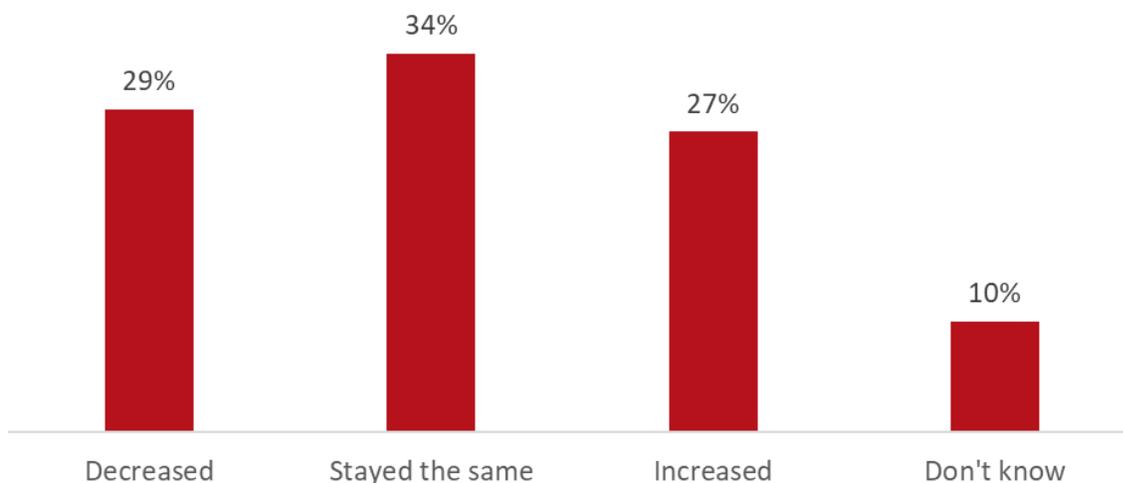


What Americans think about college: government funding and assistance

Findings from the APM Research Lab's
APM Survey

February 25, 2019

Most Americans are unaware that governmental funding for public colleges and universities has decreased over the past 10 years



Question: "Over the past 10 years do you think that government funding for public colleges and universities has generally increased, decreased, or stayed the same?"

Notes: "Refused" responses are not shown.

Source: APM Survey (November 22 – December 2, 2018). N=1,003 Americans age 18 or older; overall margin of error=+/-3.7% at the 95% confidence level.

Background

This survey is a result of a collaboration between the APM Research Lab, APM Reports, and the Hechinger Report. It was conducted between November 27 and December 2, 2018 and is a nationally representative survey of 1,003 adults conducted via telephone—60 percent via cell phone and 40 percent landline.² Respondents were asked two questions:

1. Over the last 10 years do you think that government funding for public colleges and universities has generally increased, decreased, or stayed the same?
2. Over the past 10 years do you think that publicly-funded grants and loans for students attending colleges and universities has generally kept up with the price of tuition, fallen behind the price of tuition, or increased faster than the price of tuition?

The sequence of the answer categories was rotated to address any possible order effects.

