

Back to Work: Listening to Americans

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Introductory Letter

For more than a century, Carnegie Corporation of New York has worked to ensure that America's schools fulfill their fundamental promise — preparing all students to participate fully in our democracy and thrive in an inclusive economy and society. The pandemic has challenged that vision in unprecedented ways, exacting a profound toll on lives, livelihoods and learning.

Even before this crisis, our education system was not designed to meet the cradle-to-career needs of all Americans and truly maximize opportunity for everyone. But the events of the past year hit like a tsunami, laying bare underlying inequities and challenges, exacerbating them and making them more urgent.

With millions of Americans out of work, we must act swiftly to get people back on their feet. Young people at critical transition points to college and career also find themselves facing an upended jobs market and uncertain future. What is their path to meaningful careers? It will take the will and ability of the nation to think creatively about solutions. We cannot simply aspire to restore what was lost. We need a stronger and more dynamic system that supports lifelong learning and skills development so adults can adapt to the demands of an ever-changing jobs market or as their personal ambitions evolve over time.

To achieve change at the scale required, it is essential that we start by listening to the voices of Americans — their hopes and challenges as well as their perspectives on how best to meet their needs. This survey represents a key step in that effort. Its insights are meant to help identify immediate solutions for our current crisis as well as long-term strategies to achieve lasting progress.

In a time of deep polarization, the survey reveals broad, bipartisan agreement as to what Americans believe is required now, even if they arrived at that consensus for different reasons. Given our long commitment to education, we were gratified to see learning loss emerge as a top priority for the nation to address — we must ensure that this crisis does not derail a generation of young people from achieving their dreams. The survey also surfaces strong support for a jobs recovery program that would put people back to work, addressing national and local needs while helping individuals build skills for future employment. Our schools, communities and economy are inextricably linked — we need a coherent strategy to address our common challenges if we aspire to long-term economic growth and shared prosperity.

In the *Back to Work* survey, Americans have provided strong insights about solutions that could enable us to emerge from this crisis as a stronger society. We hope that it will help policymakers come together to address the urgent needs of this moment and build a more equitable and secure future for all Americans.



LaVerne Evans Srinivasan

*Vice President, National Program,
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Executive Summary

- ● **More than nine in 10 Americans (93%)** — including 98% of Democrats and 87% of Republicans — said they favor a national initiative that creates paid work and job training opportunities as a component of COVID-19 economic recovery efforts.

A majority across party lines (72% of Democrats and 60% of Republicans) also said they would support such a program because of its potential to promote long-term economic growth by putting people back to work and helping them build skills for future jobs.

76%

cited **the economy/job loss** as an important issue that has become more urgent in recent months.

Support for a national jobs program reflects widespread concern about job losses resulting from the pandemic. Americans rated access to healthcare and the economy/job loss among the most important issues currently facing the nation. Asked which issues have become more urgent in recent months, they were most likely to choose the economy/job loss (76%).

More than 80% of Democrats and Republicans **assigned a “high” or “medium” priority** to six specific goals a national jobs-and-training program might address:

- 1 delivering food, medical prescriptions or providing care to elderly and other vulnerable populations
- 2 building and repairing infrastructure
- 3 addressing the impact of lost learning time for K-12 students related to COVID-19
- 4 preventing and addressing the consequences of natural disasters
- 5 expanding access to quality childcare
- 6 expanding access to high-speed internet

Two other goals — ensuring clean air and water and improving government websites for better online public services — were seen as high or medium priorities by at least 75% in each party.

62% of Americans said pairing paid work with education or training opportunities is the best way to prepare people for future jobs.

At a time when rapid automation has forced many U.S. workers to acquire new skills, 62% of Americans — including 65% of Democrats and 61% of Republicans — said pairing paid work with education or training opportunities is the best way to prepare people for future jobs. Seventeen percent said providing full-time work opportunities alone is the best approach, while 16% said the same about full-time training opportunities.

Notably, when asked whether increasing unemployment insurance benefits or providing opportunities for paid work that helps build skills for future jobs constitutes the “best addition” to assist people currently collecting unemployment insurance, 78% of respondents without a college degree cited jobs and training, compared with 60% of those with a college degree.

While high percentages of Republicans and Democrats supported the idea of a national jobs-and-training initiative overall, **different aspects of the program appealed more** to those affiliated with each party.

