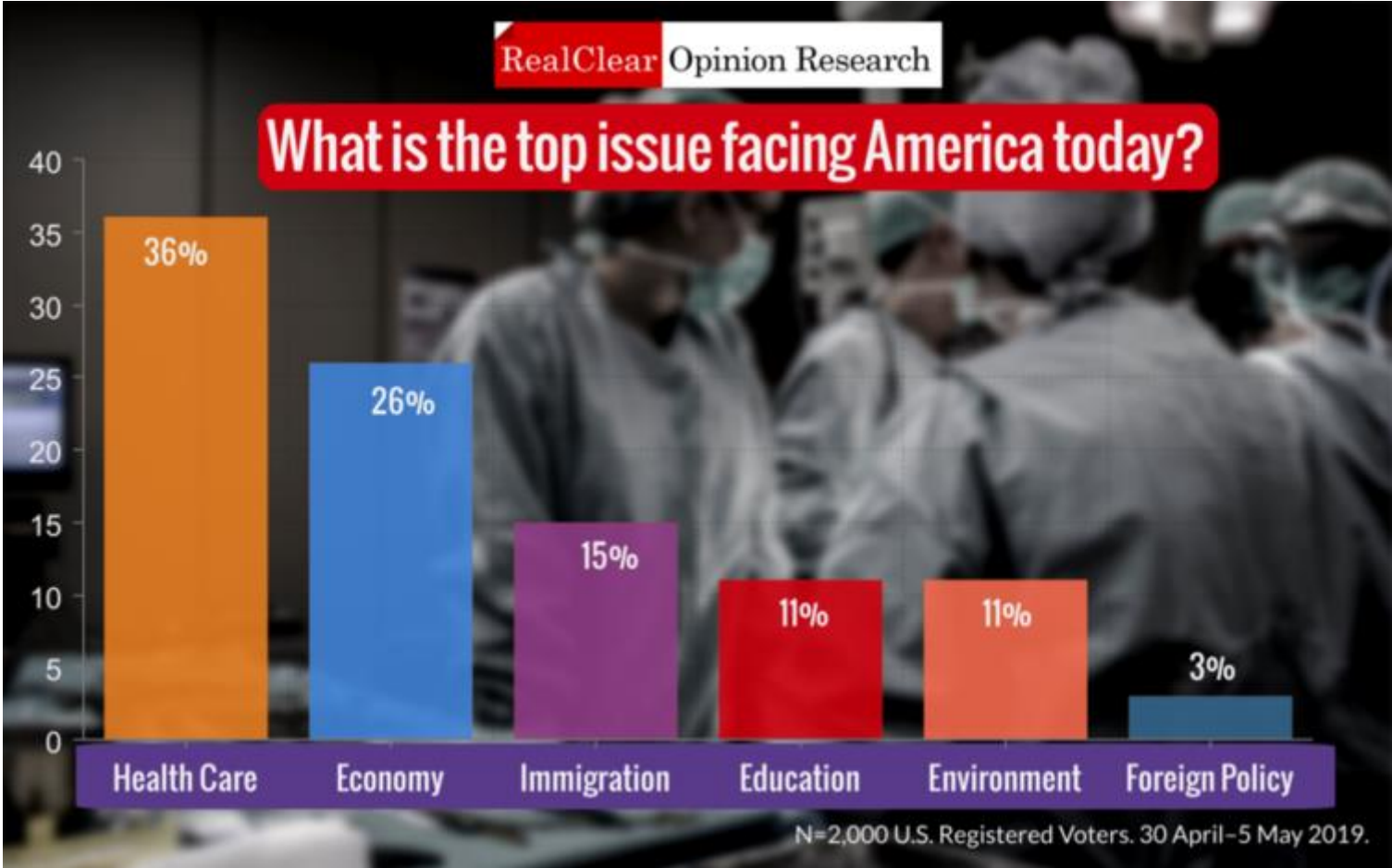


SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted April 11-16, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.





Voters remain very concerned about health care heading into the 2020 cycle. The economy has grown in importance, while immigration is of lesser significance.

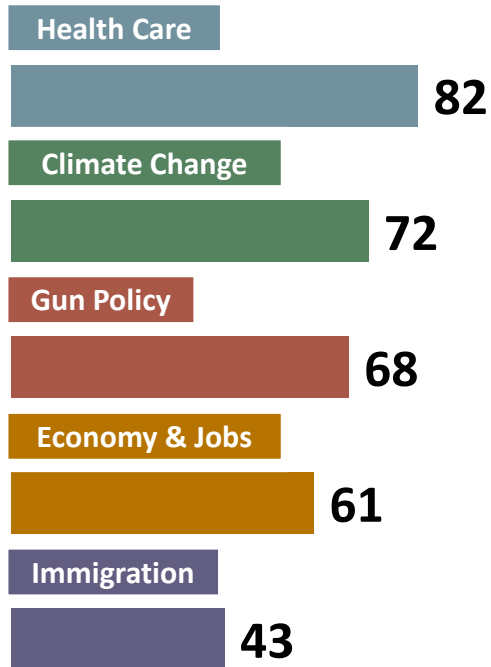


Source: RealClear Opinion Research Survey (Registered Voters. April 30-May 5, 2019.)

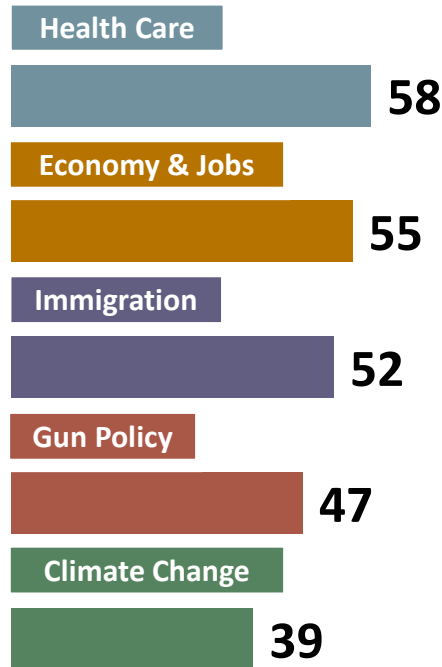
Views on health care are consistently divided by partisanship. While health care is the top issue for voters overall and for Democrats by a significant margin, Republicans remain more concerned about immigration and the economy. Independents are divided, ranking health care, the economy, and immigration as top priorities.

Very Important Issue to you Personally

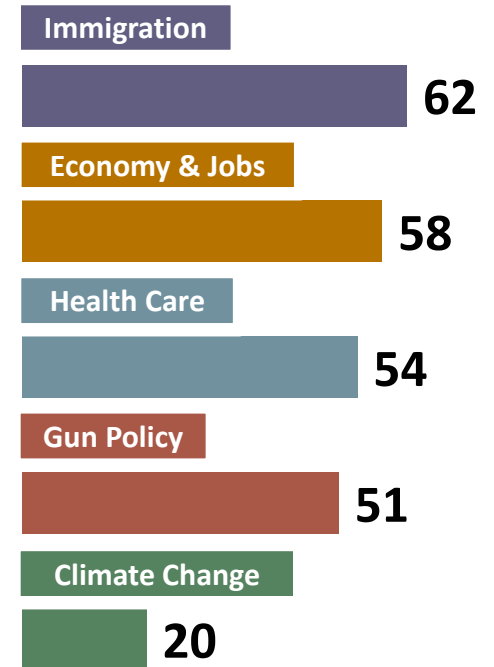
Democrats



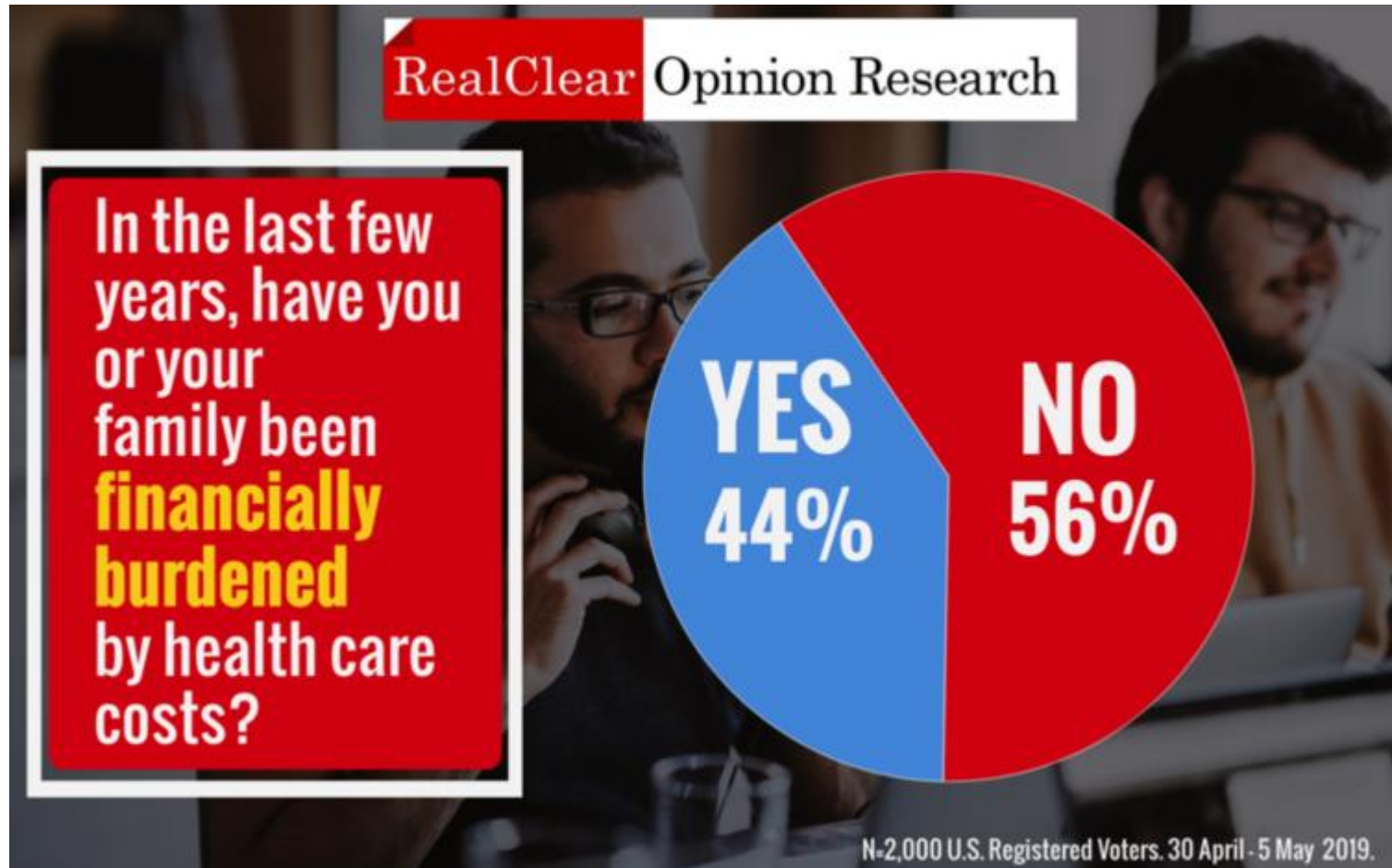
Independents



Republicans

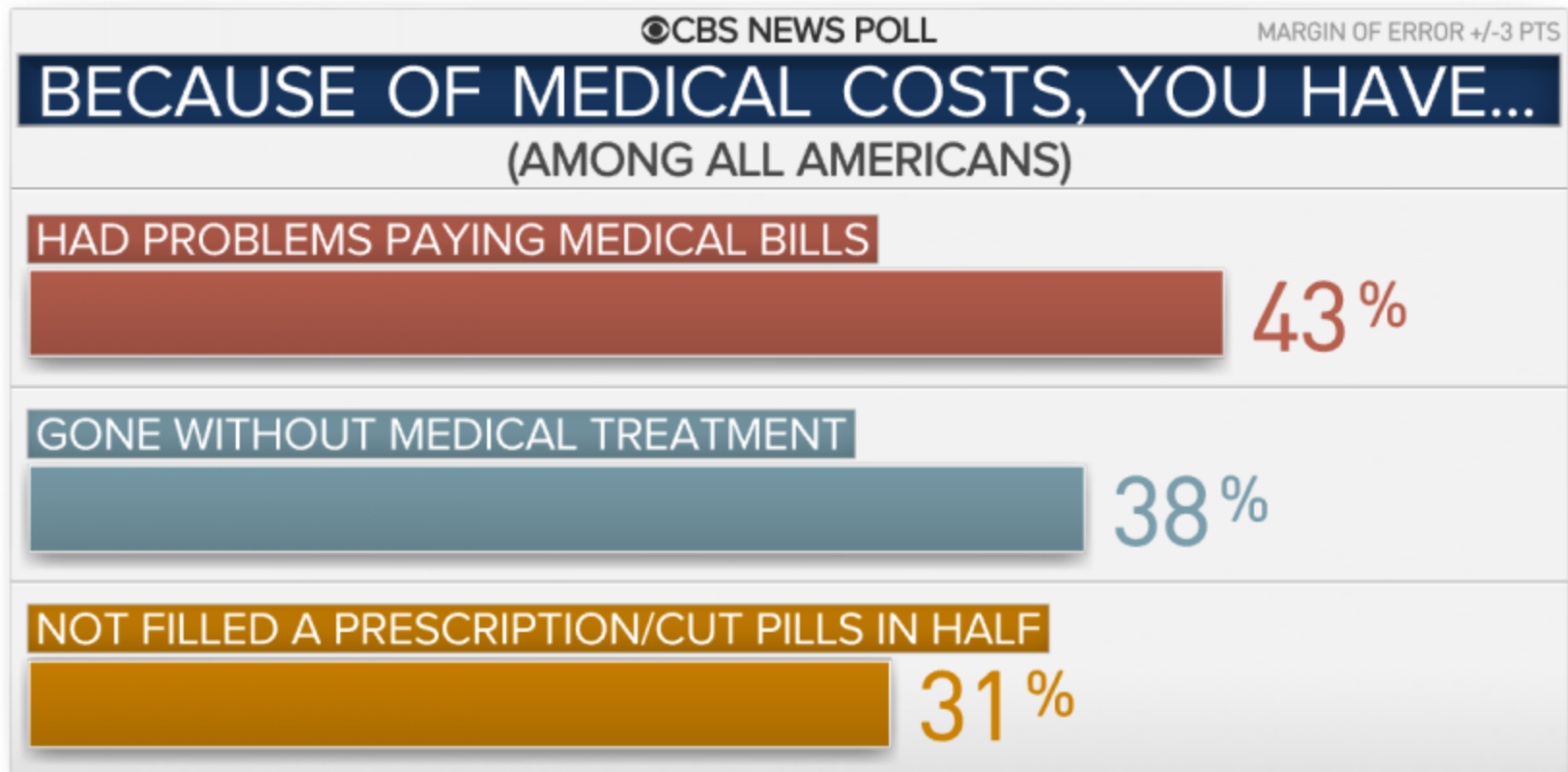


Just under half of voters' families have faced a financial burden caused by health care costs in the past few years.

