

The State of Our Union

In early 2019, more than 5,000 participants from 54 top colleges and universities came together at annual PossePlus Retreats (PPRs)¹ to discuss the state of our union. The retreats, named after the annual address given by the President of the United States, explored students' perspectives on salient social and political issues ranging from healthcare and immigration to public safety and the economy. The following infographic captures notable findings from a survey of student PPR attendees. In several places, findings are juxtaposed with U.S. public opinion polls to demonstrate how students' attitudes compare to those of the general public.

Top Priorities

Race relations, immigration, healthcare and climate change are among the most critical issues for PPR student attendees

All in all, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in this country today?

4.5% Satisfied

95.5% Dissatisfied

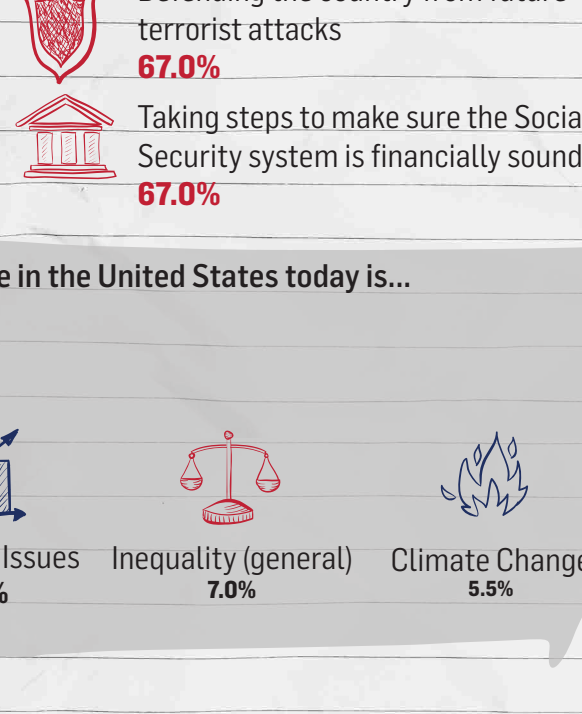
Of those who are dissatisfied, students explained it was because of...
Division and disagreement **18.2%**
Government and leadership (general) **14.9%**
The President and his administration **14.7%**
Inequality **10.2%**
Racism and discrimination **10.0%**

In comparison, 31% of the U.S. public say they are satisfied and 67% say they are dissatisfied.¹

PPR Respondents say the top priorities for President Trump and Congress in 2019 should be...



The U.S. Public² says the top priorities for President Trump and Congress in 2019 should be...



PPR Respondents believe the most pressing issue in the United States today is...

(Percent of students who mentioned this issue)