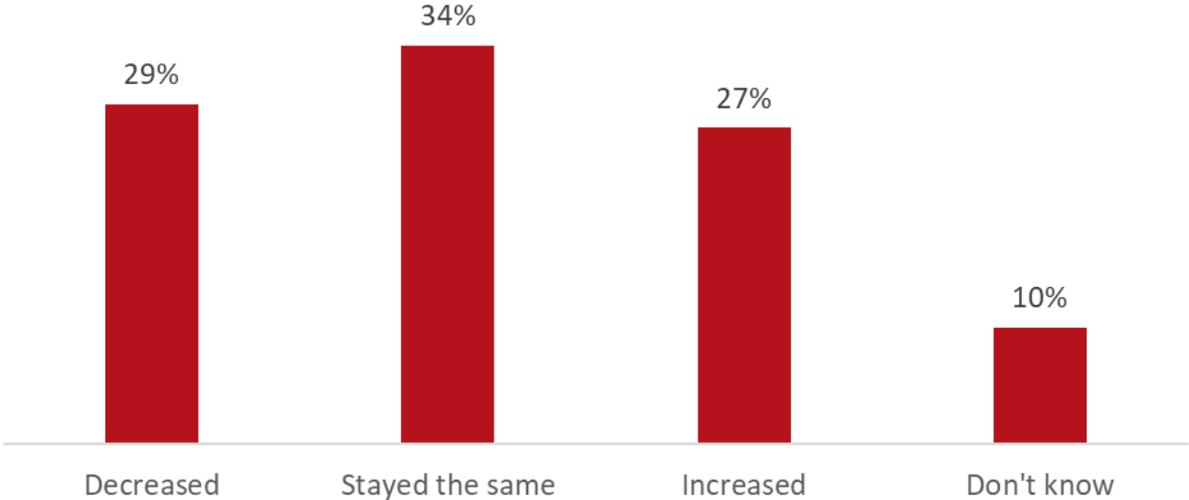
A standard list of demographic and characteristic questions was also asked, including age, sex, educational attainment, race and ethnicity, household income, political affiliation, parental or guardian status, U.S. region residing in, metro status, and employment status. The report only describes differences that are statistically significant and shows these in the graphs.

² For additional details about the survey's methods, see the appendix.

Government funding for public universities and colleges

According to subject-matter experts at APM Reports and the Hechinger Report, government funding for public universities has generally decreased over the past 10 years (in inflation-adjusted terms). Most American adults are unaware of that trend. In fact, 1 in 4 believe the opposite, that government funding has increased. One-third of Americans think government funding has stayed the same over the past 10 years, and another 10 percent are unsure. Only 29 percent answered that funding has decreased.

Americans are more likely to think government funding for public universities has stayed the same than increased or decreased



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Notes: “Refused” responses are not shown.

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Who thinks government funding has increased, decreased, and stayed the same for public colleges and universities?

Meaningful differences in the data regarding the change in levels of government funding appear by sex, age, U.S. region, education, household income, and political affiliation. Overall, Democrats, those who had completed a bachelor’s degree, and those with annual household

incomes of at least \$75,000 are the only groups where at least one-third of respondents knew that government funding has generally declined over the past ten years.

Several other differences emerged from the analysis. Men are more likely than women to think government funding increased over the past 10 years (31% and 24%, respectively).

By age, 32 percent of U.S. residents who are at least 65 years old think funding has increased, the age group most likely to believe so. This share fell ten percentage points to 22 percent among those age 45 to 54, the age group least likely to believe funding has risen.