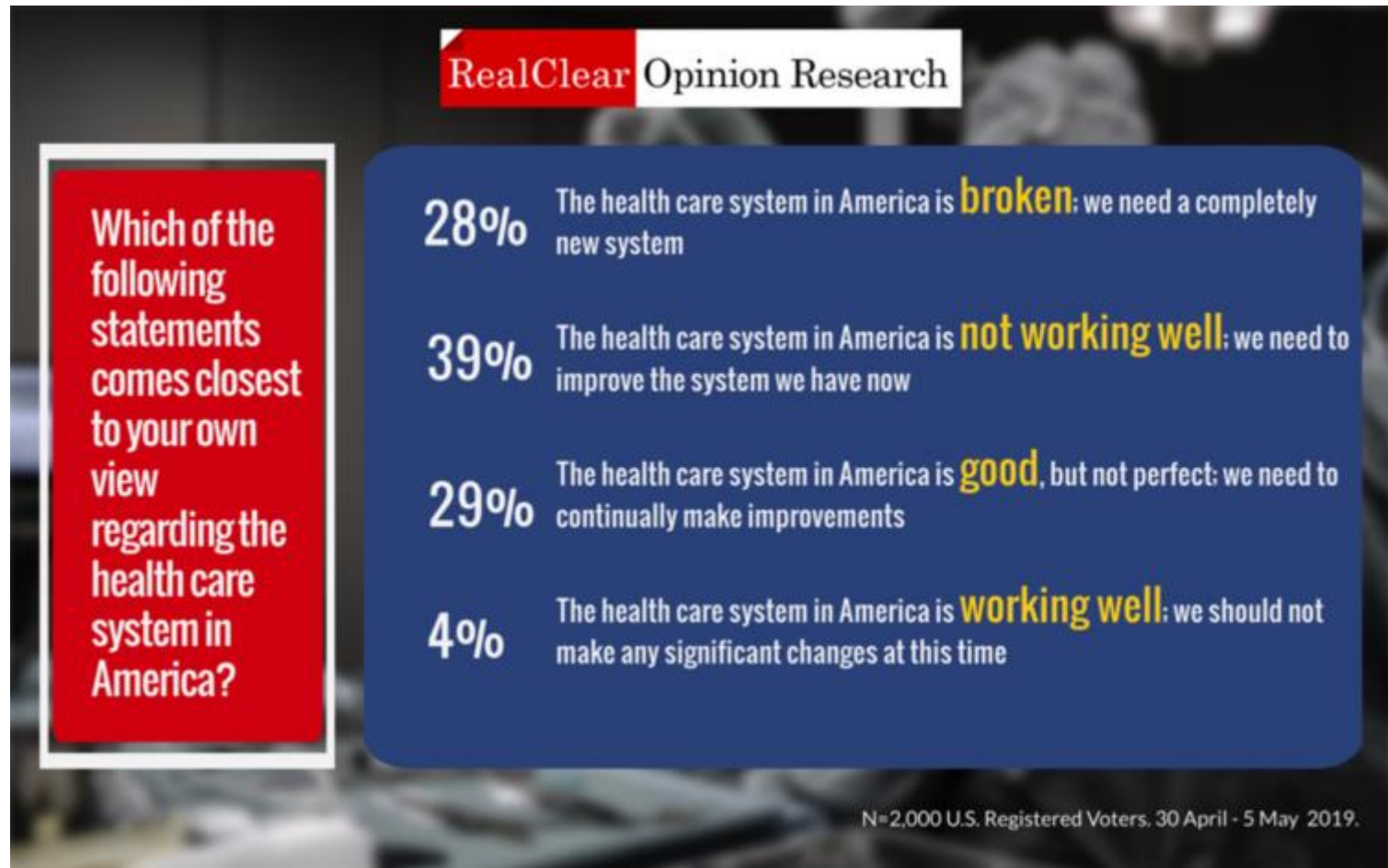


Source: RealClear Opinion Research Survey (Registered Voters. April 30-May 5, 2019.)

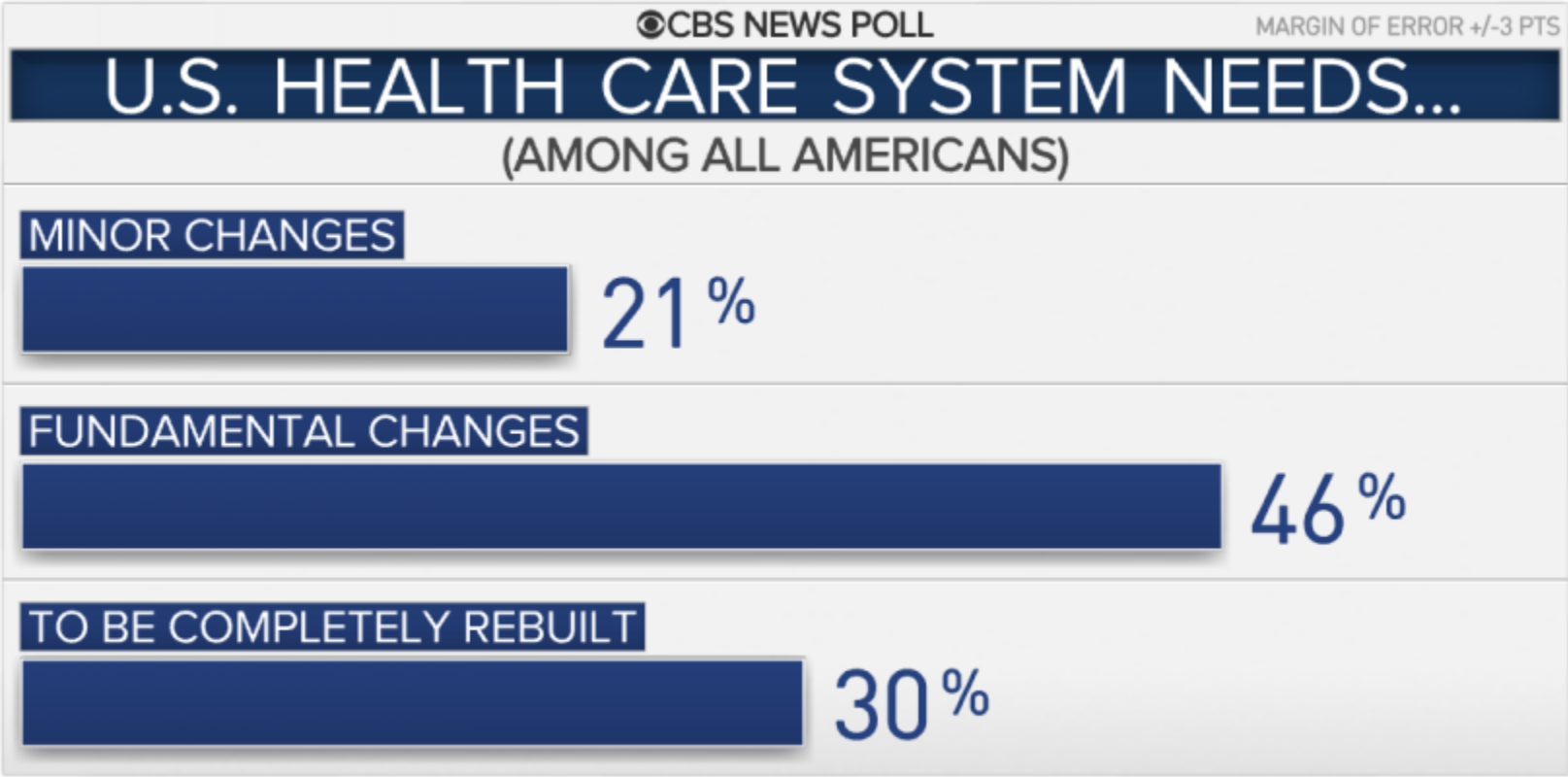
Americans report having problems paying bills, foregoing treatment, and not filling their prescriptions or taking correct dosages because of health care costs.



Only 4% of voters think that the health care system is working well. Two-thirds of voters think say that it is either broken or not working well.

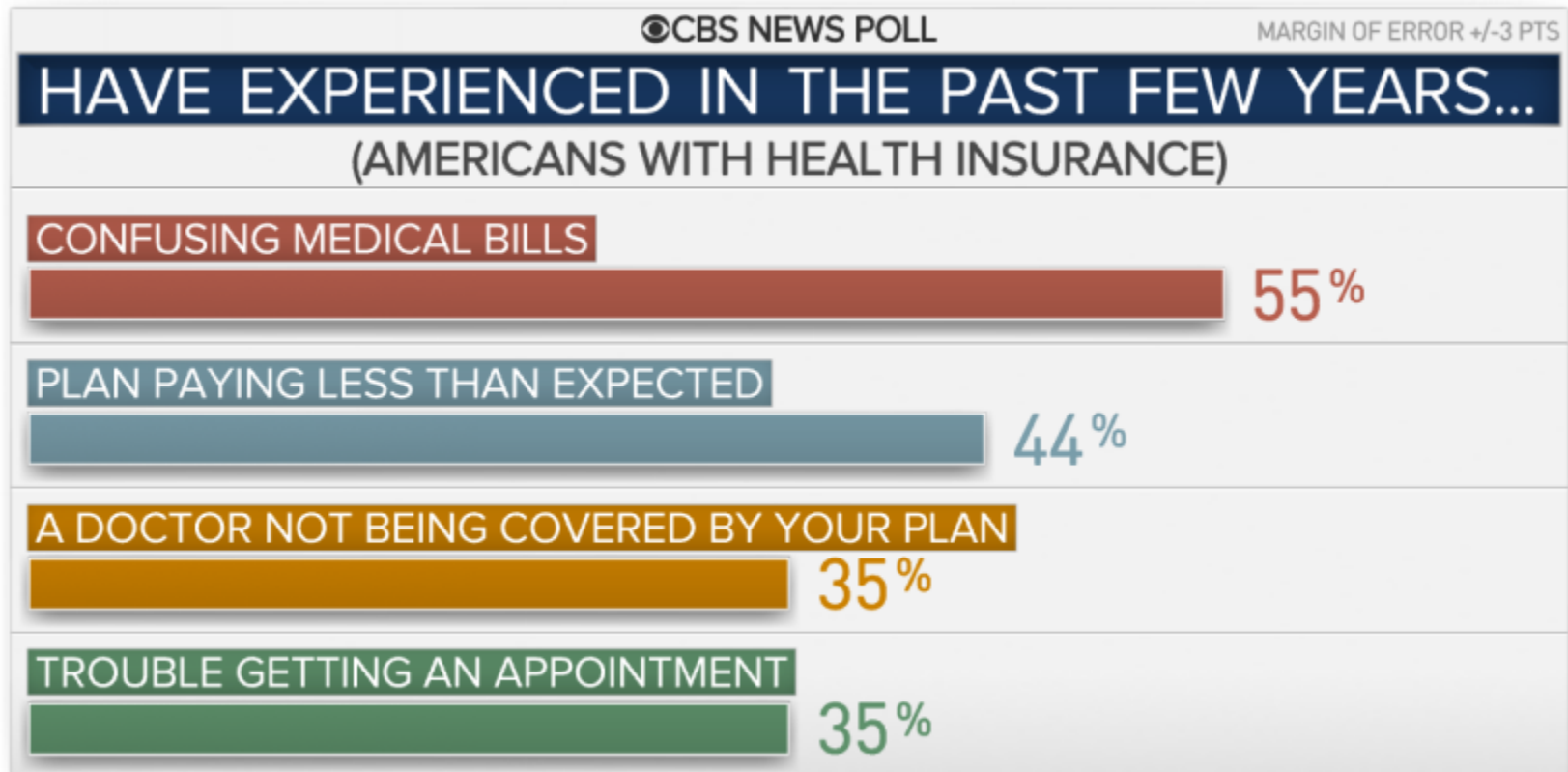


There is a near-universal demand for significant change – over three-quarters of voters say that the health care system is in need of fundamental changes, or even to be completely rebuilt.

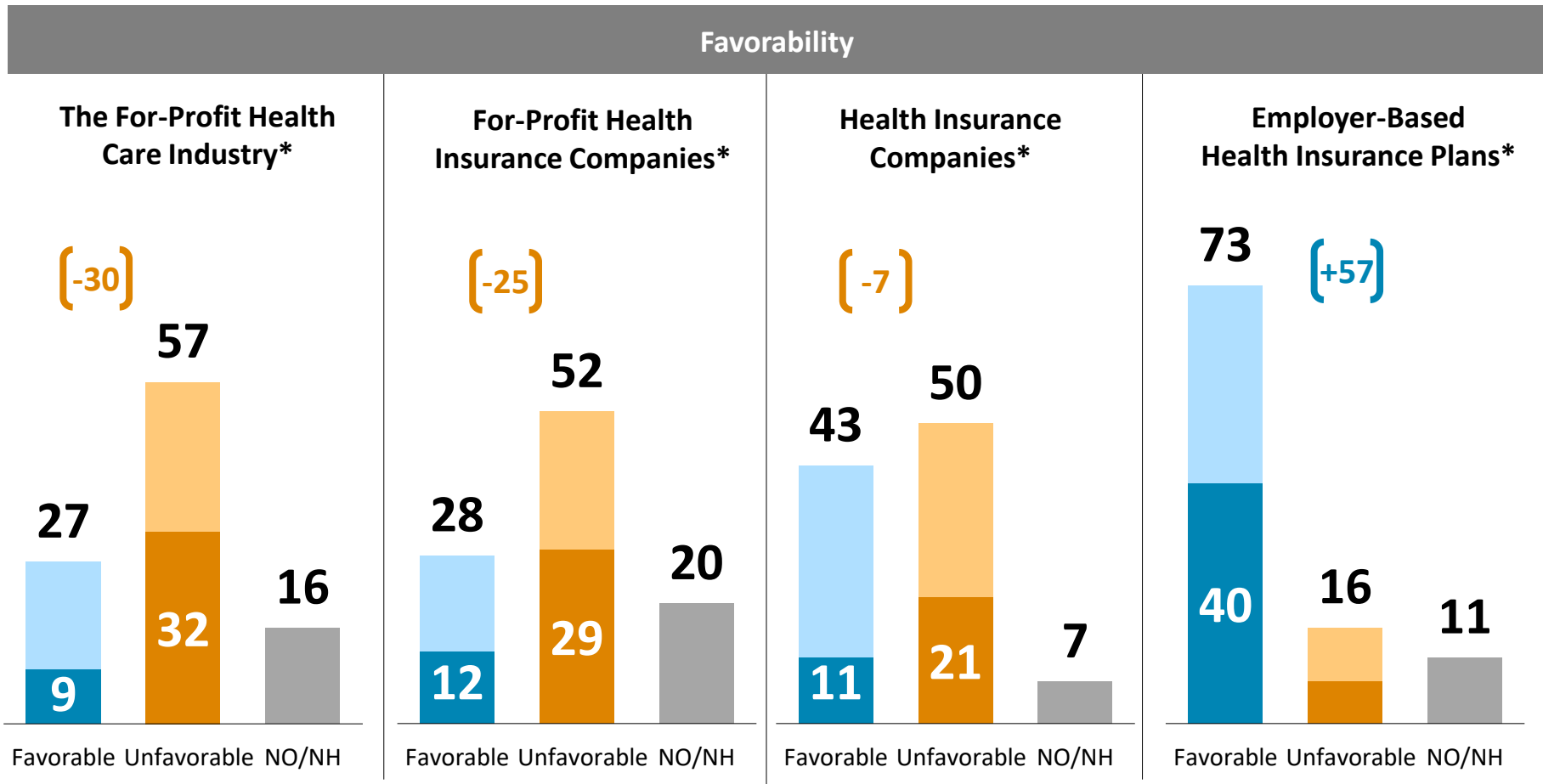


Source: CBS News Poll (Adults. October 2019).