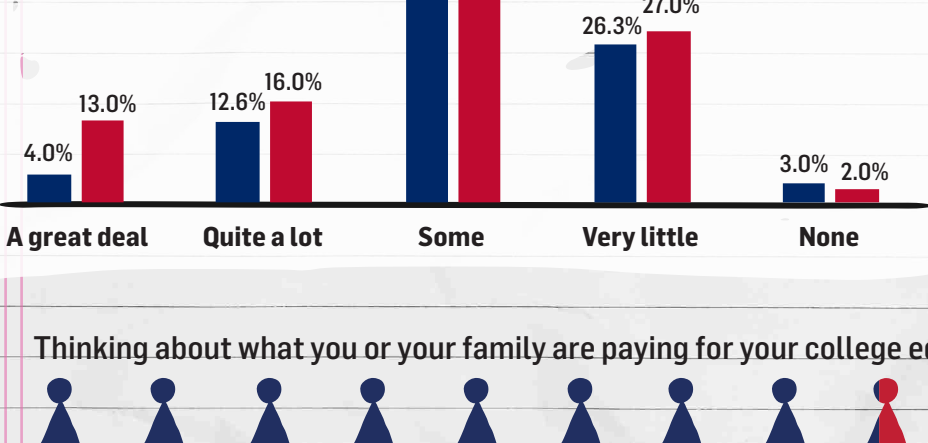
***About the PossePlus Retreat (PPR)**

Since 1993, The Posse Foundation and Posse Scholars, in conjunction with partner colleges and universities, have facilitated annual weekend-long retreats attended by members of the partner institution's larger student body, faculty and administration, with the goal of discussing an important issue identified by Posse Scholars. During each PPR weekend, a cross section of the campus community comes together to talk about the topic on a national, campus and personal level. By creating a safe space for dialogue between campus community members who may not ordinarily interact with one another, PPRs today have become an important forum to engage in social, cultural and political issues.

Education

Despite high financial costs, most students consider college a good investment

How much confidence do you have in U.S. public schools?



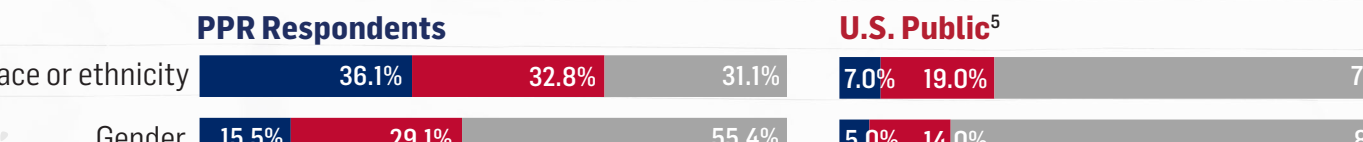
59.6%

of PPR respondents say they will have debt after graduating college. 70.0% of U.S. students nationwide take on debt.⁴

\$5,000-\$14,999

The most frequent approximation of student loan debt among PPR respondents. U.S. students nationwide take on an average of \$32k in student loan debt.⁴

Thinking about what you or your family are paying for your college education, do you think that college...



How important should each of the following factors be in making decisions about college admissions?



Policing + Public Safety

In contrast to the general public, students more strongly advocate for gun control policies and reduced prison populations



Say they would like to see gun laws in this country made more strict

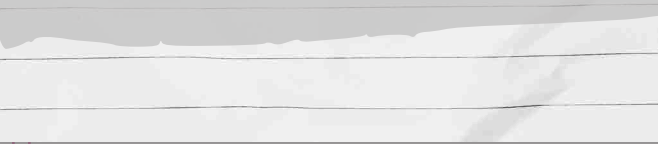


Say they have very little confidence in the police



"Whatever the crime, everyone should be entitled to regain their full rights as citizens once they complete a prison sentence."

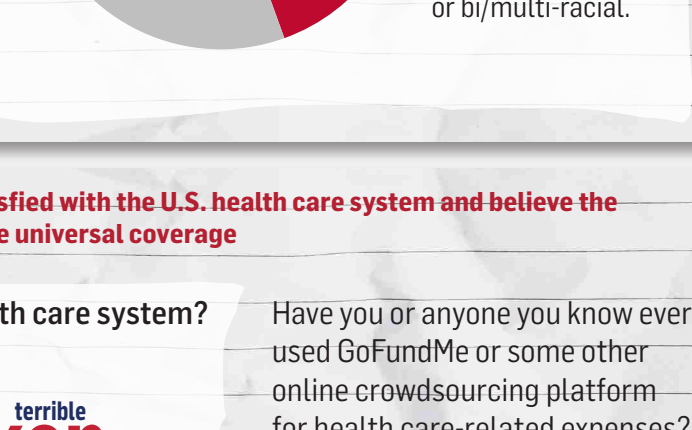
PPR Respondents:



63.0% of the U.S. public say they support restoring voting rights to individuals who have committed a felony after they have completed their entire sentence.⁹

46.5% of PPR respondents have had a significant interaction with the police. Of these, nearly half were negative.