- Republicans were likely to favor direct efforts to get people back into the workforce. Though majorities in both parties felt providing paid work opportunities to unemployed Americans is preferable to simply increasing unemployment insurance, Republicans were more likely to respond this way, at 92%, than Democrats, at 55%.
- A majority of Republicans (57%) also said “providing the dignity of engaging in productive work” is among the most important objectives of providing paid work opportunities, vs. 36% of Democrats.
- Democrats were more likely to cite the need to provide relief to those suffering economically from COVID-19 as well as the program’s potential to address important community needs.

Methodology

The *Back to Work* study is based on a nationally representative web-based survey of 1,993 Gallup Panel™ members conducted Oct. 21 to Nov. 5, 2020. See the Appendix for details on Gallup Panel methodology.

Introduction

In addition to the devastation the coronavirus pandemic has wrought in terms of lives lost, it has been one of the most economically disruptive crises in U.S. history. The unemployment rate skyrocketed between February and April 2020, then fell rapidly as restrictions on businesses eased. However, the country's jobs recovery slowed dramatically in the fall as COVID-19 infections surged again, and halted altogether in December, when the U.S. economy lost 140,000 jobs.¹

Among the most urgent concerns is the rising number of the long-term unemployed. **In January 2021, four million Americans had been unemployed for six months or more, accounting for 39.5% of the total unemployed.**² Many have been out of work for months because their industries — such as food service and hospitality — have been among those most directly affected by the crisis. Additional unemployment insurance does not help with many of the problems associated with long-term unemployment, including the effects on worker mental health and employers' reluctance to hire those who have been out of the workforce for an extended period.

Young workers are heavily overrepresented among industries hardest hit by the pandemic. In the spring of 2020, about one-fourth of those aged 16-24 were unemployed, vs. one-tenth of older workers.³ College graduates entering the workforce during an economic crisis are particularly at risk for long-term effects: Some experts have estimated lifetime earnings losses of \$116,000 and \$82,000, respectively, for the classes of 2020 and 2021.⁴

The Biden administration's and the new Congress's response to the COVID-19 economic downturn, which aims to address the current employment crisis and promote longer-term growth by incorporating skills training for participants, happens at a critical time. **Income inequality has risen consistently in recent years, partly due to automation of many lower-skill jobs combined with unequal access to higher-paying jobs and the education needed to obtain them.**⁵ Millions of Americans are underemployed, locked into low-paying jobs that are often part-time and offer limited career advancement prospects. Such barriers to opportunity are bad for long-term U.S. economic growth, as the potential for increasing labor productivity goes down as the share of the population not properly equipped to meet labor market needs goes up.

1 Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, January 8). *The employment situation — December 2021* [BLS News Release].

2 Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, February 5). *The employment situation — January 2021* [BLS News Release].

3 Gould, E., & Kassa, M. (2020, October 14). *Young workers hit hard by the COVID-19 economy*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/young-workers-covid-recession/>

4 Friedman, J. (2020). *Lifetime earnings effects of the COVID-19 recession for students* [Manuscript in preparation]. Opportunity Insights, Harvard University.

5 Dizikes, P. (2020, May 5). *Study finds stronger links between automation and inequality*. MIT News. <https://news.mit.edu/2020/study-links-automation-inequality-0506>



Amid economic crises such as the current surge in joblessness due to the pandemic, the problems associated with structural inequality are heightened, as economic harms like job loss fall disproportionately on those who already face disadvantages. But crises also present opportunities to develop recovery strategies that both alleviate suffering in the present and address long-term economic challenges facing the country. Among the most pressing of those challenges is the need to upgrade America's "skills infrastructure"—i.e., help more U.S. workers develop skills for the current job market and lay the groundwork for more broad-based economic growth.

One idea that has the potential to address short-term and long-term economic pain for many Americans is a national jobs-and-training program. The *Back to Work* survey reveals that even in these deeply divided times, an overwhelming majority of **Americans across political affiliations agree on at least two points: 1) Many people are at risk, and we need to help each other, and 2) we can do that by providing millions of people who have lost their jobs during the pandemic with a combination of paid work and training opportunities over the next few years.** Further, there is widespread support for the idea that those jobs should address pressing national or community needs while helping people build skills for future employment.

Background

The new administration faces a **deeply polarized nation and a closely divided Congress** unaccustomed to bipartisan cooperation.

Past national crises, such as the 9/11 attacks, have seen a rally effect with strong public support for government responses, regardless of partisan affiliation. Public response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been different, with cross-party efforts hindered by a highly divisive presidential election and fragmented media that offer competing narratives about the situation.