Over half have encountered confusing medical bills in the past few years, 44% have had their plan cover less of their costs than expected, and over one-third have experienced a doctor not being covered by their plan and/or had trouble getting an appointment.



While voters have overwhelmingly negative perceptions of the for-profit health care industry and health insurance companies, they largely like their own employer-based health plans.



\*Split sampled

Darker colors indicate intensity.

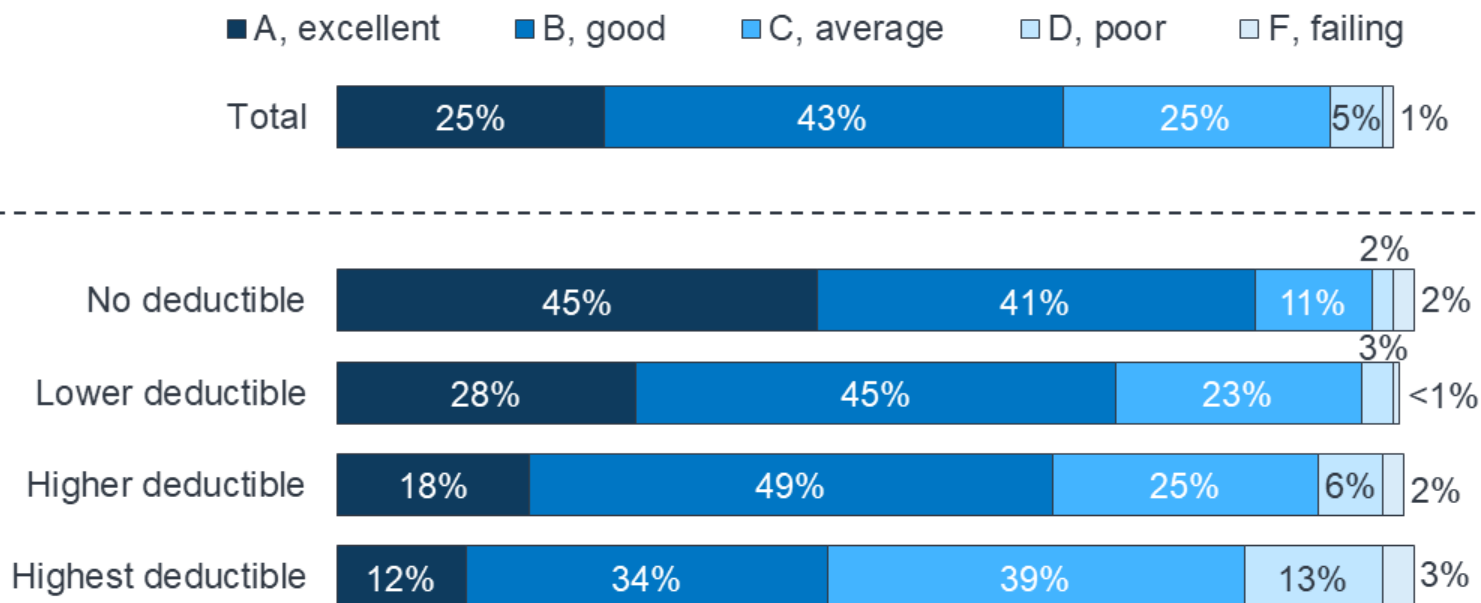
LRP Survey, April 2019, Nationwide



However, this is less true of voters with high deductible plans.

## Most Give Plans Passing Grades, But Less So For Those With High Deductibles

Percent who say they would give their health insurance plan the following grades:



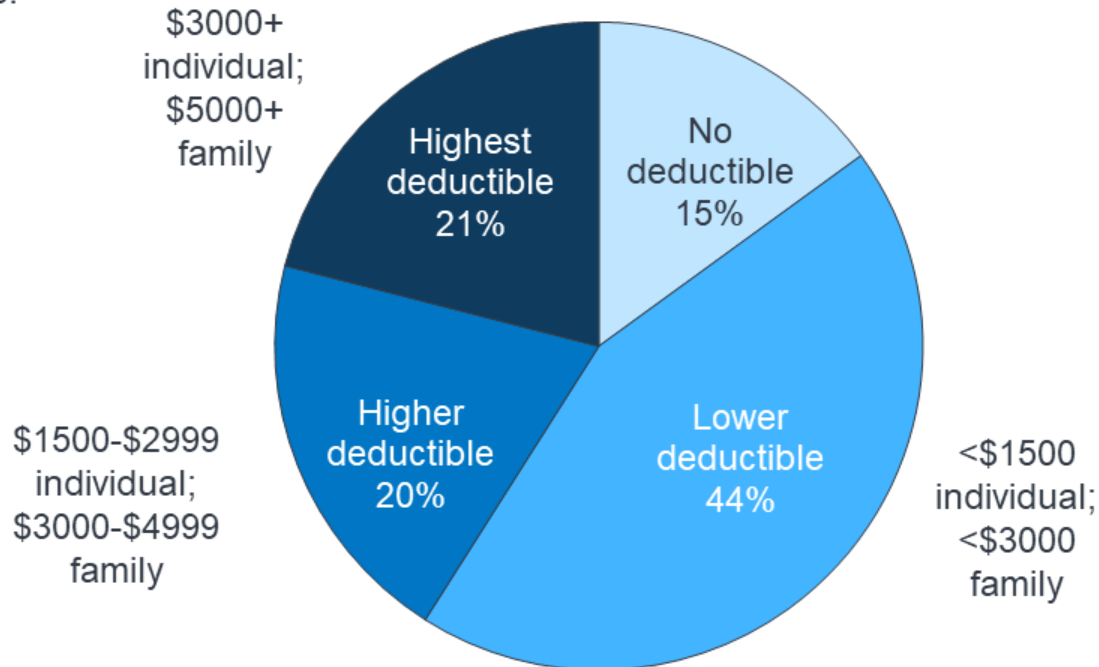
NOTE: Deductible definitions (lower, higher, highest) for individual: <\$1500, \$1500-\$2999, \$3000+; for family: <\$3000, \$3000-\$4999, \$5000+.  
 SOURCE: KFF/LA Times Survey of Adults with Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance (Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2018). See topline for full question wording.



Over four in ten adults with employer-sponsored insurance have high-deductible plans. One in five pay the highest deductibles – defined as \$3,000 for an individual or \$5,000 for a family annually.

## Four In Ten Adults With Employer-Sponsored Insurance Report Having High Deductible Plans

AMONG ADULTS WITH EMPLOYER-SPONSORED HEALTH INSURANCE: Percent who say their annual deductible is:

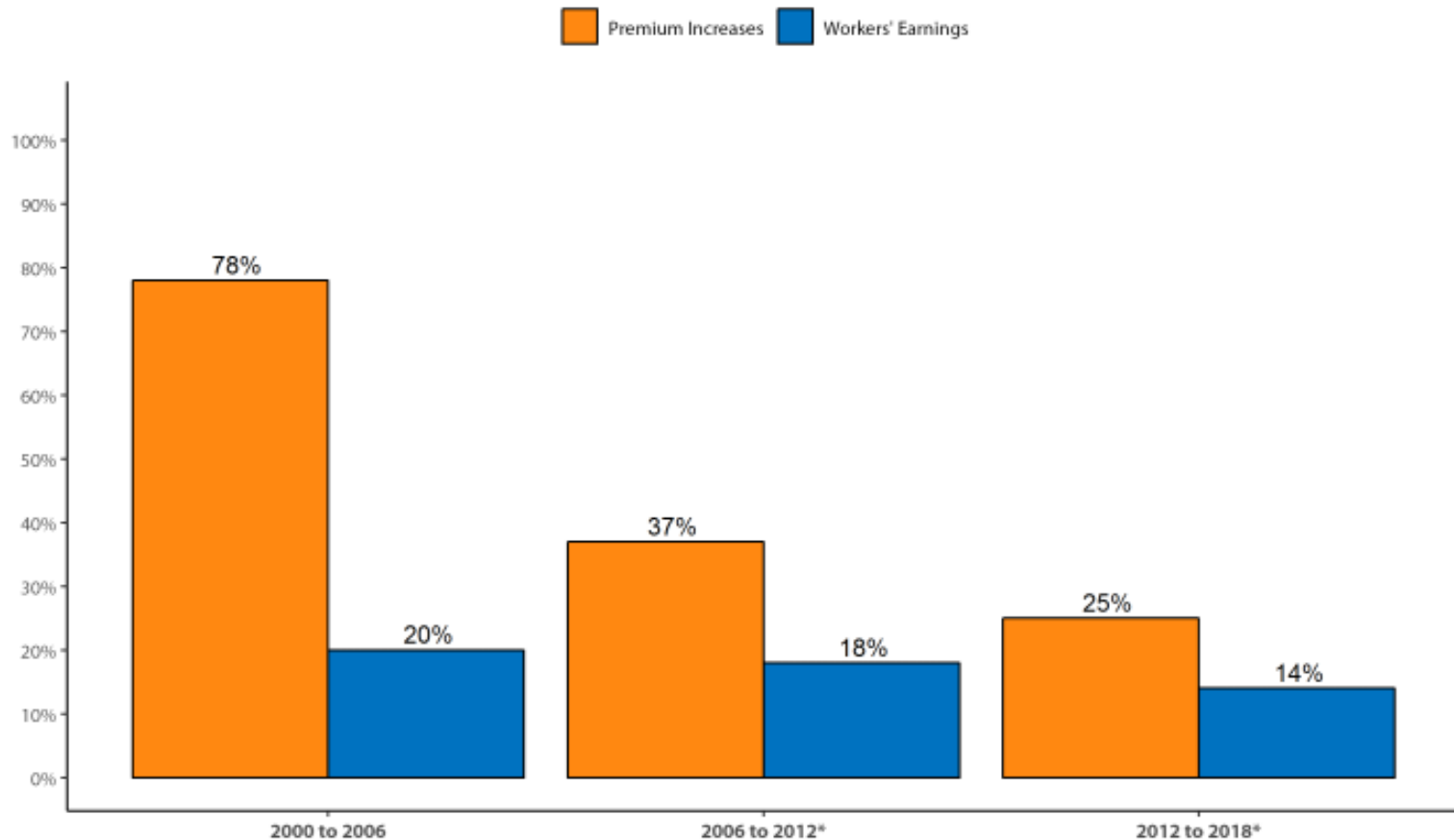


SOURCE: KFF/LA Times Survey of Adults with Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance (Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2018). See topline for full question wording.



Increases in premiums have far outpaced increases in wages and earnings over the past 20 years, though by less in recent years than the early 2000s.

**Figure C**  
**Cumulative Family Premium Increases and Workers' Earnings, 2000-2018**

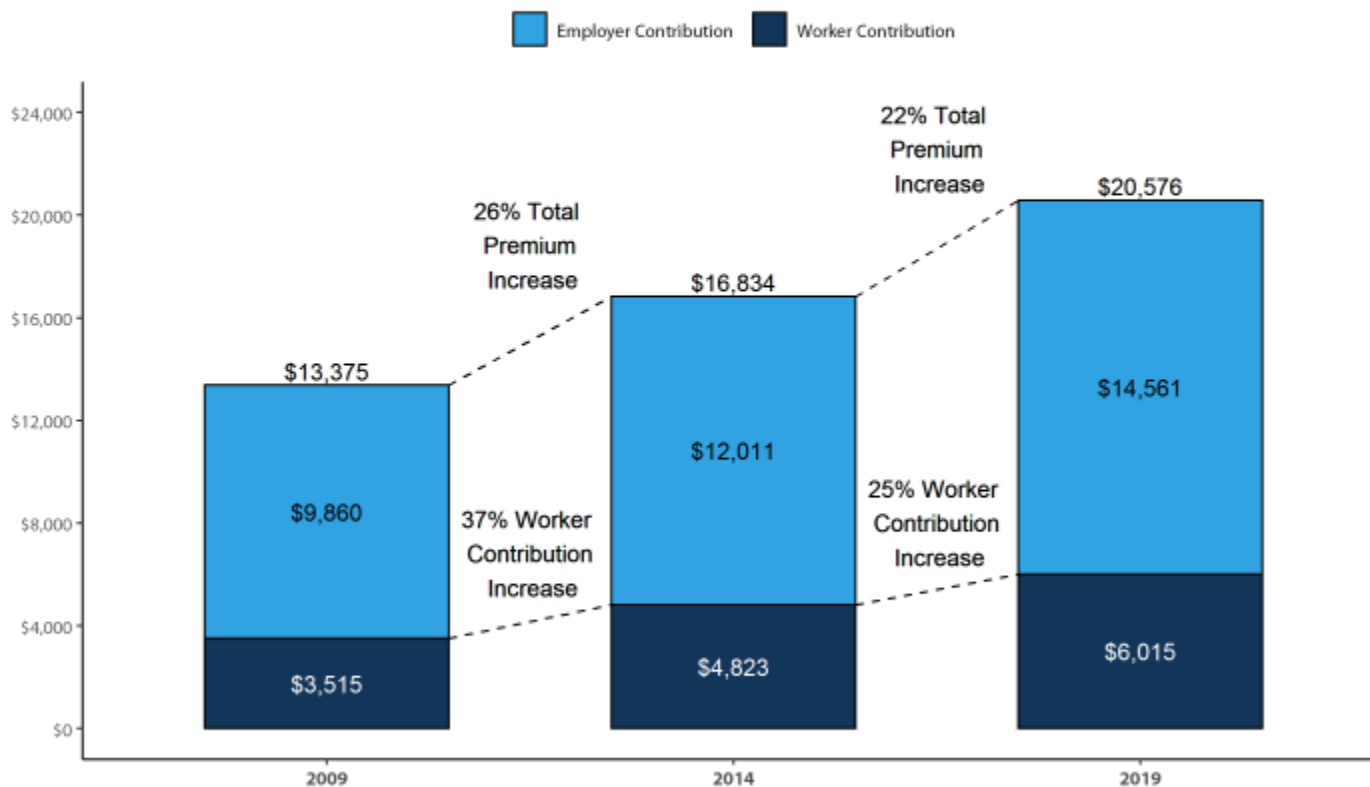


\* Percentage change in family premium is statistically different from previous period shown ( $p < .05$ ).