Sentiment of police interactions

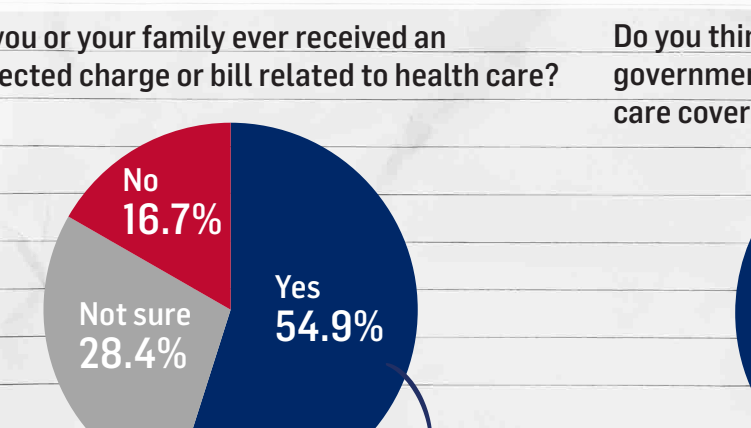


81.9% of these students are black/African American, Latinx or bi/multi-racial.

Health Care

Many students are dissatisfied with the U.S. health care system and believe the government should ensure universal coverage

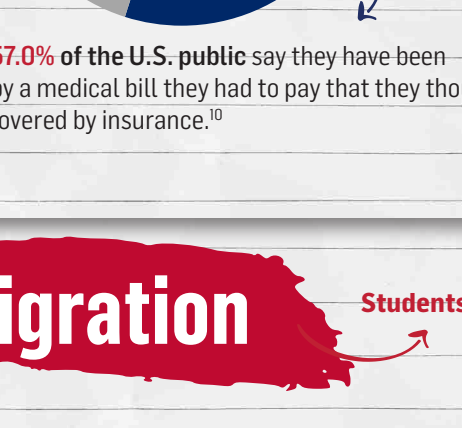
What word best describes your feeling about the U.S. health care system?



Have you or anyone you know ever used GoFundMe or some other online crowdsourcing platform for health care-related expenses?

Yes 56.3%
No 43.7%

Have you or your family ever received an unexpected charge or bill related to health care?



Similarly, 57.0% of the U.S. public say they have been surprised by a medical bill they had to pay that they thought would be covered by insurance.¹⁰

Do you think it is the responsibility of the federal government to make sure all Americans have health care coverage?

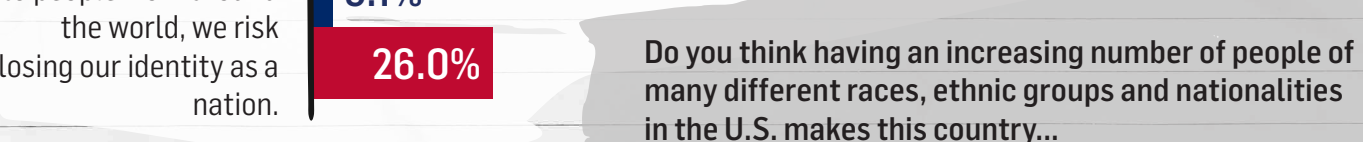


60.0% of the U.S. public say it is the responsibility of the federal government to make sure all Americans have health care coverage.¹¹

Immigration

Students view openness to immigrants as a net positive

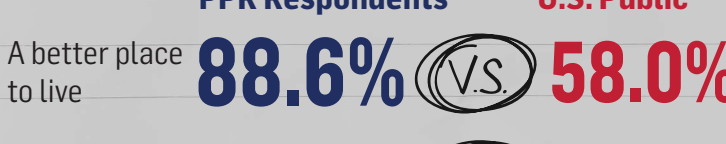
Which comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right?