However, strong cross-party support in the *Back to Work* survey for a national jobs-and-training program indicates that the need for good jobs and careers — including near-term employment and skill-building — is a point of consensus across partisan groups. Prior Gallup research has documented the importance of access to good jobs not just to financial health but to many aspects of personal wellbeing.⁶ Reflecting the common desire for employment that offers financial security as well as a source of identity and optimism, politicians across the political spectrum often promise to make jobs a central focus.⁷

National jobs-and-training programs have focused on infrastructure and specific industry sectors.

During economic downturns, the U.S. government has often implemented subsidized jobs programs to make it more affordable for employers to hire or retain workers. For example, as part of the CARES Act, the Small Business Administration established the Paycheck Protection Program, which provided small businesses with funds to pay up to eight weeks of payroll costs.

Since the Great Depression, the federal government has also initiated national programs that create limited-term jobs, particularly in response to economic crises or urgent national needs. Throughout the 20th century, a number of such initiatives addressed large-scale infrastructure challenges, thereby contributing to long-term economic development even as they provided short-term employment opportunities. The Tennessee Valley Authority, for example, created thousands of jobs in the 1930s while generating hydroelectric power in the economically blighted Tennessee Valley area.⁸ Construction of the interstate highway system, initiated by President Eisenhower in 1956, was a major source of publicly funded employment with massive long-term economic benefits.⁹

⁶ Clifton, J. (2011). *The coming jobs war: What every leader must know about the future of job creation*. Gallup Press.

⁷ Newport, F. (2020). *Biden-Harris economic opportunities and U.S. public opinion*. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/327302/biden-harris-economic-priorities-public-opinion.aspx>

⁸ TVA. (n.d.). HISTORY. Retrieved January 21, 2020, from <https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/history-of-the-tva>

⁹ Uchitelle, L. (2019, May 2). Manufacturing can't create enough jobs. Infrastructure can. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/business/manufacturing-jobs-infrastructure.html>

Public opinion polls continue to find that Americans recognize infrastructure maintenance and development as a national priority.¹⁰ Modern infrastructure development efforts need to go beyond construction projects to include jobs in technology and healthcare, giving a broader range of opportunities to those hit hardest by the pandemic.¹¹

In recent years, national efforts to help workers upgrade their skills or learn new ones have increasingly included sector-based training programs.¹² Such programs offer a workforce development strategy to address the expanding economic divide between college-educated workers and those with no college degree by providing participants with the skills and work experience they need to launch productive, well-paid careers. Sector-based programs focus on specific industries and job types that have strong local labor demand and would provide workers with opportunities for career advancement.¹³

Smaller-scale employment programs have targeted specific groups, such as at-risk youth.

Smaller job creation programs have been implemented in past decades, most often during periods of high unemployment. Many programs have targeted groups with particularly high rates of joblessness — such as those on federal assistance programs or young people who are not employed or in school — with the goal not only of providing income support but of better preparing participants to succeed over the long-term.

There has also been a long-standing role for national youth service programs, most notably AmeriCorps, that address critical community needs like mentoring children, building affordable housing and engaging in environmental cleanup efforts. In the context of the pandemic, tutoring K-12 students may be a particularly impactful service; 65% of Americans say addressing the impact of lost learning time is a high-priority goal (see page 28). Previous studies have shown that even virtual tutoring programs can significantly improve learning outcomes, especially for disadvantaged students.¹⁴

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- 10 Newport, F. (2019, May 2). *The singular appeal of a government focus on infrastructure*. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/249326/singular-appeal-government-focus-infrastructure.aspx>
- 11 White, M. C. (2020, October 22). *Trump vs. Biden: Who has a better chance of restoring America's lost jobs?* NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/economy/trump-vs-biden-who-has-better-chance-restoring-america-s-n1244178>
- 12 Schaberg, K., & Greenberg, D. H. (2020). *Long-term effects of a sectoral advancement strategy: Costs, benefits, and impacts from the WorkAdvance demonstration*. MDRC.
- 13 Katz, L. F., Roth, J., Hendra, R., & Schaberg, K. (2020, December). *Why do sectoral employment programs work? Lessons from WorkAdvance* [Working paper, p. 3]. National Bureau of Economic Research. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w28248>
- 14 Oreopoulos, P. (2020, November 24). Scale up tutoring to combat COVID learning loss for disadvantaged students. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/scale-up-tutoring-to-combat-covid-learning-loss-for-disadvantaged-students/>

Evidence-based studies show combining work experience with sector-specific training can result in long-term employment and income gains.

In addition to easing the current jobs crisis, a national jobs-and-training program offers a chance to address the growing "opportunity divide" between workers with and without the skills to meet current labor market needs by giving participants sector-specific training that corresponds to their work in the program.