Source: KFF Employer Health Benefits Survey, 2018; Kaiser/HRET Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Benefits, 2000-2017. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Seasonally Adjusted Data from the Current Employment Statistics Survey 2000-2018 (April to April).

Workers' contributions have also increased, at a faster rate than premium increases overall.

**Figure A**  
**Average Annual Worker and Employer Premium Contributions and Total Premiums for Family Coverage, 2009, 2014, and 2019**

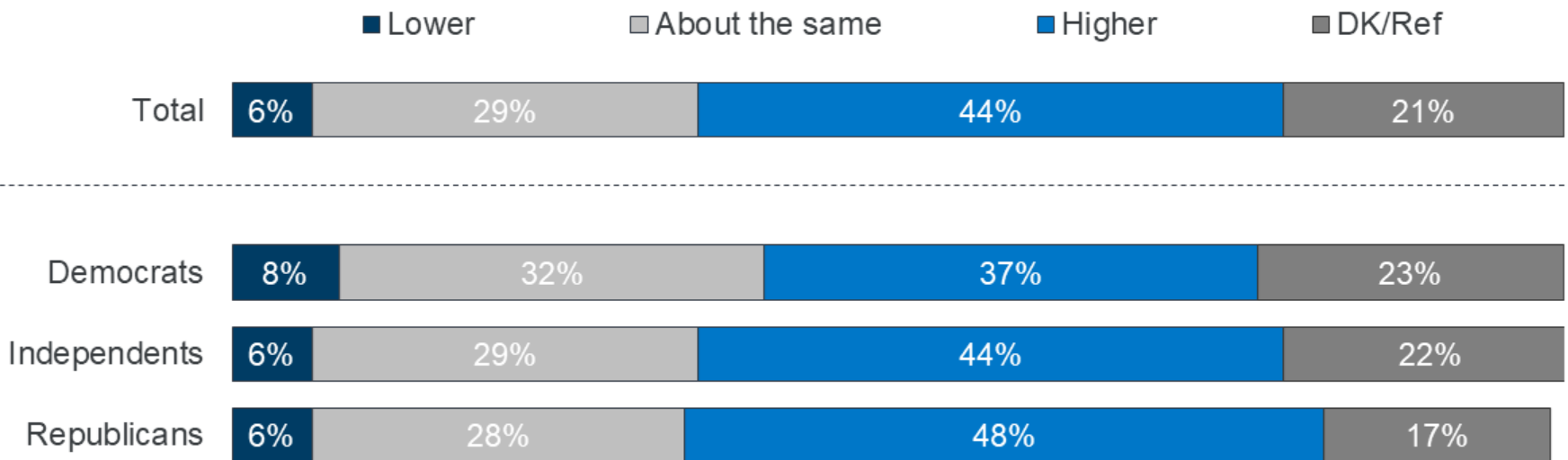


SOURCE: KFF Employer Health Benefits Survey, 2019; Kaiser/HRET Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Benefits, 2009 and 2014

Americans can see their premiums rising and are aware that ACA premiums are going up as well.

## About Four In Ten Think ACA Marketplace Premiums Are Higher Compared To Last Year

On average, do you think the premiums for health insurance plans available in the Affordable Care Act marketplaces for those who are shopping now are higher, lower, or about the same as they were last year?



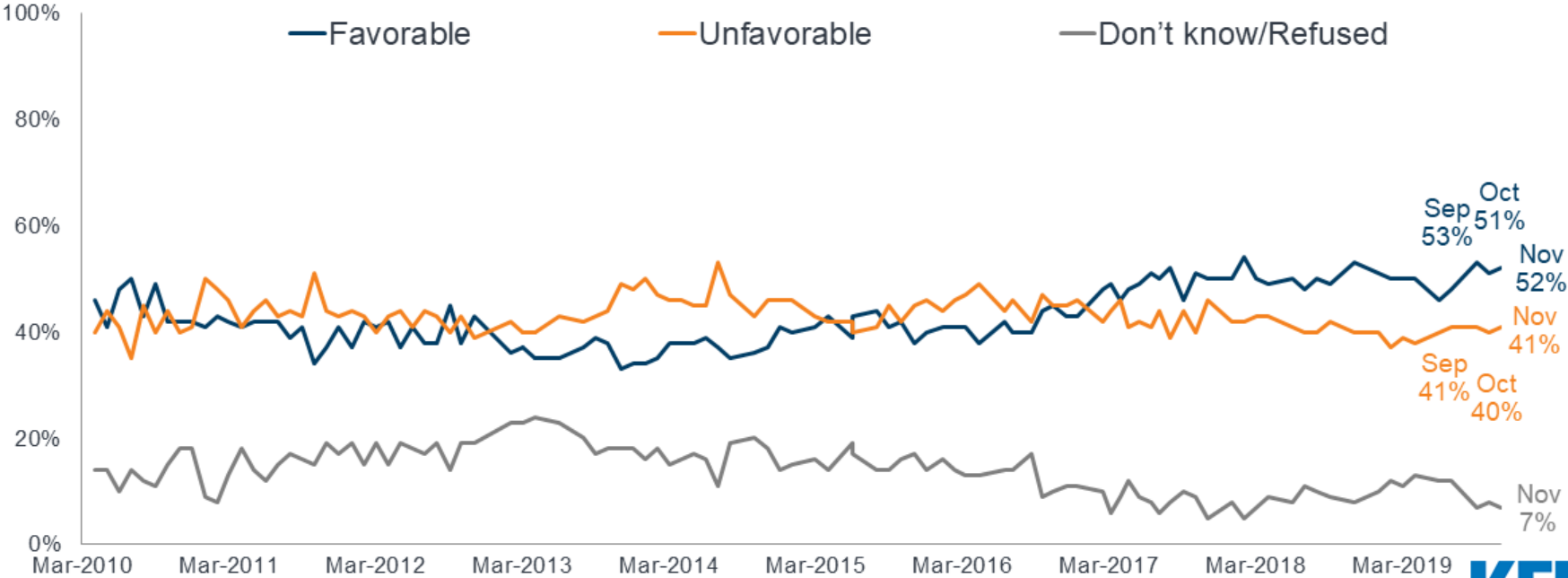
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.



Support for the Affordable Care Act has remained relatively unchanged over the last two years since Republicans first began their efforts to repeal the health care law, resulting in an increase in its popularity.

# Public More Likely To View The ACA Favorably Than Unfavorably

Do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of the 2010 health reform law?



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Polls. See topline for full question wording and response options.

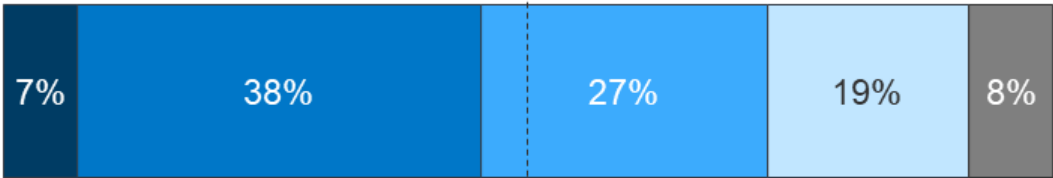


Americans do not have as negative an impression of the Affordable Care Act as they do of the health care system as a whole. The public is divided on how well marketplaces are working, with slightly more believing their own states are running it more effectively than the country as a whole.

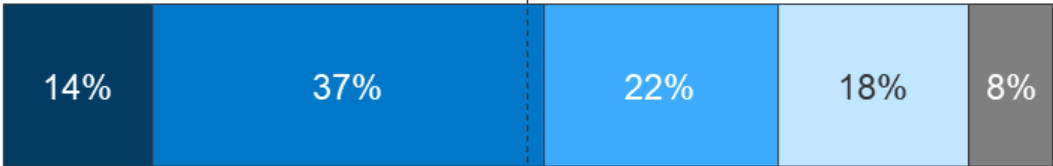
## Public Divided On How Well ACA Health Insurance Marketplaces Are Working

■ Very well ■ Somewhat well ■ Not too well ■ Not at all well ■ Don't know

How well would you say the health insurance marketplaces are working in the **nation, overall**?



How well would you say the health insurance marketplace is working in **your state**?



50%

SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.



This difference is largely driven by Democrats, though it holds across party. Most people believe that state marketplaces are working better, both nationally and in their states.

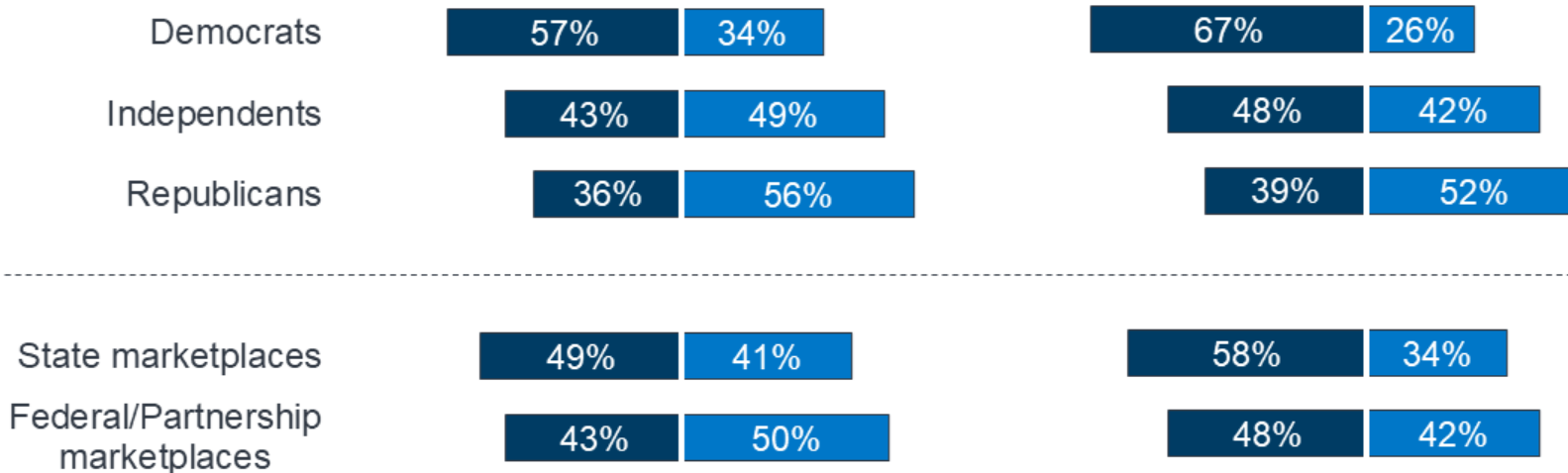
## Views Of ACA Marketplaces Vary By Partisanship And Marketplace Type

How well would you say the health insurance marketplaces are working in the **nation, overall**?

How well would you say the health insurance marketplace is working in **your state**?

■ Working well

■ Not working well



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.





Majorities of Democrats and independents do not want the Supreme Court to overturn the ACA as a whole, and even Republican are divided on overturning the pre-existing condition protections in the ACA.

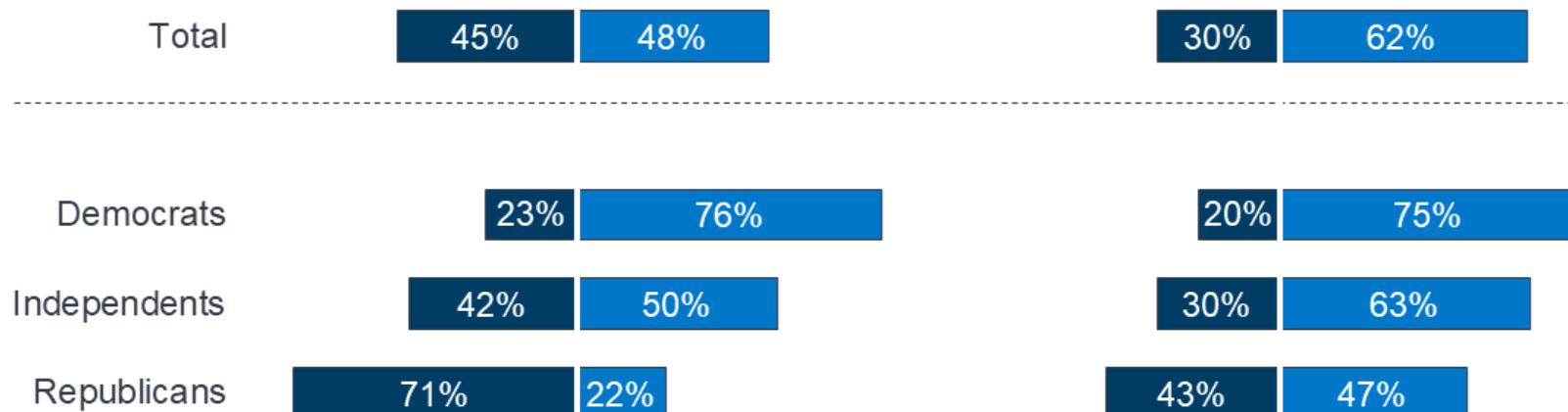
## About Six In Ten Do Not Want Supreme Court To Overturn ACA Protections For People With Pre-Existing Conditions

Would you like to see the Supreme Court overturn...?

■ Yes, overturn      ■ No, do not overturn

...the Affordable Care Act...

...the ACA's protections for people with pre-existing conditions...