95.7%

of PPR respondents oppose the proposal to substantially expand the wall along the U.S. border with Mexico. 58.0% of the U.S. public says the same.¹³

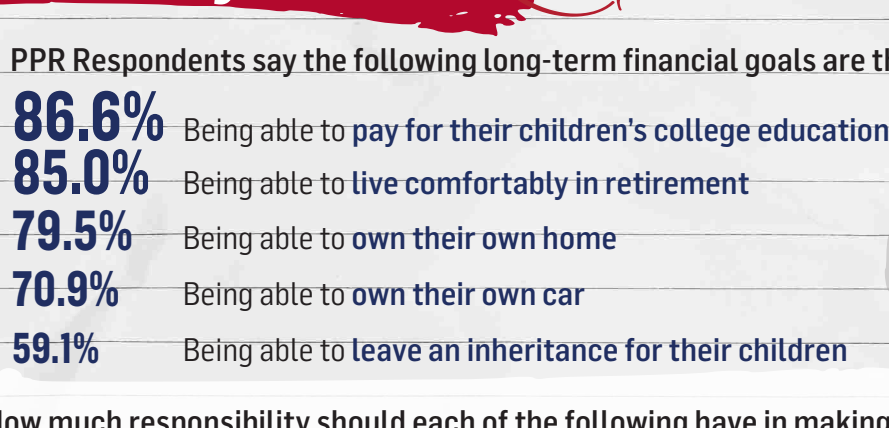
Do you think having an increasing number of people of many different races, ethnic groups and nationalities in the U.S. makes this country...



Economy + Jobs

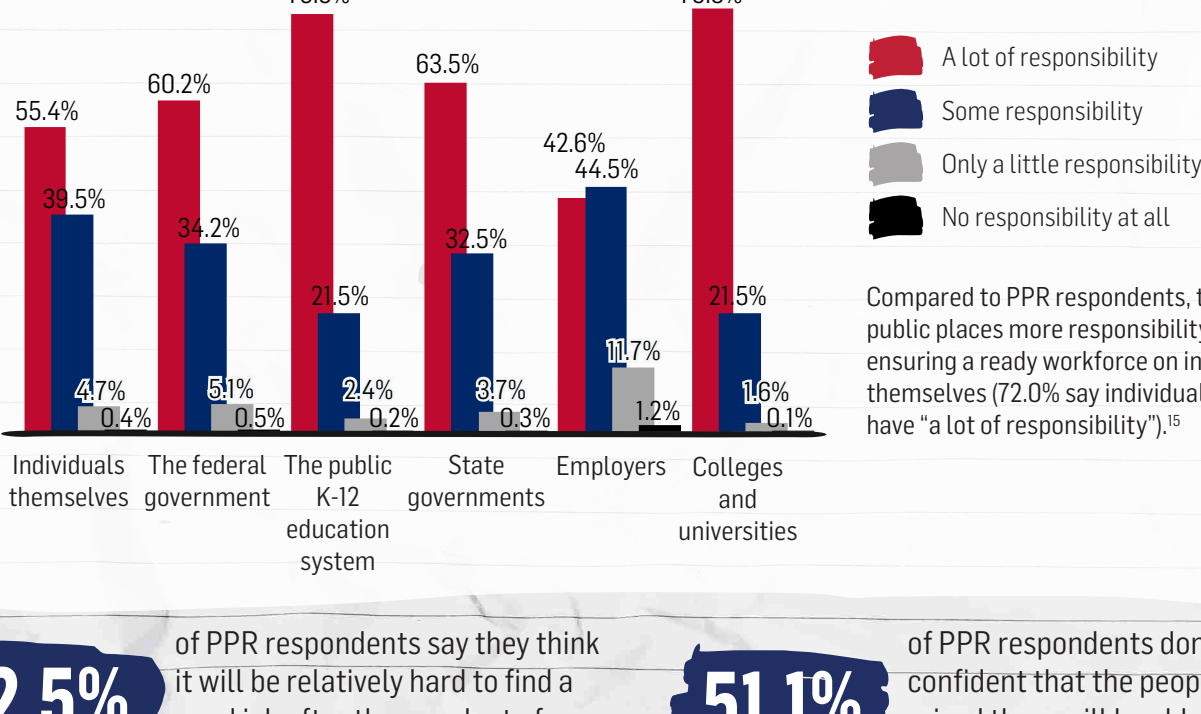
Most students are concerned about finding a good job, but hope to achieve the "American Dream"

PPR Respondents say the following long-term financial goals are the most important for them:



More than 500 respondents wrote in their own long-term financial goals. Of these, the most common concern supporting their parents, siblings and extended families financially.