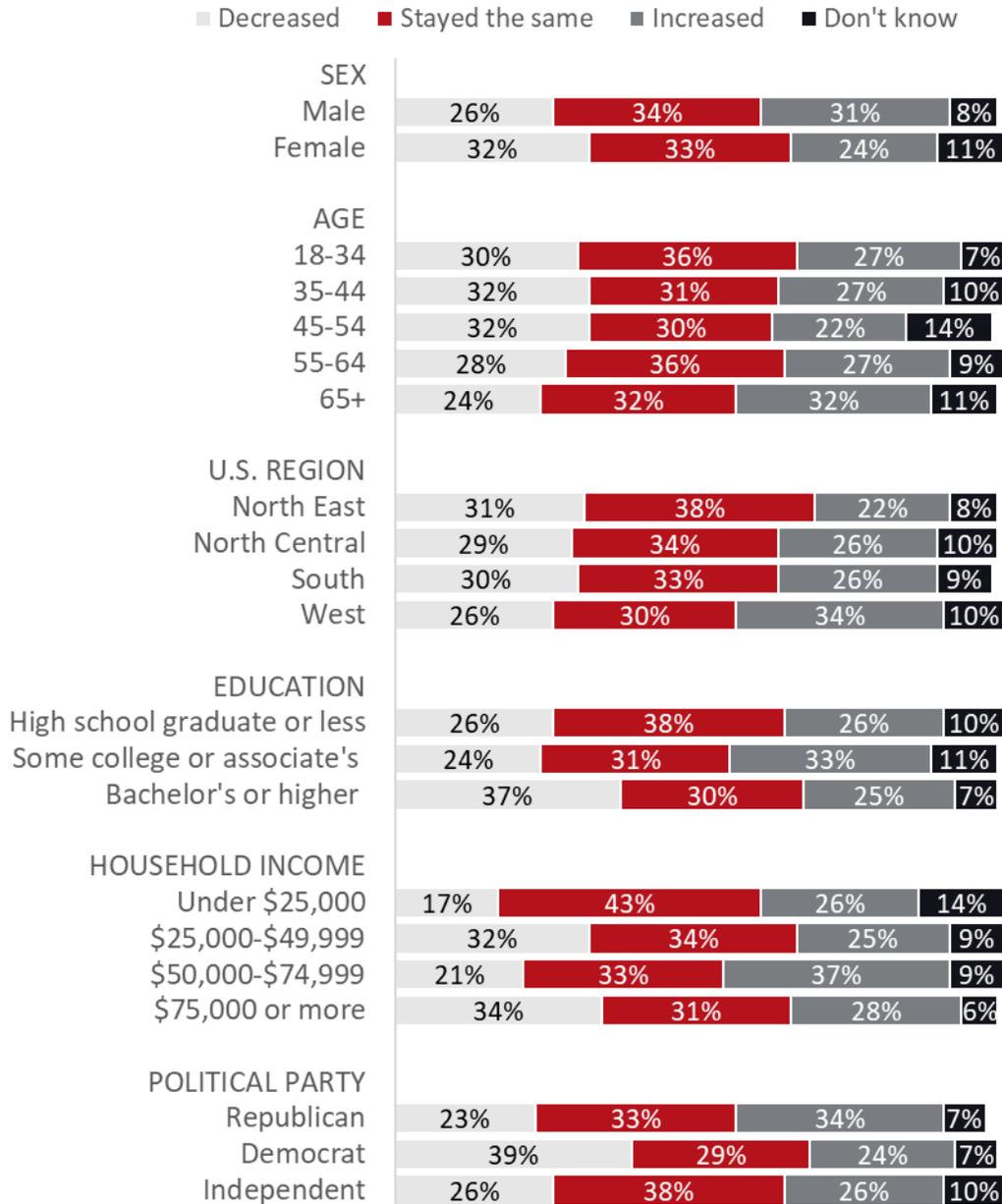
Regionally, 34 percent of residents in the West think funding has increased (the highest share of all regions), compared to 22 percent in the North East (the lowest of all regions).

Americans with a household income between \$50,000 and \$74,999 are more likely than those with a household income between \$25,000 and \$49,999 to think government funding has increased (37% and 25%, respectively). Forty-three percent of those with a household income of less than \$25,000 think government funding for public colleges and universities has stayed about the same, compared to only 31 percent for those with a household income of at least \$75,000. Adults with a household income of less than \$25,000 are twice more likely than those with a household income of at least \$75,000 to say they “don’t know” in response to this question (14% and 6%, respectively).

By educational attainment, one-quarter of Americans with at least a bachelor’s degree think government funding of public colleges and universities has risen, while the share of Americans who think this increases to one-third for those with some college education or an associate’s degree.

By political affiliation, Republicans are most likely think government funding for public colleges and universities has increased over the past 10 years (34% say so), compared to about one-quarter of Democrats and Independents.

Percentage of Americans who think government funding has increased, decreased, or stayed the same for public colleges and universities over the past 10 years



Question: "Over the past 10 years do you think that government funding for public colleges and universities has generally increased, decreased, or stayed the same?"