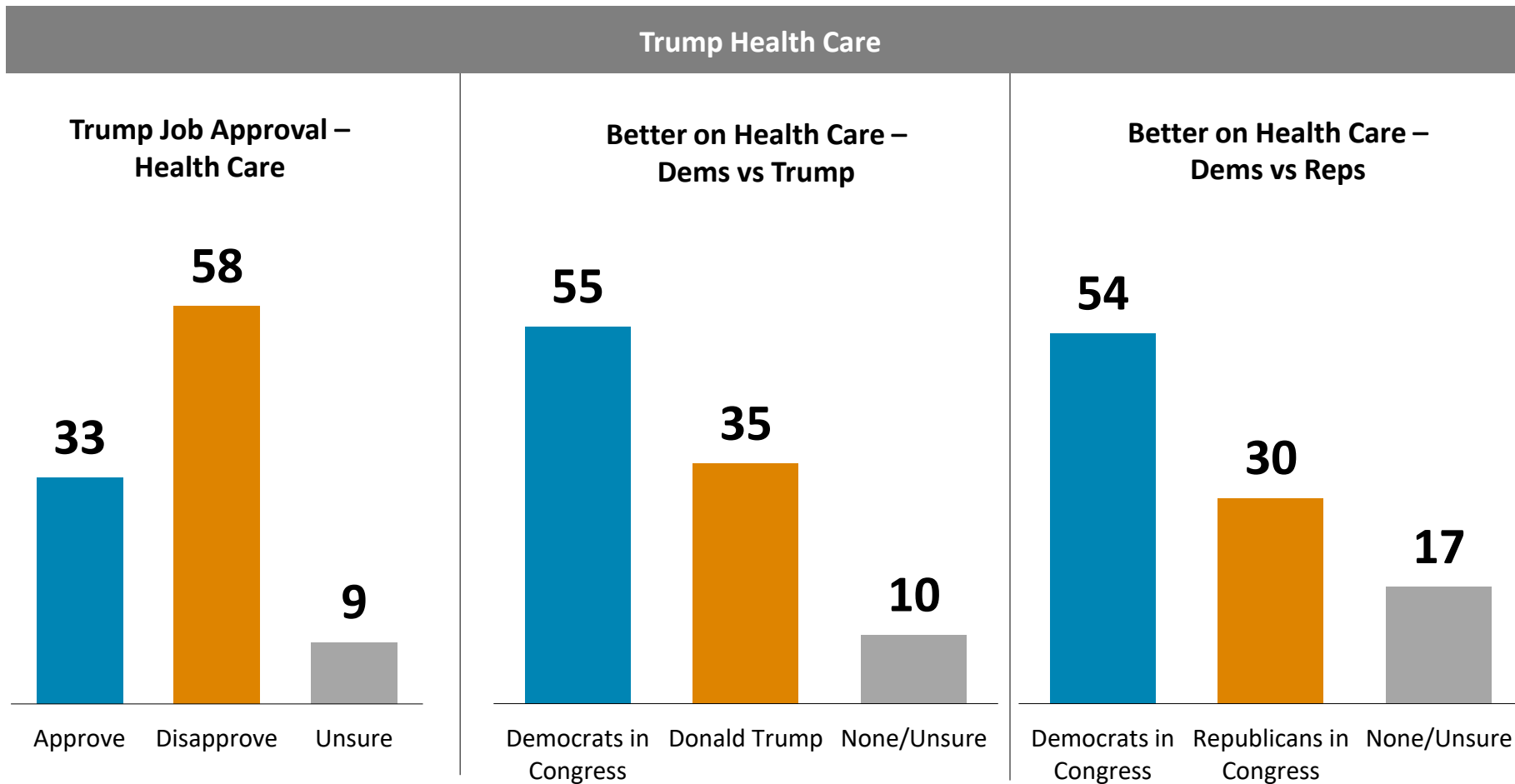
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.



Source: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019).

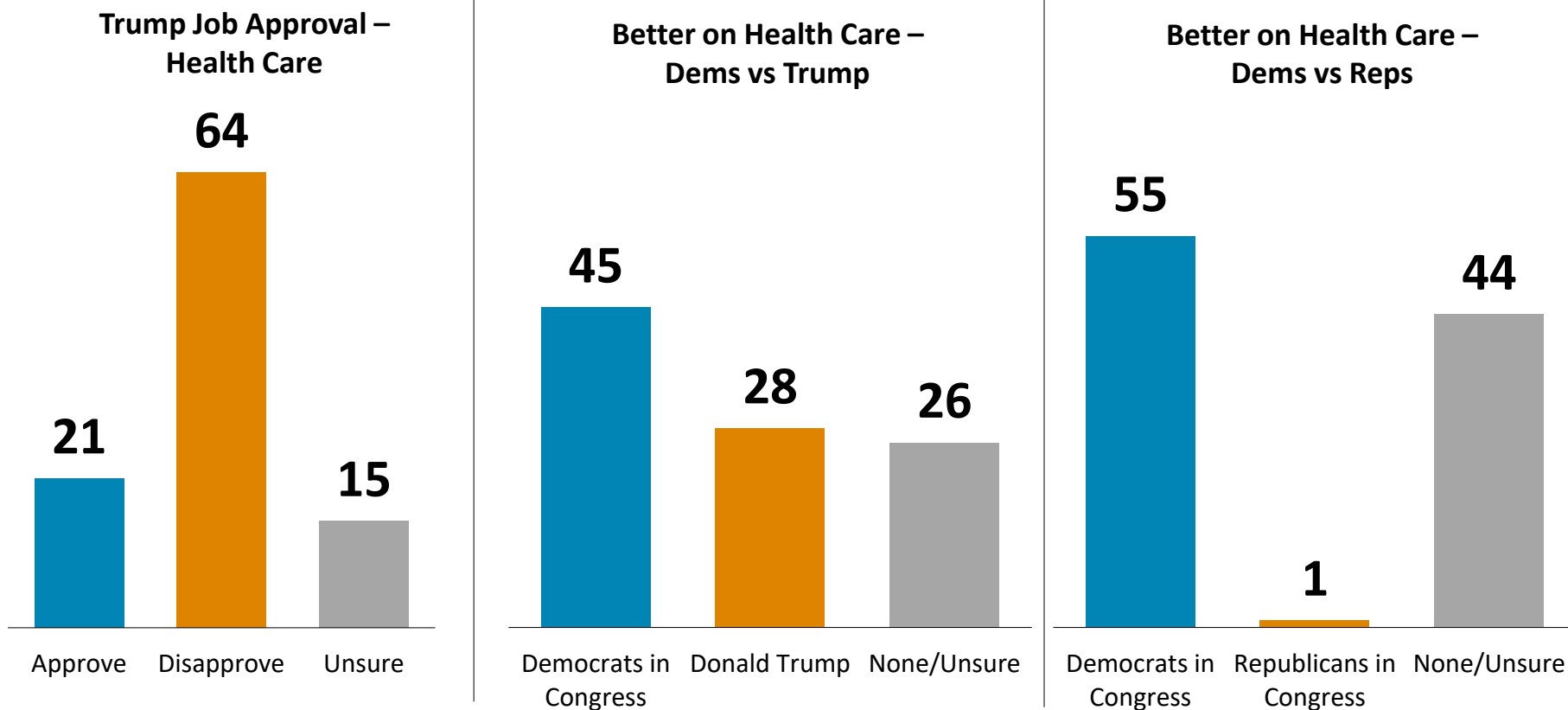


A majority (58%) of voters disapprove of the job Trump is doing on health care, and a majority (55%) also say Democrats in Congress are doing a better job on health care.



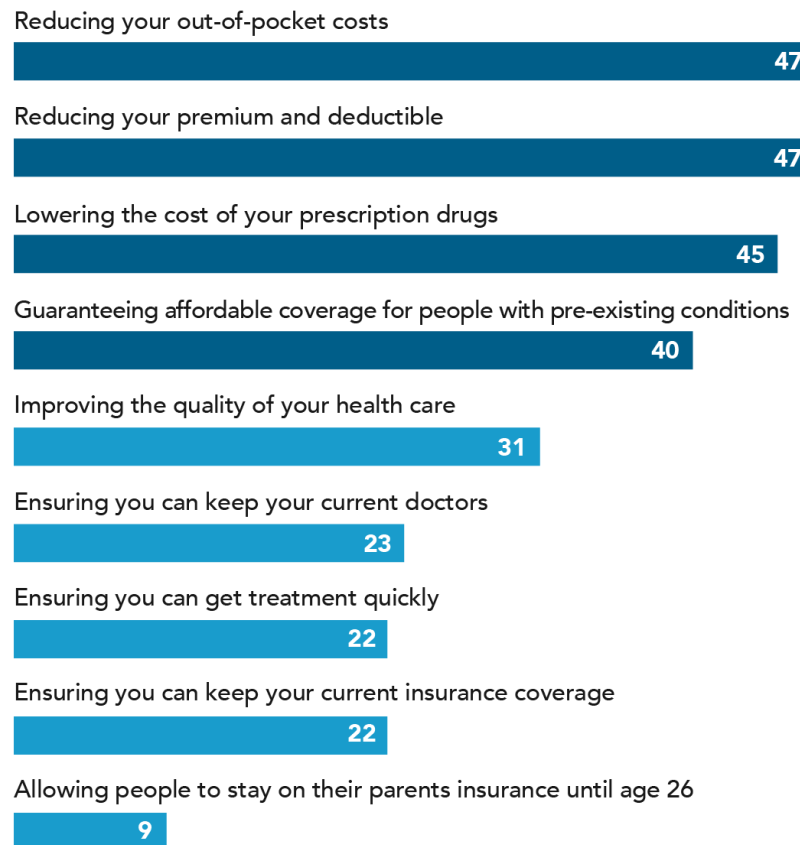
Among independents, nearly two in three (64%) disapprove of the job Trump is doing on health care, but only a plurality (45%) say Democrats in Congress are doing a better job. However, Democrats have a wide advantage over Republicans in Congress.

### Trump Health Care – Among Independents

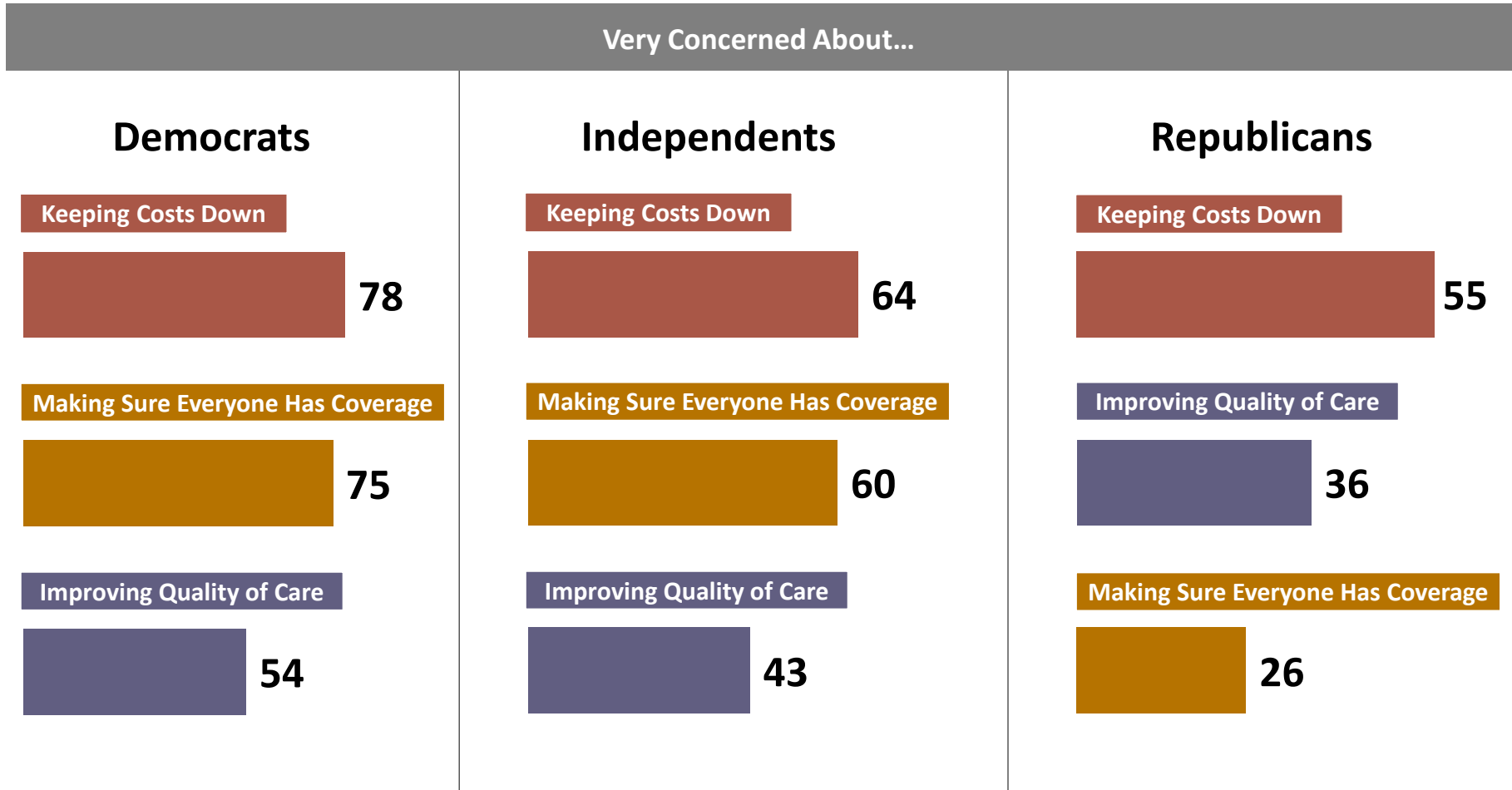


Reducing costs is voters' dominant priority when it comes to health care. This includes out-of-pocket costs, premiums, deductibles, and prescription drug prices. They are less concerned with avoiding changes to their coverage.

**As our leaders in Washington consider changes to our health care system, which three items below do you think are the most important priorities for your personal health care?**

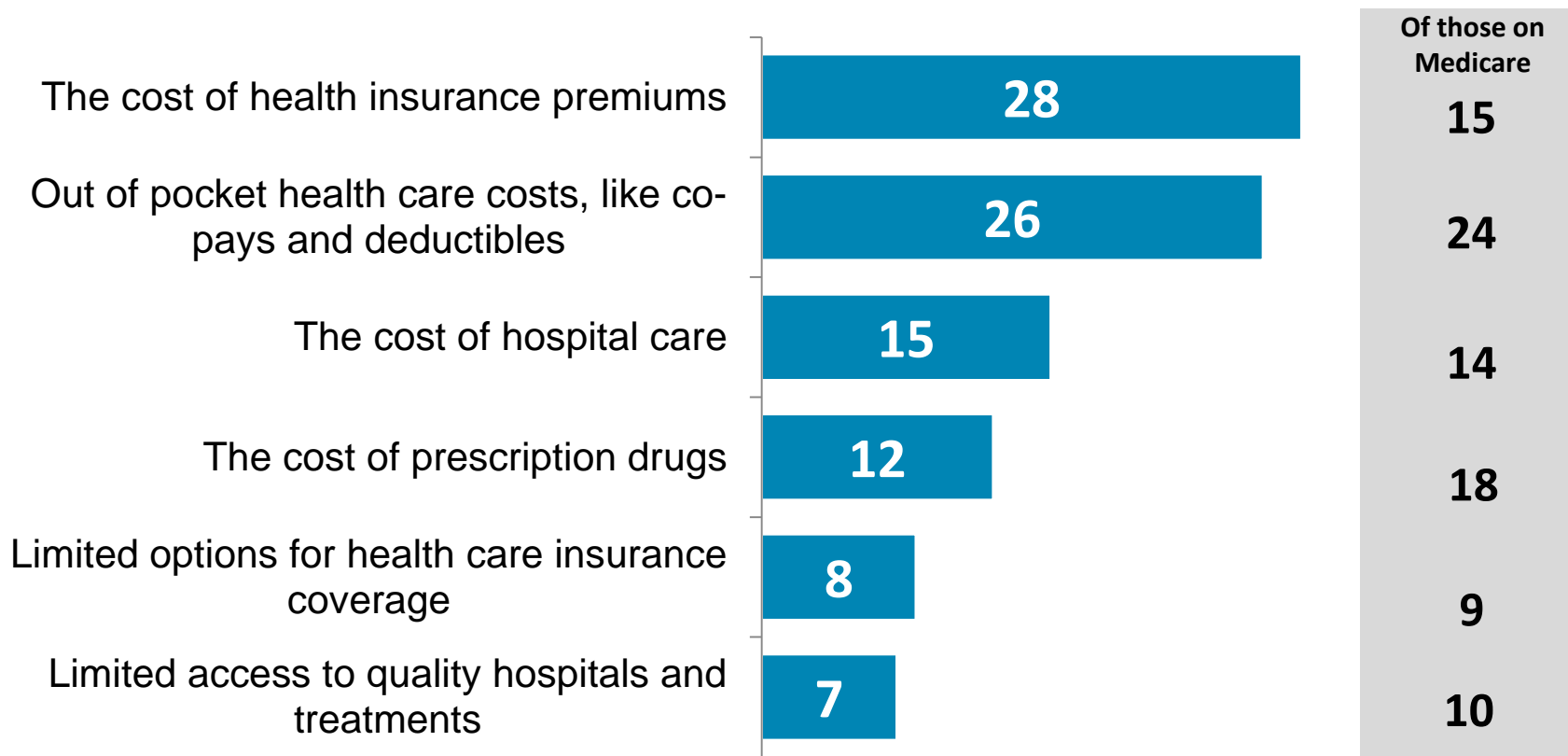


While cost remains the top concern across party, Democrats and independents are significantly more concerned than Republicans about making sure that everyone has health care coverage. Democrats as a group are most concerned about all issues.