How much responsibility should each of the following have in making sure that the American workforce has the right skills and education to be successful in today's economy?



Compared to PPR respondents, the U.S. public places more responsibility for ensuring a ready workforce on individuals themselves (72.0% say individuals should have "a lot of responsibility").¹⁵

62.5% of PPR respondents say they think it will be relatively hard to find a good job after they graduate from college.

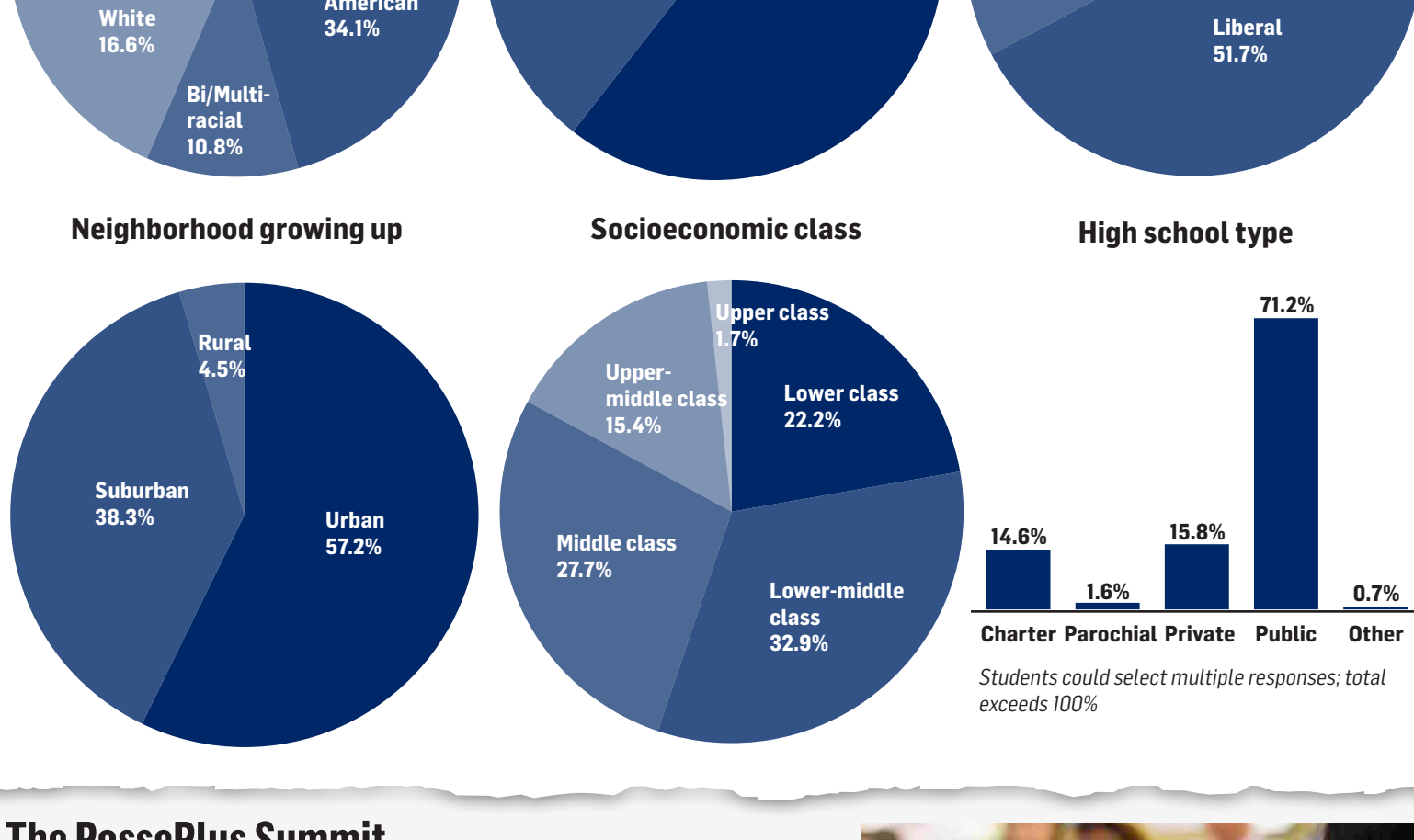
51.1% of PPR respondents don't feel confident that the people who raised them will be able to be financially stable when they're old.