Recent evaluations based on randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of sector-focused training programs demonstrate that they lead to higher incomes for participants and that their benefits last for years after the training is complete. A working paper released in December 2020 by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) concludes that sectoral employment programs generate persistent earnings gains by "moving participants into jobs with higher hourly wages rather than mainly by increasing employment rates."¹⁵

In three of the four programs included in the NBER study, training lasted one year or less but led to higher average incomes for several years after completion. A separate RCT evaluation of one of those programs — Year Up, which provides young adults with six months of training followed by a six-month internship — found that participants retained large earnings gains five years after taking part in the program.¹⁶

The NBER authors offer possible explanations for such gains, including the idea that publicly supported sector-based training addresses a failure by employers in some sectors to provide proper training in transferable skills because part of the benefit may accrue to other firms if employees leave. Another possible factor is that those who provide sector-based training are highly attuned to the demand for specific skills in their sector and how that demand is likely to change in the near future; thus, they can adapt training efforts to better prepare participants for valued roles in expanding occupations.

Implementing a jobs-and-training program through public-private partnerships could help in this regard and fulfill a key criterion for success in the RCT studies: partnerships with local employers that can be leveraged for job placement upon participants' completion of the program.

15 Katz, L. F., Roth, J., Hendra, R., & Schaberg, K. (2020, December). *Why do sectoral employment programs work? Lessons from WorkAdvance* [Working paper p. 2]. National Bureau of Economic Research. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w28248>

16 Fein, D., Dastrup, S., & Burnett, K. (2020, October 14). *Still bridging the opportunity divide for low-income youth: Year Up's longer-term impacts* [PowerPoint presentation]. PACE Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency, Washington, D.C. https://www.abtassociates.com/files/events/2020/to-improve-and-to-prove_appam-2020_collated_11-10-20final.pdf

Economic fallout from COVID-19 has led to renewed interest in a national jobs initiative.

The economic crisis caused by the pandemic has led to new calls for a national program that addresses both short-term job creation and long-term economic needs. In July, Brookings proposed a four-part infrastructure stimulus plan for boosting the economy, including an “*InfraCorps*” program that creates infrastructure career pathways for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.¹⁷ Others have called for job creation efforts that specifically address coronavirus recovery needs, such as contact tracing or delivering basic care and medical supplies to the elderly and other vulnerable populations.¹⁸

As candidates, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris put forth job creation proposals for immediately putting people back to work, including a Public Health Jobs Corps and other efforts focused on manufacturing, infrastructure and education.¹⁹ With a closely divided Congress, finding political common ground for their recovery agenda is likely to be a challenge.²⁰ Infrastructure projects generally enjoy strong bipartisan support, and the *Back to Work* survey demonstrates that the idea of shoring up America’s “skills infrastructure” through targeted training opportunities is no exception.

More fundamentally, the survey shows that Americans recognize the need for national efforts to help people — especially the most vulnerable members of society — through this historic crisis. They are no strangers to the idea of federally funded programs that put people to work in the service of national needs. Particularly in the context of widespread joblessness, most Americans support such an approach as a practical way to address short-term suffering that also has potential longer-term benefits.

17 Tomer, A., Kane, J., & Fishbane, L. (2020, July 29). An infrastructure stimulus plan for the COVID-19 recession. *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/an-infrastructure-stimulus-plan-for-the-covid-19-recession/>

18 Crampton, D. (2020, July 6). *The United States needs a new Works Progress Administration to overcome the coronavirus recession*. Washington Center for Equitable Growth. <https://equitablegrowth.org/the-united-states-needs-a-new-works-progress-administration-to-overcome-the-coronavirus-recession/>

19 *Build back better: Joe Biden's jobs and economic recovery plan for working families*. (n.d.). Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website. Retrieved Dec. 22, 2020, from <https://joebiden.com/build-back-better/>

20 New York Times Editorial Board. (2020, December 12). Opinion | Build on common ground. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/12/opinion/joe-biden-america.html>

Detailed Findings

Americans' views on national challenges amid COVID-19

The first part of the *Back to Work* study focused on Americans' opinions about national priorities as the country struggles with the coronavirus pandemic. The findings highlight the prevalence of concern about joblessness and offer insights on how Americans think the problem should be addressed.

- **62% of Americans**, including majorities of Democrats and Republicans, selected job creation as an important criterion for a 2021 economic recovery plan.
- Most Americans said **access to healthcare and the economic recession/job loss** are among the country's three most urgent issues.
- Asked about the most important way to help people hurt economically by the pandemic, **Americans favored providing paid work opportunities over direct financial support** (such as stimulus payments) or federally funded education opportunities.