Though addressing costs is the top issue among voters overall, those on Medicare care most about out-of-pocket costs and prescription drug costs specifically.

**From the following list, which health care issue is most important to you?**



Voters are highly concerned about prescription drug prices, and wide majorities agree that no part of government is doing enough to bring them down.

## Majorities Say President Trump And Congressional Republicans And Democrats Are Not Doing Enough To Lower Rx Drug Costs

Do you think...are doing enough to bring down the cost of prescription drugs, or not?



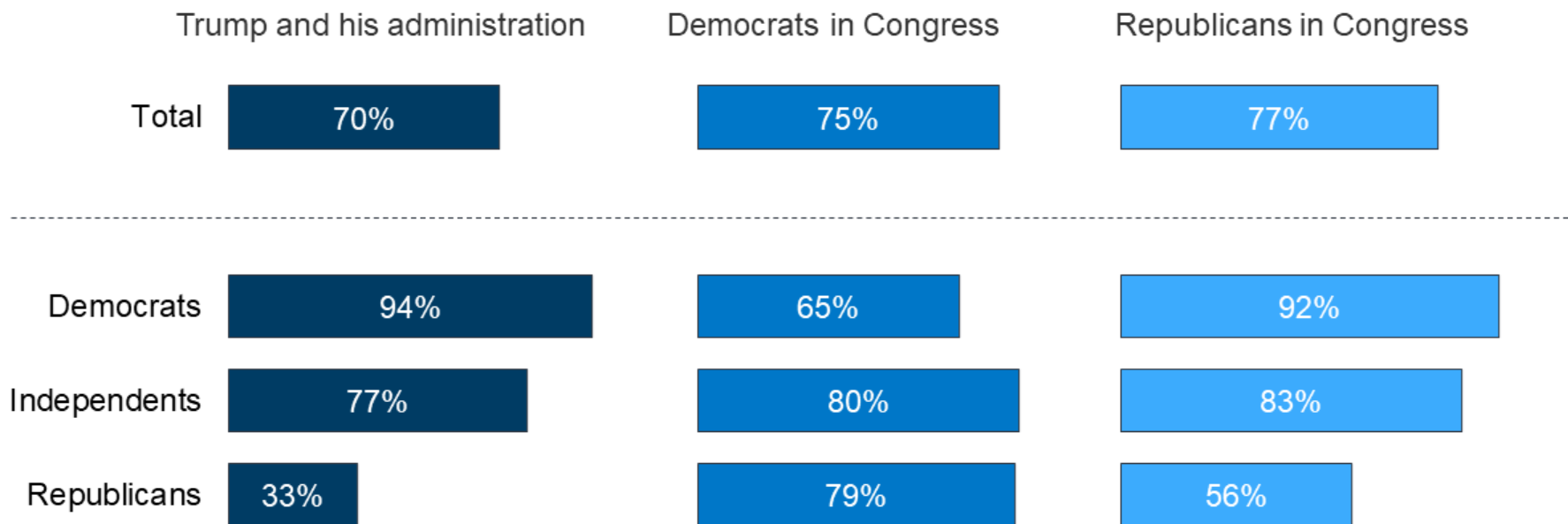
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.



This dissatisfaction holds across party, with a majority of Republicans saying that Republicans in Congress are not doing enough and a majority of Democrats saying that Democrats in Congress are not doing enough.

## Majorities Of Partisans Say Democrats And Republicans In Congress Are Not Doing Enough To Lower Rx Drug Costs

Percent who say each of the following are **not doing enough** to bring down the cost of prescription drugs:



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.

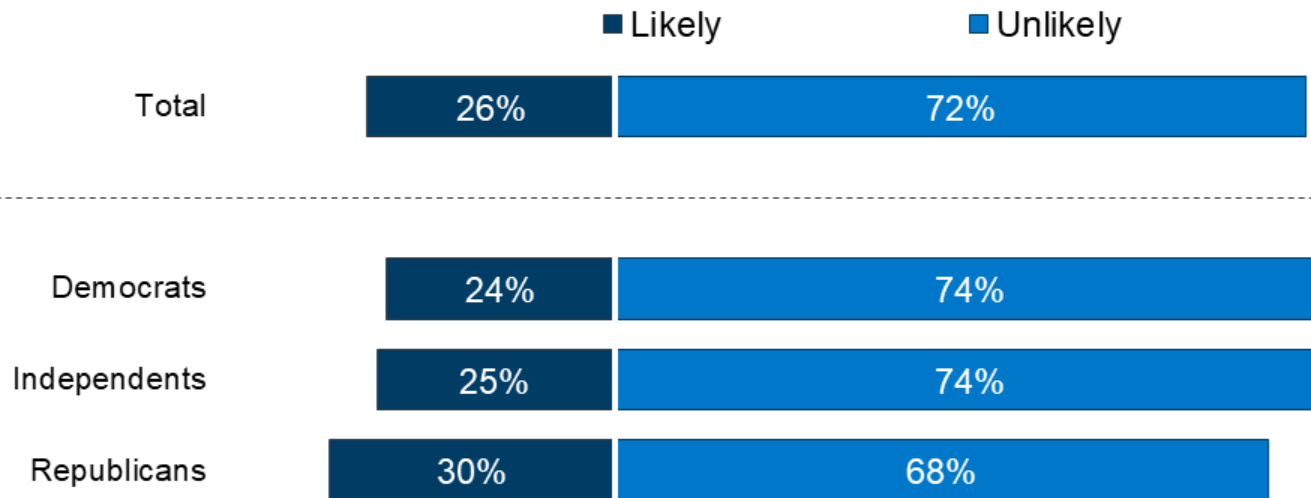




Most voters do not believe that Congress will take action to lower prescription drug prices in the next year, making this issue one that will likely carry significant weight in the 2020 election.

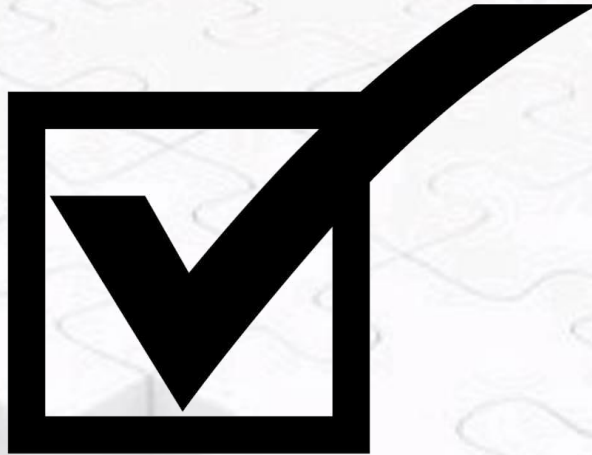
## Most Say It Is Unlikely That Congress Will Pass Legislation To Lower Prescription Drug Costs In The Next Year

How likely do you think it is that Congress will pass legislation to lower the costs of prescription drugs in the next year?



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.





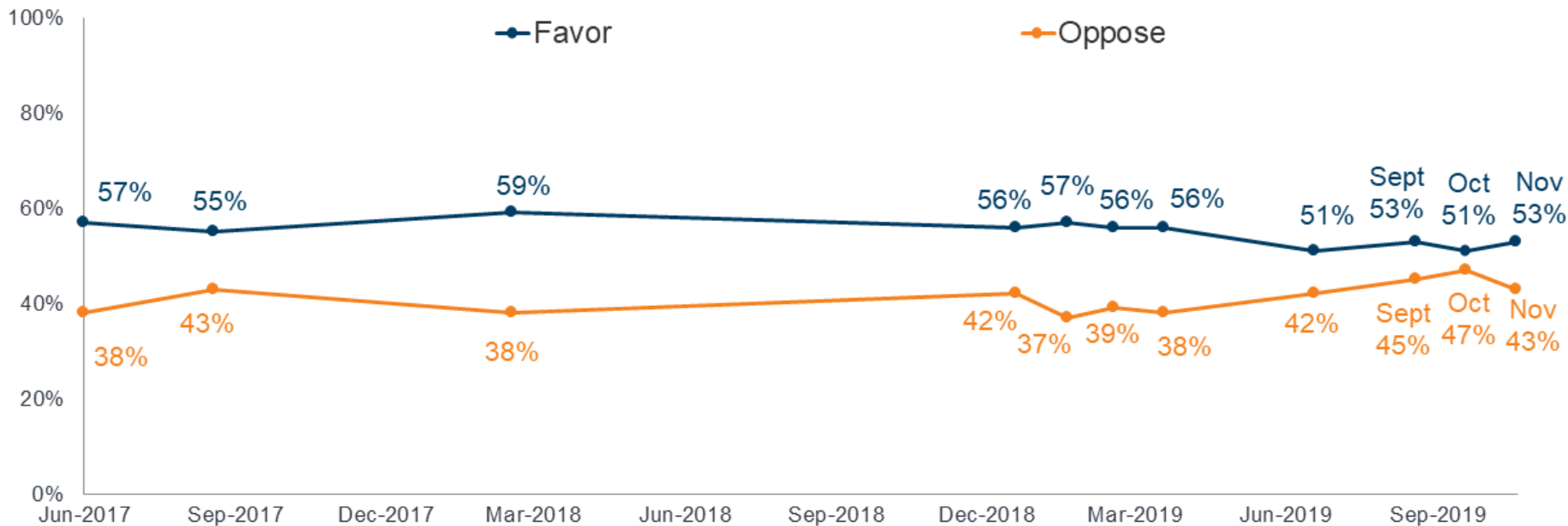
## Policies

Most policies that expand health care coverage are popular with voters; however, there is widespread confusion over what they would do, making communication critical.

About half of adults are in favor of Medicare for All when given a brief description, a number that has held fairly steady over the past several months.

## About Half Of Adults Support A National Medicare-for-all Plan

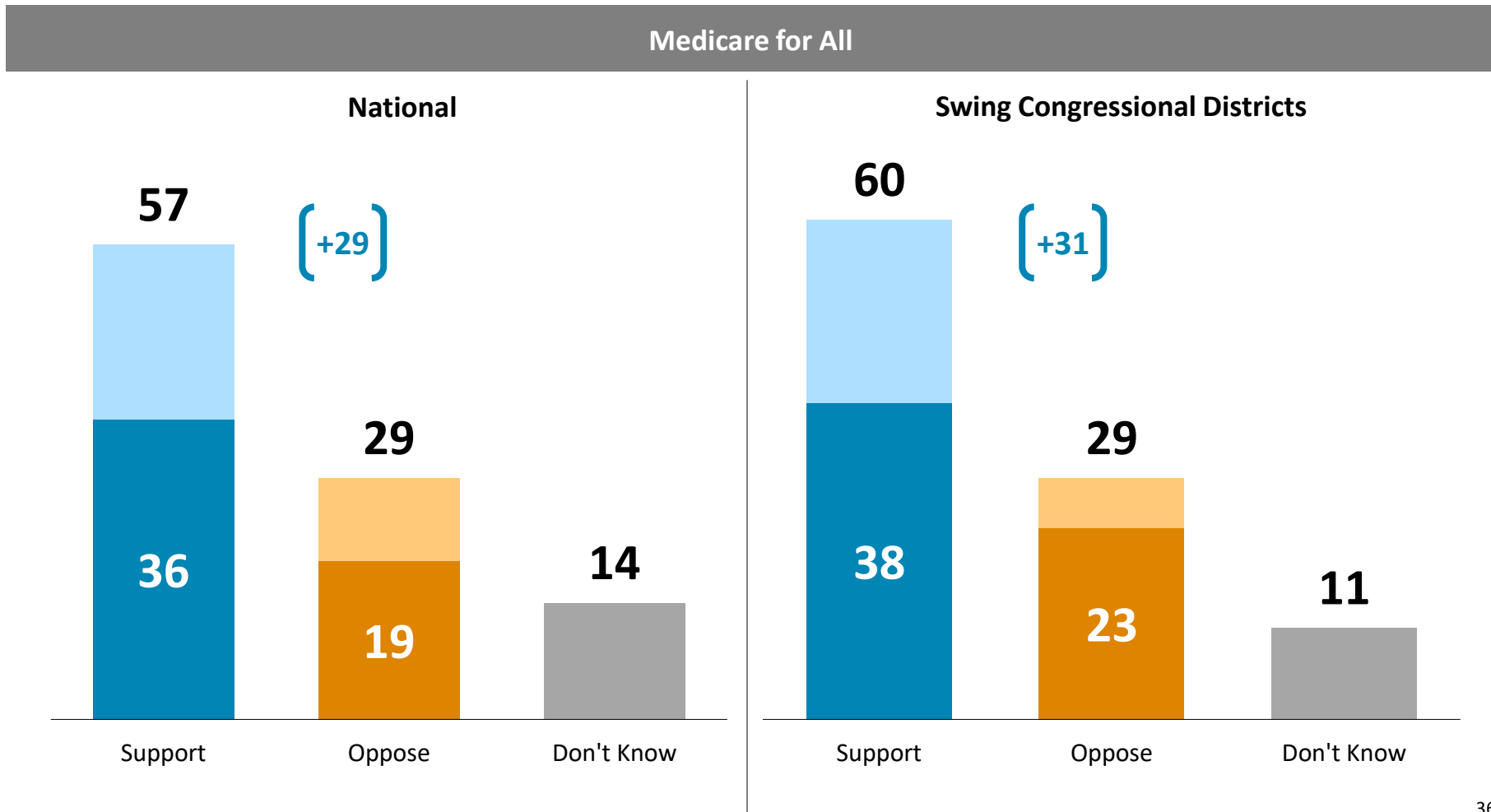
Do you favor or oppose having a national health plan, sometimes called **Medicare-for-all**, in which all Americans would get their insurance from a single government plan?



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Polls. See topline for full question wording and response options.



LRP polling in Spring of 2019 found Medicare for All was even slightly more popular in swing congressional districts than in the country as a whole.



Darker colors indicate intensity.

Do you support or oppose an expanded and improved Medicare for All health care plan?