In Conclusion

For the annual State of the Union address, the United States President sifts through data chosen from their agencies and committees, then delivers a report to Congress and the nation about the health of the country. In a modified version of this process, 2019 PPR attendees participated in three days of engaging, interactive, and sometimes challenging workshops, discussions and activities. Students crafted their own picture of the state of the union throughout the retreats: though they are largely dissatisfied with the way things are going in this country, they have clear priorities for the future. PPR participants envision a country that addresses race relations, improves the educational system, provides health coverage and fights global climate change. Most believe that colleges and the K-12 school system should play a significant role in creating a workforce that is ready to succeed in today's economy. They want to reduce the prison population and see stricter gun laws passed; most think the government should ensure health care for all Americans. View immigration positively and have less confidence in the police than the U.S. public. And although some have concerns about their financial futures, many still hope to achieve pieces of the American Dream.

PPR Respondent group demographics

Average age: 19.8 Posse Scholars: 54.9%



The PossePlus Summit

In honor of Posse's 30th anniversary, The Posse Foundation, together with the Aspen Institute, hosted the inaugural PossePlus Summit on June 6-7, 2019. The event, sponsored by Deloitte, was held at Deloitte University in Westlake, Texas.

The summit featured the 2019 PPR topic, "The State of Our Union." Through interactive workshops, forums with guest speakers and networking opportunities with other leaders, the Summit provided a space for student participants to report on and amplify the conversations and stories from their PPRs. One hundred and fifty student delegates from Posse's 54 college and university partners participated in the Summit. These delegates, approximately half of whom were Posse Scholars, were selected from among the 5,000 students who attended PPRs earlier in the year. Also in attendance were leaders from the business, philanthropic and higher education communities.

The weekend-long programming commenced with a Q&A discussion with former United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Secretary Duncan shared his own concerns about the country and offered advice for how best to address issues of importance with people in positions of power. Following the Q&A and in preparation for the town hall, Posse and Aspen Institute members facilitated workshops with delegates that closely examined PPR survey findings on the state of the union. The weekend concluded with a town hall moderated by Emmy Award-winning journalist Frank Sesno and live-streamed by NBCU's Telemundo.

The highlight and final event of the summit—the town hall—addressed the five most pressing issues in the U.S. identified by students during the retreats: immigration, racism, inequality, education and climate change. Delegates shared their opinions and personal experiences on each of the topics and discussed the role that young people can play in addressing issues by more actively participating in U.S. democracy. The result of the town hall was a dynamic conversation worthy of the nation's attention. One student delegate spoke of his experience migrating from Palestine to the United States and how the PPR influenced his perspective. Another told a harrowing story about an interaction with law enforcement and advocated for building stronger relationships between police and the communities they patrol. A third talked about the stress related to experiencing a classroom setting as a minority, and another described the pain his family endured when his father was deported.

There were moments of both animated disagreement and profound empathy. Ultimately, the student delegates engineered an enlightening conversation within a room as diverse as the nation itself. Frank Sesno ended the town hall with a message of hope for the nation and a charge to the delegates: "You will own the future, and you will shape it. You just saw how and it starts right now. I beg you to keep this conversation going."