Majorities of Democrats and Republicans

said generating income and creating jobs are priorities for an economic recovery plan.

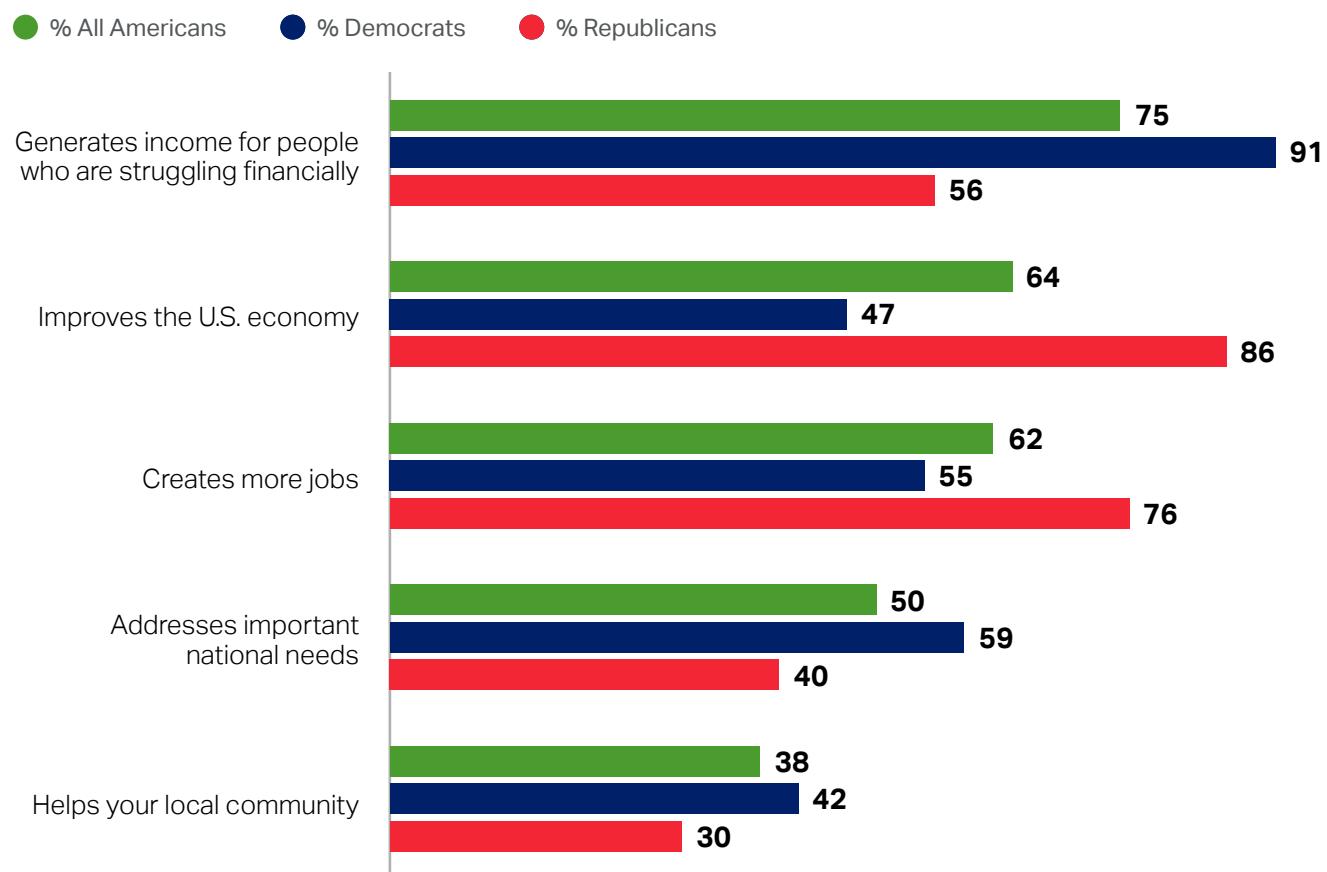
The Carnegie-Gallup *Back to Work* survey asked Americans about the issues and approaches they favor for economic recovery from the pandemic. In particular, the study sought Americans' input on how to address a jobs crisis that has disproportionately affected low-income workers in industries like retail and food service.