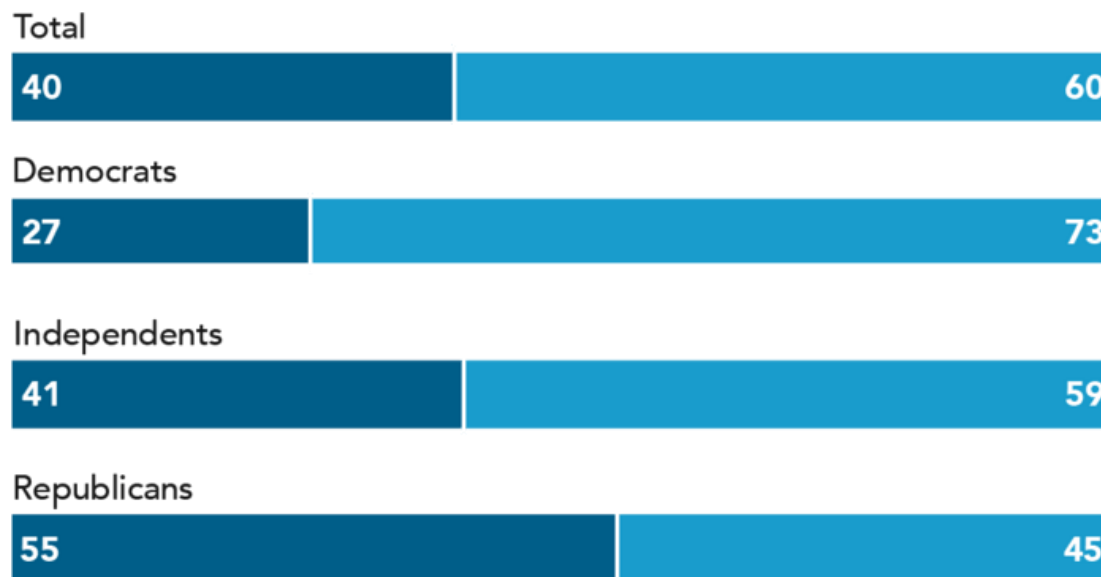
LRP Survey, April 2019, Nationwide

However, data suggests that most voters are confused about what Medicare for All actually is. Six in ten believe that under the system they would be able to keep their private insurance if they want to – frequently called a “public option.” This perception is particularly widespread among Democrats.

**As far as you know, which better describes what “Medicare for All” really is?**

**A health care plan that makes everyone get rid of their current private insurance and switch over to Medicare.**

**A health care plan that lets anyone buy Medicare instead of their current private insurance, if they want to.**

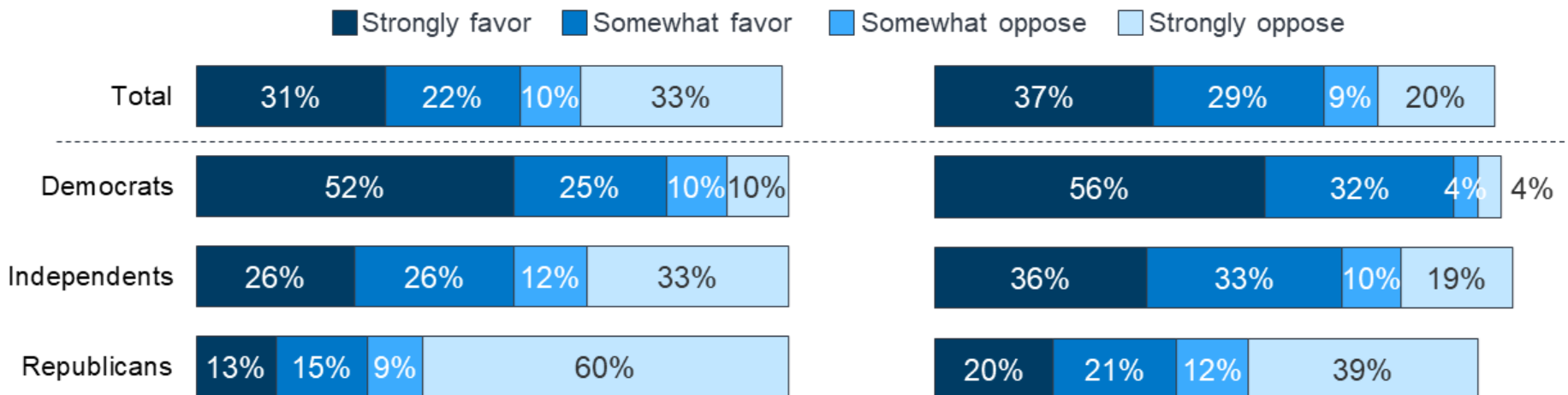


Indeed, more voters are in support of a public option when both plans are described to them. However, the level of support for each is highly dependent on how it is described.

## Larger Shares Support A Public Option Than Medicare-for-all

A national health plan, sometimes called **Medicare-for-all**, in which all Americans would get their insurance from a single government plan

A government-administered health plan, sometimes called a **public option**, that would compete with private health insurance plans and be available to all Americans



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.



Many of Medicare for All's more popular features are not understood. While a strong majority of Americans believes taxes would increase under Medicare for All, only just over half understand that private health insurance companies would no longer be the primary providers of health insurance, and far fewer are aware that they would no longer have to pay deductibles, copays, or premiums.

**Share who think the following would happen under a national health plan like Medicare for All**

Survey of 1,206 U.S. adults, May 30 to June 4, 2019

	TOTAL	DEM.	IND.	GOP
Taxes for most people would increase	78%	71%	80%	85%
All U.S. residents would have health insurance coverage	62	76	61	45
Private health insurance companies would not be the primary way Americans get health coverage	53	52	52	57
Doctors and hospitals would be paid less	52	42	50	64
People who buy their own insurance would not be able to keep their current plans	39	24	40	53
Individuals and employers would not continue to pay health insurance premiums	39	31	42	45
People with employer-sponsored insurance would not be able to keep their current plans	38	25	42	47
People would not continue to pay deductibles and co-pays when they use health care services	27	25	29	28

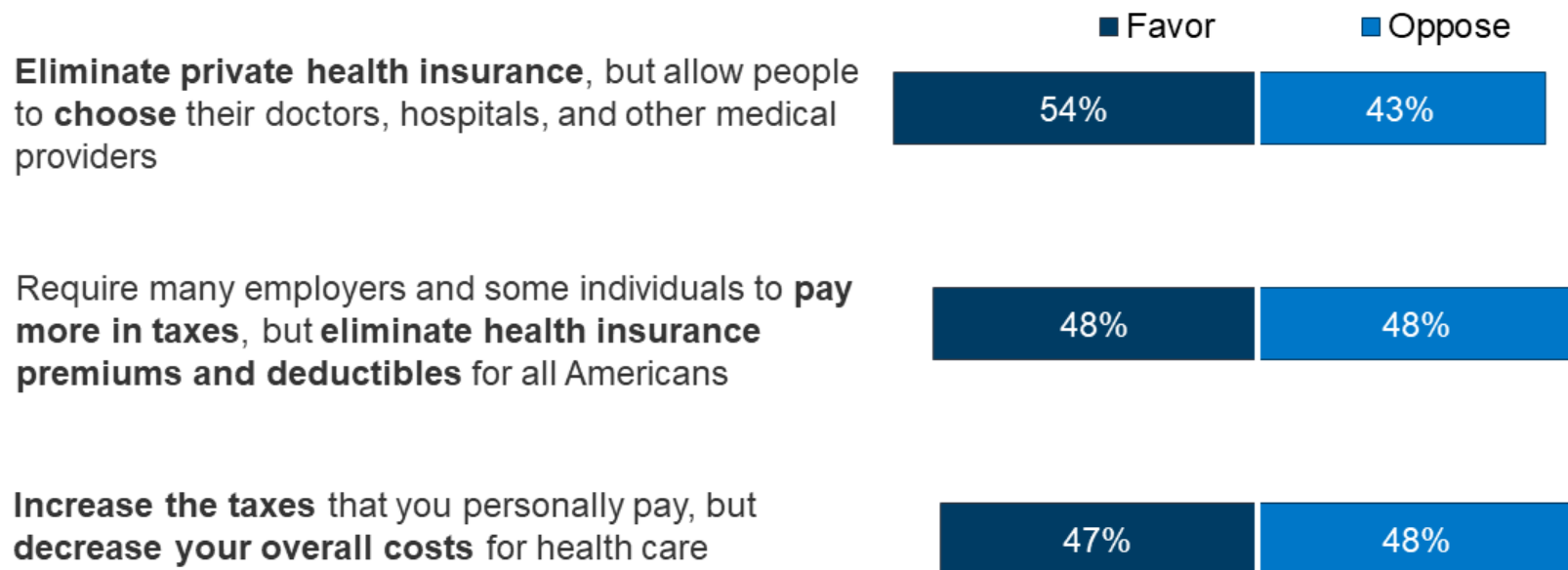
Data: [Kaiser Family Foundation](#); Chart: Andrew Witherspoon/Axios

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (May 30-June 4, 2019.)

Support for Medicare for All shifts depending on how the plan is described. As we have consistently seen in other research, though costs are Americans' top concern when it comes to health care, voters are more interested in what they will get from Medicare for All than what it will eliminate.

## Some Moderate Shifts In Support For Medicare-for-all Depending On Description Of Plan

Would you favor or oppose a national Medicare-for-all plan if you heard it would...



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.

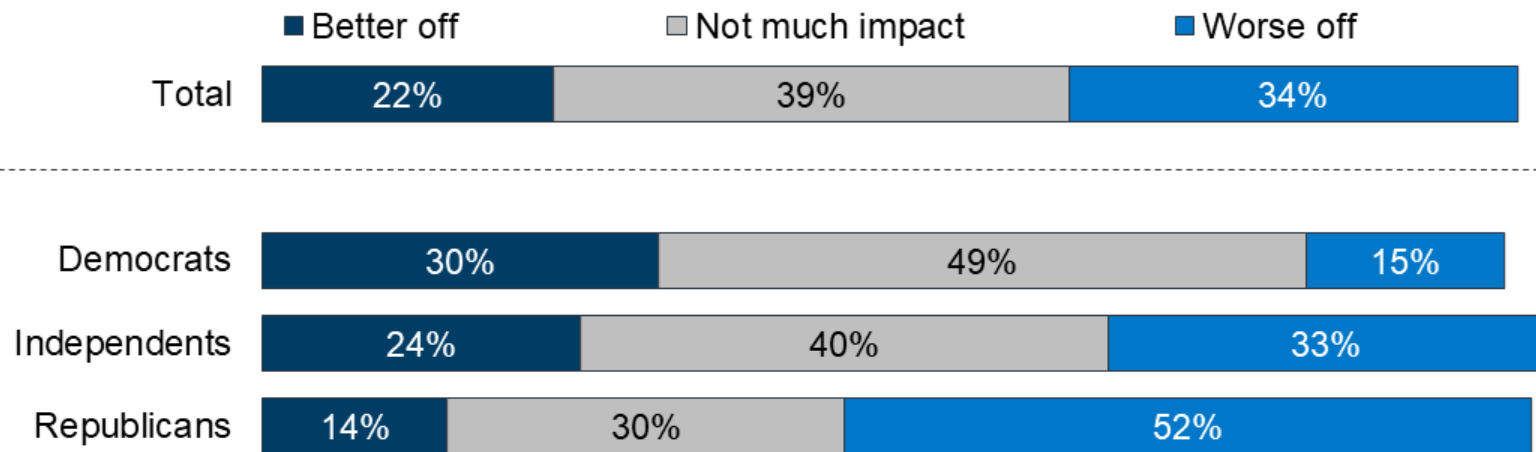




Even with the financial burden of health care costs weighing heavily on many Americans, most have difficulty believing that Medicare for All would effectively eliminate costs, or would help them personally.

## Nearly Four In Ten Think A Medicare-for-all Plan Would Not Have Much Financial Impact On Them

If a national Medicare-for-all plan was put into place, which eliminated **all health insurance premiums, deductibles and most out-of-pocket health care costs** and **increased taxes on many employers and some individuals**, do you think you personally would be better off or worse off financially, or would it not have much of a financial impact on you?



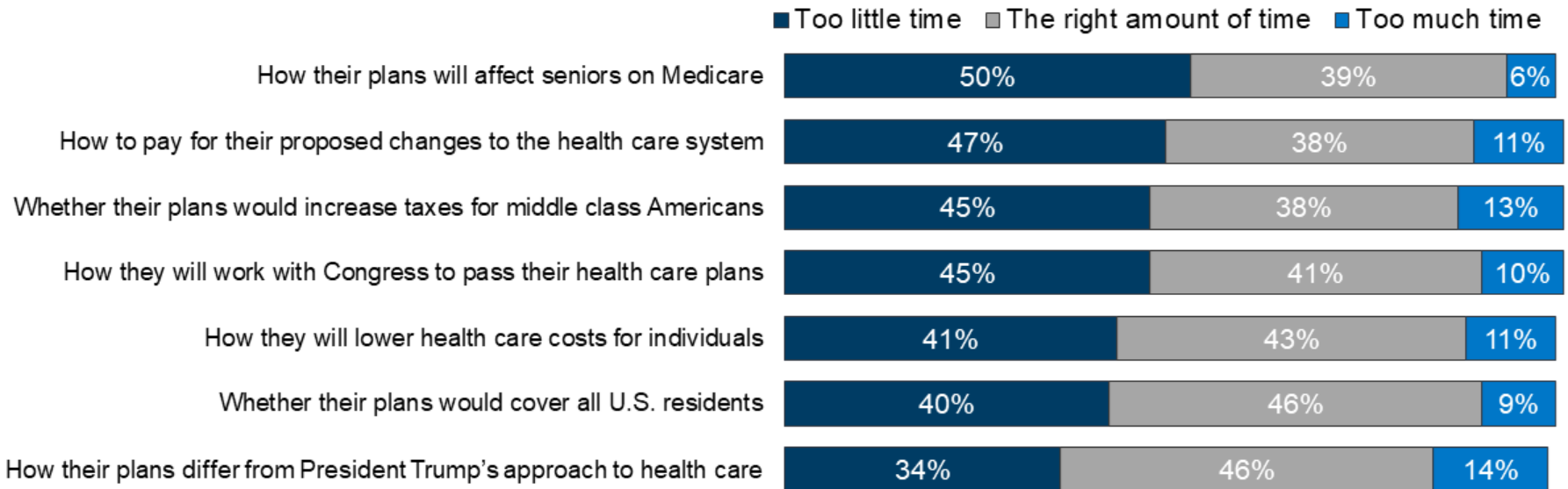
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording.



Democratic-leaning voters most want to know how proposed changes to the health care system will affect older adults on Medicare (50%), how they will be paid for (47%), whether they will require higher taxes on the middle class (45%), and how Democratic candidates plan to pass them in Congress (45%).

## Half Want To Hear About How Democratic Candidates' Health Care Proposals Will Affect Older Adults

AMONG DEMOCRATS AND DEMOCRATIC-LEANING INDEPENDENTS: Do you think the candidates are spending too much time, too little time, or about the right amount of time talking about...?