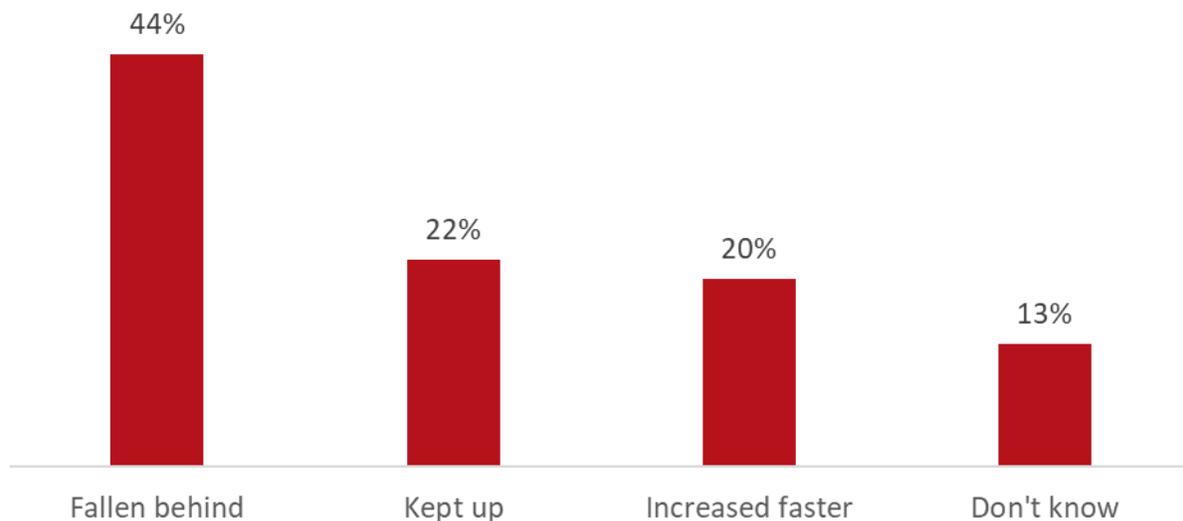
Notes: States included in each region are listed in the appendix. "Refused" responses are not shown.

Source: APM Survey (November 22 – December 2, 2018). N=1,003 Americans age 18 or older; overall margin of error=+/-3.7% at the 95% confidence level.

Government aid and the price of tuition

According to subject-matter experts at APM Reports and the Hechinger Report, government-funded grants and loans have not kept pace with increases in the price of tuition over the past ten years. Over 2 in 5 American adults recognize this to be the case. One in five believe the reverse to be true, indicating that government-funded grants and loans have increased faster than the price of tuition.

A plurality of Americans thinks government-funded grants and loans have fallen behind the price of tuition over the past 10 years



Question: "Over the past 10 years, do you think that publicly-funded grants and loans for students attending colleges and universities has generally kept up with, fallen behind, or increased faster than the price of tuition?"

Notes: "Refused" responses are not shown.

Source: APM Survey (November 27 – December 2, 2018). N=1,003 Americans age 18 or older; overall margin of error=±3.7% at the 95% confidence level.

Who thinks what about trends in government aid for college?

Half or more of the following groups offered the correct response, that aid has fallen behind the price of tuition, to the question about trends in government grants and loans for college students: those with at least a bachelor's degree, those with annual household incomes of at least \$75,000, those who identified as non-Hispanic Black, and Democrats. Other meaningful differences for this question exist by age, region, education, household income, race, political party, parental status, and employment status. For almost all these groups, a plurality of Americans feel government-funded grants and loans has fallen behind the price of tuition over the past 10 years.

Around 1 in 4 U.S. residents under the age of 45 and between the age of 55 and 64 think government aid has kept up with the price of tuition, compared to 1 in 7 of those of traditional retirement age (age 65 or older). Younger adults (age 18-34) and Americans at least 65 years old are more likely than those age 35 to 44 to think government-funded grants and loans has surpassed the price of tuition over the last 10 years (about 1 in 4 and 1 in 10, respectively).

Regionally, 48 percent of Americans residing in the North Central part of the country think the price of tuition has outpaced government aid, compared to 36% of residents in the West.

By educational attainment, the data show that residents with at least a bachelor's degree are more likely to think government-funded grants and loans have fallen behind the price of tuition compared to those with less education (54% and about 39%, respectively). Twenty-three percent of those who have a high school degree or less education think government aid for college and universities has increased faster than the price of tuition compared to 16 percent of those with at least a bachelor's degree.