Most Americans believed helping people who are suffering severe financial consequences from the pandemic should be a top priority. Asked to choose three criteria (from a list of five) that were most important to them for an economic recovery plan, Americans were most likely to choose generating income for people who are struggling financially, at 75% overall. However, improving the U.S. economy more generally (64%) and creating jobs (62%) were also high priorities. Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans chose job creation and generating income as important criteria.¹⁹

CHART 1:

When it comes to an economic recovery plan for 2021, what is most important to you?

Please select the three most important criteria.



¹⁹ Unless otherwise stated, results for Republicans and Democrats in this report include those who consider themselves a member of one of the two parties, plus independents who say they lean Republican or Democrat.



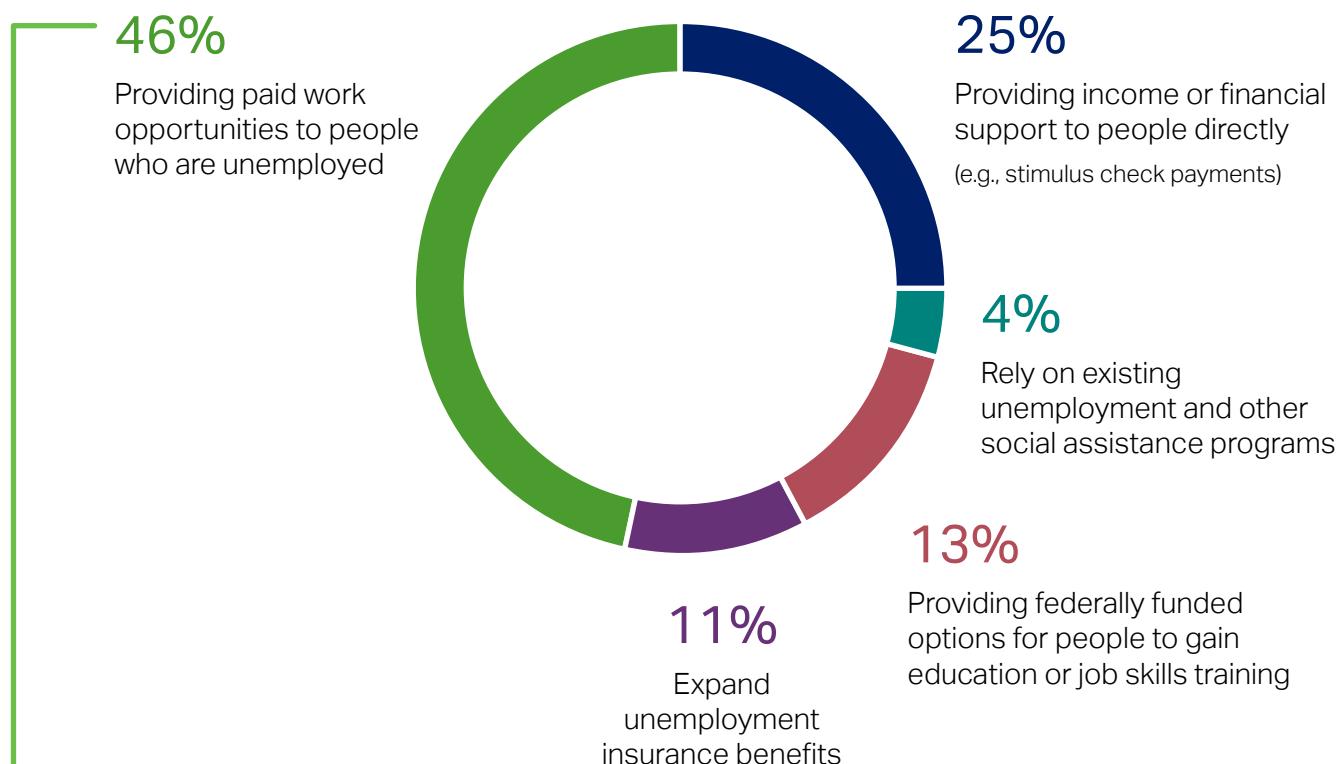
Most Americans believed helping people who are **suffering severe financial consequences** from the pandemic should be a top priority.

Americans were asked more specifically to choose the one goal they felt was most important for helping people who have lost their jobs during the pandemic. Almost half (46%) chose providing paid work opportunities, far outdistancing all other options.

One in four Americans (25%) said providing financial support to people directly (e.g., through stimulus checks) was most important, while 13% chose providing federally funded education or training opportunities.

CHART 2:

In your opinion, which of the following would be the most important for helping people who lost their jobs or income during the COVID-19 pandemic while the economy recovers over the next few years?



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% +/- 1%.

Almost half (46%) chose providing paid work opportunities, far outdistancing all other options.