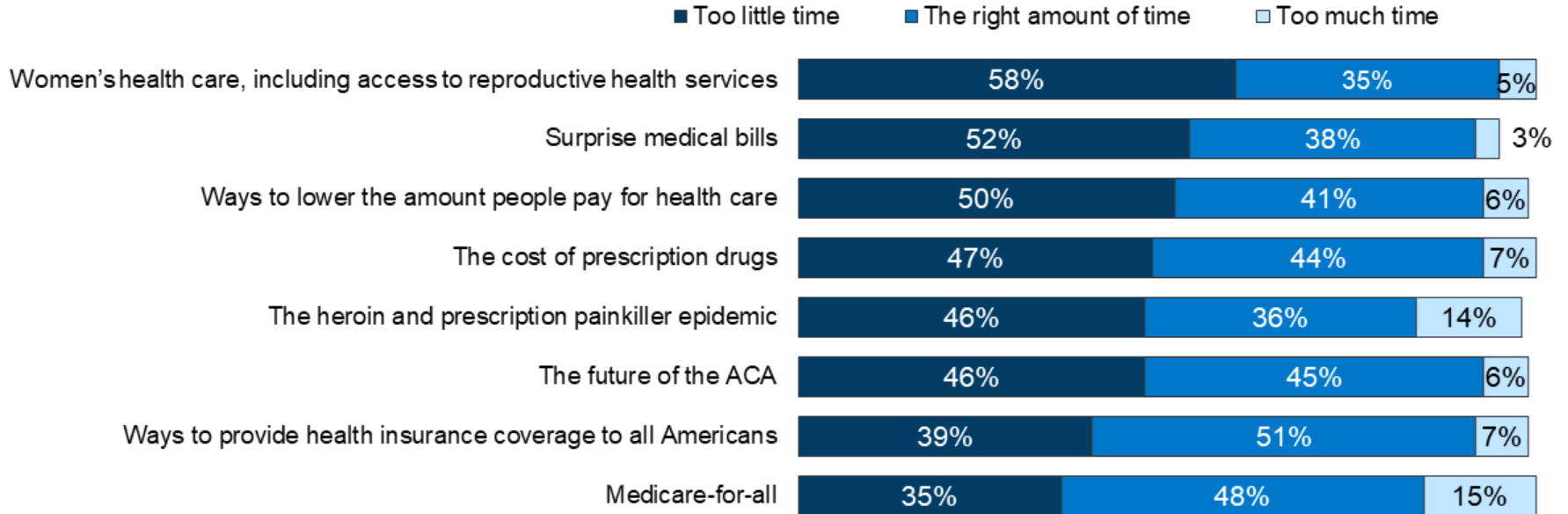
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.



These voters also want to hear more about women’s health care and access to reproductive health services. This trumps even discussion of how to lower costs. Surprise medical bills are also a growing concern.

## Democrats and Dem-Leaning Independents Want To Hear More From Candidates On Women’s Health Care, Cost Issues

AMONG DEMOCRATS AND DEMOCRATIC-LEANING INDEPENDENTS: Overall, do you think the Democratic candidates for president are spending too much time, too little time, or about the right amount of time talking about...?



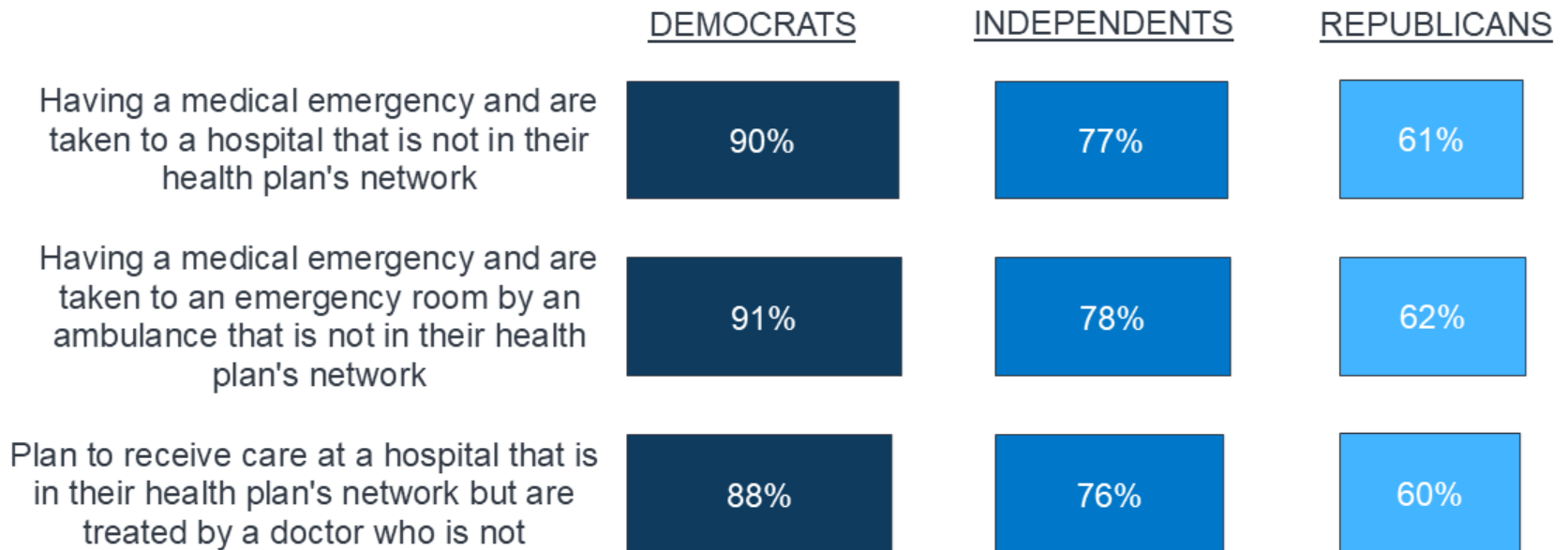
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted October 3-8, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.



A strong majority of Americans across party believe the federal government should take action to prevent surprise billing.

## Majorities Across Partisanship Say The Government Should Take Action When Patients Receive Surprise Medical Bills

Percent who say the federal government **should take action** to protect patients from having to pay the cost not covered by their insurance for care received in each of the following situations:



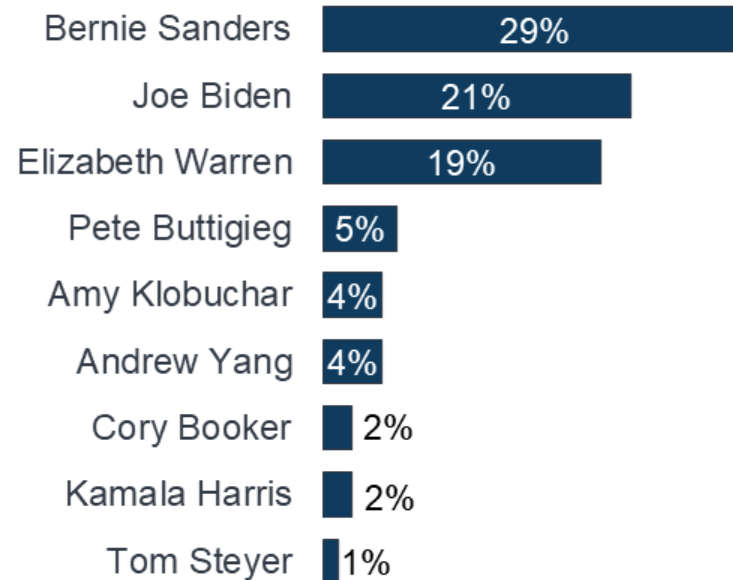
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted April 11-16, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.



Democratic-leaning voters trust Bernie Sanders (29%) most on health care, followed by Joe Biden (21%), and Elizabeth Warren (19%).

## Democrats And Democratic-Leaning Independents Most Likely to Trust Sanders, Biden, And Warren To Handle Health Care

Percent who say they trust each of the following Democratic presidential candidates the most when it comes to handling health care:



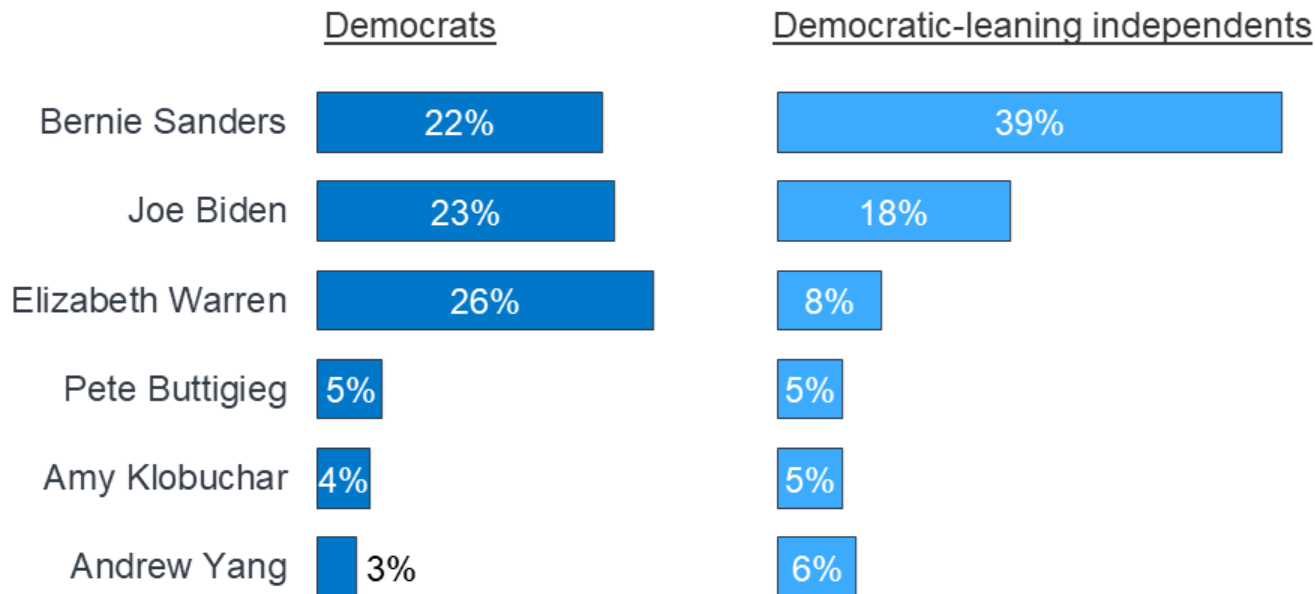
NOTE: Among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents.

SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.

However, Sanders' support is largely driven by Democratic-leaning independents, while pure Democrats are more divided but favor Elizabeth Warren.

## While Pure Democrats Are Divided; Four In Ten Democratic-Leaning Independents Trust Bernie Sanders The Most On Health Care

Percent who say they trust each of the following Democratic presidential candidates the most when it comes to handling health care:



NOTE: Responses with at least 3% among total Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents shown.

SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 7-12, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.

There is also a notable age divide. Nearly half (47%) of younger Democratic leaning voters, ages 18 to 34, say they have the most trust in Bernie Sanders when it comes to handling health care. However, among adults ages 65 and older, Joe Biden is the most trusted candidate (33%). Elizabeth Warren wins the trust of a wider age range, though not as large a proportion of any one group.

**Table 1: Candidate Trust On Health Care By Age**

Percent who <b>trust</b> each of the following candidates the <b>most</b> when it comes to handling health care:	<b>18-34 year olds</b>	<b>35-54 year olds</b>	<b>55-64 year olds</b>	<b>65 and older</b>
Bernie Sanders	47%	26%	9%	16%
Joe Biden	12	20	31	33
Elizabeth Warren	14	25	21	18
Pete Buttigieg	3	4	7	9
Amy Klobuchar	1	7	7	3
Andrew Yang	10	1	1	2
Cory Booker	3	3	2	0

NOTE: Showing only candidates who received more than 2% among total Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (November 7-12, 2019).

Americans are unified in their desire to see any action taken to reduce prescription drug prices. Majorities support a number of policy options, the most popular being allowing the government to negotiate with companies for lower prices.

## Majorities Favor Policy Proposals to Keep Rx Drug Costs Down

Percent who **favor** each of the following actions to keep prescription drug costs down:



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted October 3-8, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.

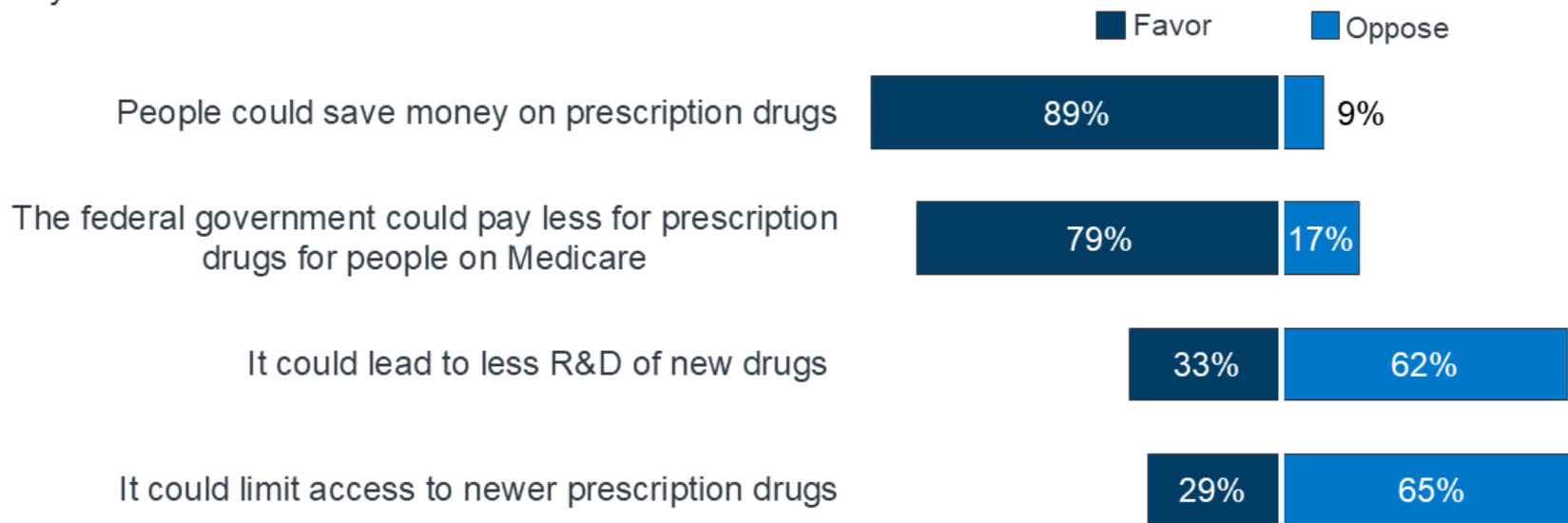




However, as with other health policy options, support is soft and changes drastically based on the framing and information provided about the proposal.

## Support For Government Negotiations With Drug Companies Can Shift With Arguments

Would you favor or oppose allowing the federal government to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices if you heard...?



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted October 3-8, 2019). See topline for full question wording and response options.



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