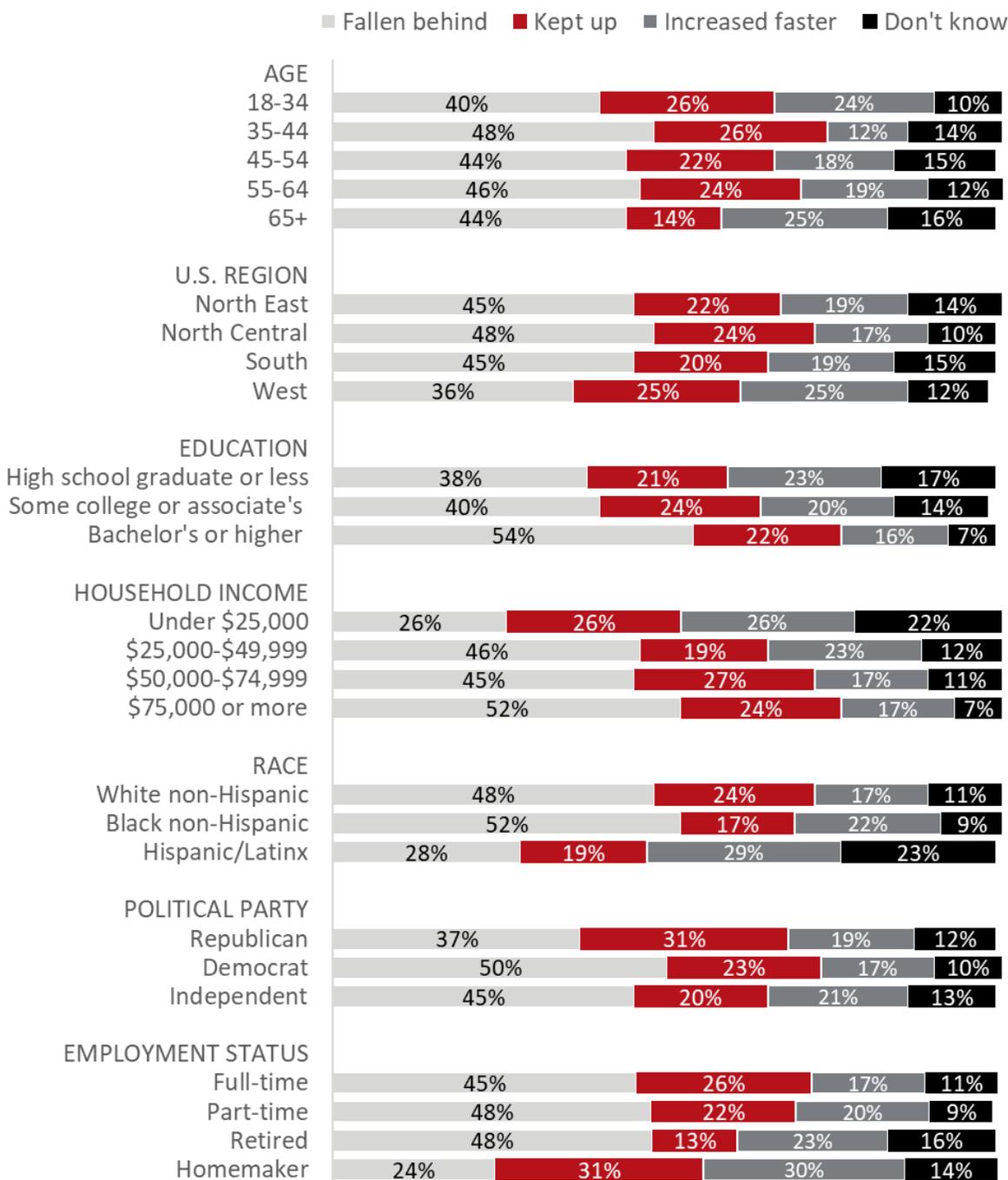
Americans with a household income of at least \$25,000 are more likely to think government-funded grants and loans have fallen behind the price of tuition over the last decade than those with a household income below \$25,000 (45-52% and 26%, respectively). Additionally, adults with a household income below \$25,000 are the most likely to say they "don't know" in response to this question compared to those with a higher annual household income.