To view the PosseSummit town hall event in its entirety, please visit possefoundation.org/posseplussummit.



2019 PPR Participating Partners

Agnes Scott College
Babson College
Bard College
Boston University
Brandeis University
Bryn Mawr College
Bucknell University
Carleton College
Case Western Reserve University
Centre College
Colby College
The College of Wooster
Connecticut College
Cornell University
Dartmouth College
Davidson College
Denison University
DePauw University
Dickinson College
Franklin & Marshall College
The George Washington University
Grinnell College
Hamilton College
Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Illinois Wesleyan University
Kalamazoo College
Lafayette College
Lawrence University
Lehigh University
Middlebury College
Mount Holyoke College
Northwestern University
Oberlin College
Pepperdine University
Pomona College
Sewanee: The University of the South
Smith College
Syracuse University
Texas A&M University
Trinity College
Tulane University
Union College
University of Michigan
University of Notre Dame
University of Puget Sound
University of Rochester
University of Texas at Austin
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Vanderbilt University
Vassar College
Wellesley College
Wesleyan University
Wheaton College

Notes

- 1 Gallup. (2019, April 1-9). Satisfaction With the United States. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1669/general-mood-country.aspx>
- 2 Pew Research Center. (2019, January 24). Public's 2019 Priorities: Economy, Health Care, Education and Security All Near Top of List. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/24/publics-2019-priorities-economy-health-care-education-and-security-all-near-top-of-list/>
- 3 Gallup. (2019). The Public Schools [Table]. *Confidence in Institutions*. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>
- 4 Hess, A. (2017, July 3). This is the Age Most Americans Pay Off Their Student Loans. CNBC. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/07/03/this-is-the-age-most-americans-pay-off-their-student-loans.html>; Value Penguin. (2019). Average Student Loan Debt in America: 2019 Facts & Figures. Retrieved from <https://www.valuepenguin.com/average-student-loan-debt-2019>
- 5 Pew Research Center. (2019, February 22). Grades, Test Scores Top List of Factors Americans Say Should Be Considered in College Admissions. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/25/most-americans-say-colleges-should-not-consider-race-or-ethnicity-in-admissions/ft_19-02-25_admissions_gradetestscores/
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- 9 HuffPost/YouGov. (2018, March). Restoration of Voting Rights. Retrieved from <http://big.assets.huffpostpost.com/tabsHPRestorationofvotingrights20180316.pdf>
- 10 NORC at the University of Chicago. (2018, August 16-20). NORC AmeriSpeak Omnibus Survey: Surprise Medical Bills. Retrieved from <http://www.norc.umd.edu/PDFs/Health%20Care%20Surveys/Surprise%20Bills%20Survey%20August%202018%20Topline.pdf>
- 11 Kelly, J. (2018, October 3). Most Continue to Say Ensuring Health Care Coverage is Government's Responsibility. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/03/most-continue-to-say-ensuring-health-care-coverage-is-governments-responsibility/>
- 12 Hartig, H. (2018, October 9). Most Americans View Openness to Foreigners as 'Essential to Who We Are as a Nation.' Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/09/most-americans-view-openness-to-foreigners-as-essential-to-who-we-are-as-a-nation/>
- 13 Gramlich, J. (2019, January 16). How Americans See Illegal Immigration, the Border Wall and Political Compromise. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/16/how-americans-see-illegal-immigration-the-border-wall-and-political-compromise/>
- 14 Fingerhut, H. (2018, June 14). Most Americans Express Positive Views of Country's Growing Racial and Ethnic Diversity. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/06/14/most-americans-express-positive-views-of-countrys-growing-racial-and-ethnic-diversity/>
- 15 Pew Research Center. (2016, September 28). Americans Think Individuals and Public Schools Should Have the Most Responsibility to Make Sure Workers Have the Right Skills. Retrieved from https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/10/06/the-state-of-american-jobs/st_2016-10-06_jobs_0/