Most Americans included **access to healthcare and the economy/job loss** among the most pressing issues facing the country.

A key objective of the *Back to Work* survey was to examine Americans' views of the most important issues for national leaders to address in the context of the pandemic and other historic events of 2020.

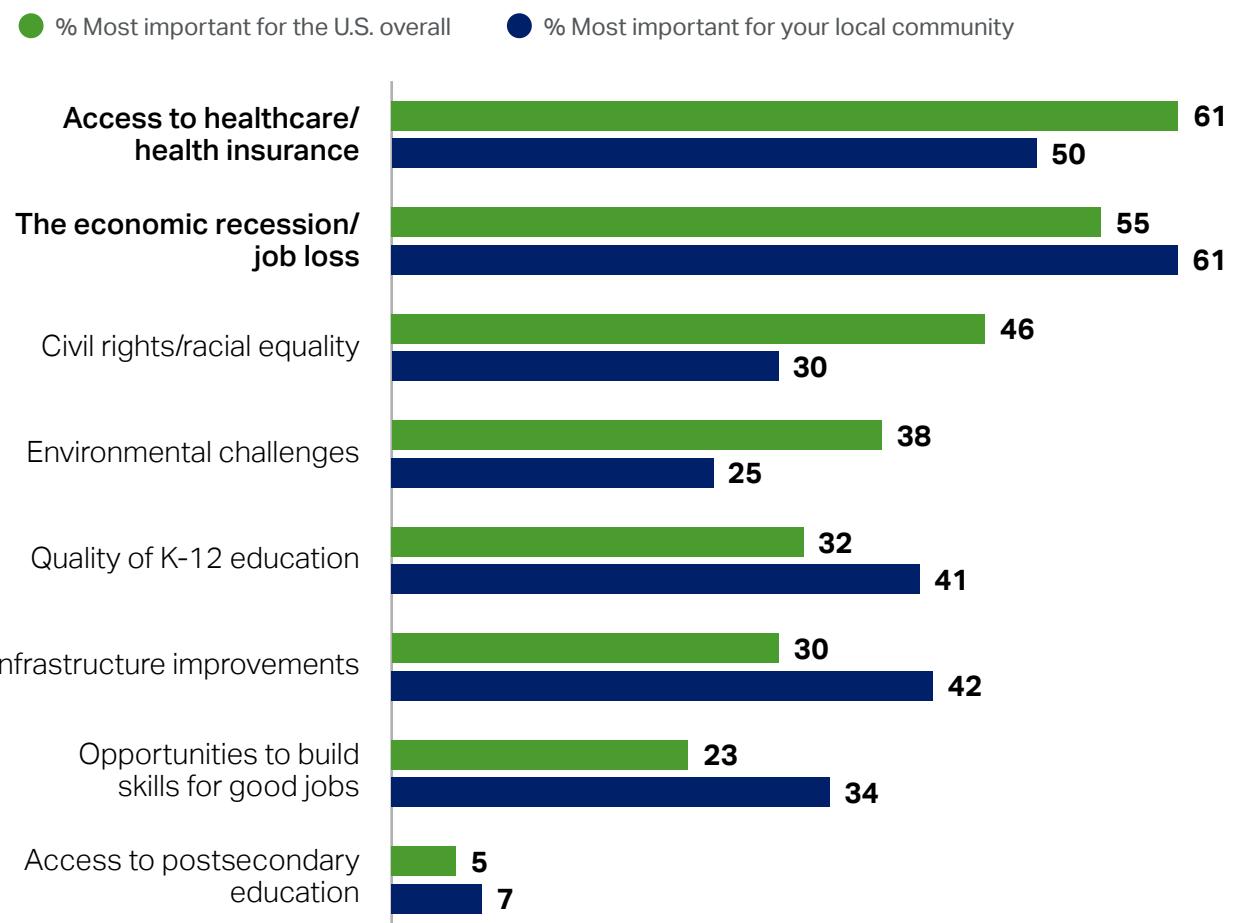
Americans were presented with a set of eight prominent issues currently facing the country and asked to choose the three they felt were most important to the U.S. overall and to their local community.

The results indicate Americans are most concerned with managing the effects of the pandemic: 61% said access to healthcare is among the three most important issues, while 55% included the economic recession/job loss. In total, 88% of Americans included one or both of these issues among their three responses.

CHART 3:

In your opinion, which three of the following issues facing [the U.S./your local community] today are the most important?

Percentage who included each item among their three possible responses.