Interestingly, about half of non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black adults think government-funded aid has fallen behind the price of tuition, compared to just 28 percent of the Latinx population. Conversely, 1 in 3 U.S. residents who identify as Hispanic also think government aid has increased more quickly than the price of tuition compared to just 17 percent of non-Hispanic White adults.

By political affiliation, the data reveal that a full half of Democrats think government-funded loans and grants for students attending public colleges and universities have fallen behind the price of tuition over the last 10 years, compared to 37 percent of Republicans. Republicans are also more likely than Independents to think government aid has kept up with the price of tuition (31% and 20%, respectively).

Part-time workers (22%), full-time workers (26%), and homemakers (31%) are more likely than retirees (13%) to think government aid has kept up with the price of tuition over the last ten years. Part-time workers, full-time workers, and retirees are about twice as likely as homemakers to think government aid has fallen behind the cost of tuition over the last ten years.

Percentage of Americans who think government-funded loans and grants has fallen behind, kept up with, and increased faster than the price of tuition over the past 10 years



Question: "Over the past 10 years, do you think that publicly-funded grants and loans for students attending colleges and universities has generally kept up with, fallen behind, or increased faster than the price of tuition?"

Notes: States included in each region are listed in the appendix. "Refused" responses are not shown.

Source: APM Survey (November 27 – December 2, 2018). N=1,003 Americans age 18 or older; overall margin of error=+/-3.7% at the 95% confidence level.

Appendix:

Note: For additional details about survey methodology, please see:

https://www.americanpublicmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SSRS_2018-Nov-27-Dec-2-OmnibusSurvey_Methods.pdf

Characteristics of survey sample

	<i>Number of respondents</i>	All
<i>Weighted N</i>	<i>1,003</i>	<i>100%</i>
SEX		
Male	<i>487</i>	49%
Female	<i>516</i>	51%
AGE GROUP		
18-34	<i>284</i>	28%
35-44 ^b	<i>169</i>	17%
45-54	<i>173</i>	17%
55-64	<i>164</i>	16%
65+	<i>206</i>	21%
RACE & ETHNICITY		
White (non-Hispanic)	<i>622</i>	62%
Black (non-Hispanic)	<i>116</i>	12%
Hispanic/Latinx	<i>163</i>	16%
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		
High school diploma or less	<i>387</i>	39%
Some college or associate's degree	<i>280</i>	28%
At least a bachelor's	<i>324</i>	32%
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME		
Under \$25,000	<i>169</i>	17%
\$25,000-\$49,999	<i>253</i>	25%
\$50,000-\$74,999	<i>127</i>	13%
\$75,000 or more	<i>305</i>	30%

Continued on next page.

	Number of respondents	All
<i>Weighted N</i>	<i>1,003</i>	<i>100%</i>
REGION ^a		
North East	178	18%
North Central	209	21%
South	377	38%
West	239	24%
METRO STATUS ^b		
Metro	706	70%
Non-metro	172	17%
PARENT/GUARDIAN STATUS ^c		
Yes, parent or guardian	248	25%
Not, not parent or guardian	754	75%
POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION		
Republican	225	22%
Democrat	311	31%
Independent	393	39%
EMPLOYMENT STATUS		
Full-time	446	44%
Part-time	122	12%
Retired	230	23%
Homemaker	61	6%
Unemployed	58	6%

^a See next page for definitions of regions.

^b Metro status is unknown for 125 respondents.

^c "Parent/Guardian Status" refers to adults who are either the guardian or parent of a child, or someone under the age of 18, in their household.

Source: APM Survey (November 27 – December 2, 2018).

Regions

North Central: Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin.

North East: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont.

South: Alabama, Arkansas, Washington DC, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia.

West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

About the APM Survey

The APM Research Lab periodically conducts brief national surveys on topics of public interest. Those interested in partnering with the APM Research Lab on future iterations of the APM Survey are encouraged to contact us through the channels below. To see other examples of our survey-related research, please see: <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/collections/surveys>

This survey was funded through internal resources. It was not conducted on behalf of or in conjunction with any other entity or initiative beyond the partners acknowledged below.

Acknowledgements

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This report was authored by Kassira Absar and Craig Helmstetter of the APM Research Lab.

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