Americans were more likely to include

K-12 education quality, infrastructure improvements and job-training opportunities

on the list of issues most important to their local community than to the U.S. overall.

Several items — including access to healthcare, civil rights and environmental challenges — were more likely to be seen as important from a national perspective than from a local one. Conversely, Americans were more likely to include K-12 education quality, infrastructure improvements and job-training opportunities on the list of issues most important to their local community than to the U.S. overall. The economic recession/job loss was the only item selected by a majority of respondents as one of the most important issues to the U.S. and their local community.

A few items attracted the lion's share of responses regarding issues important to the U.S. overall — especially among Democrats, for whom access to healthcare, civil rights and environmental challenges represented 70% of all responses.

Notably, Democrats tended to focus primarily on managing the health effects of the pandemic, while Republicans were more likely to focus on the economic impact. About eight in 10 Democrats (79%) included access to healthcare and health insurance among the three most important issues, vs. 43% of Republicans. Conversely, 72% of Republicans included the economy/job loss, vs. 42% of Democrats.

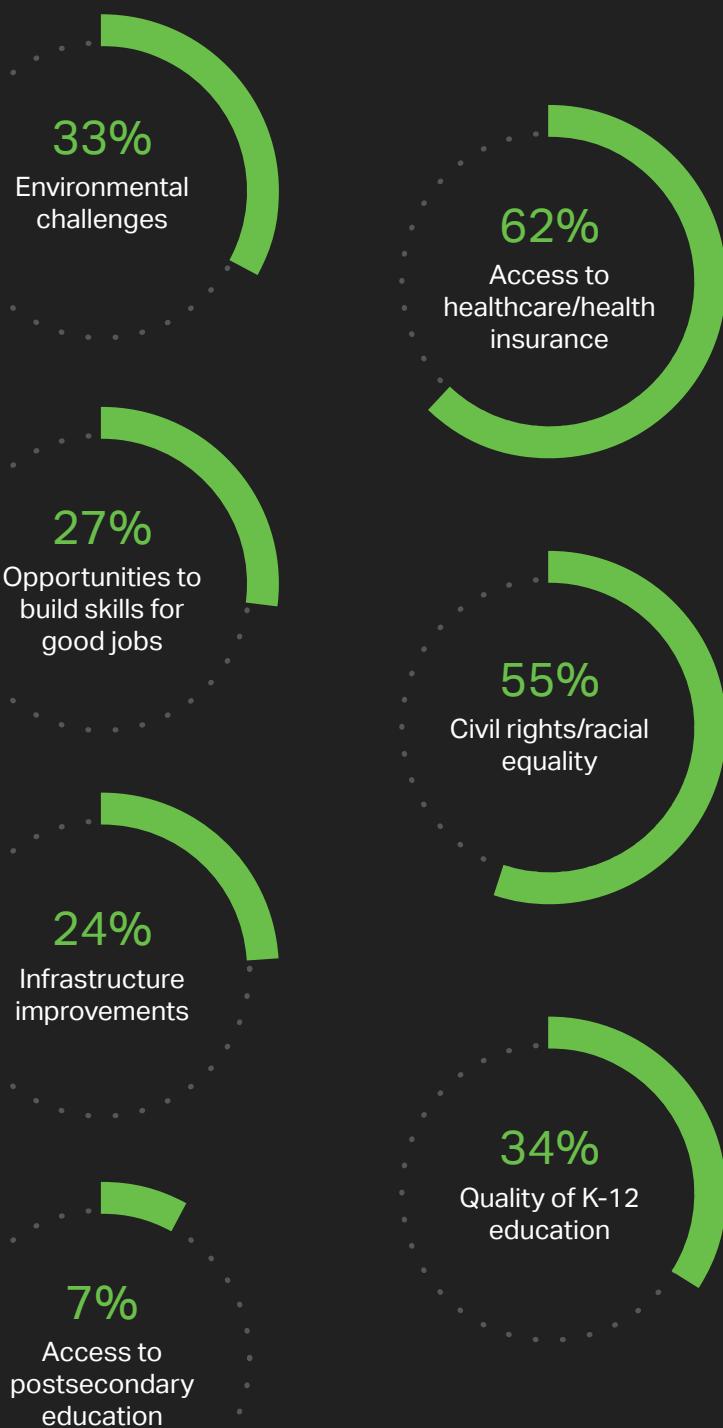
Importantly, these results represent Americans' choices when forced to select three of the eight issues rather than indicate the importance they would attach to each issue if it were measured independently. Thus, the low percentage of Americans who included access to postsecondary education among their three responses does not necessarily reflect a widespread lack of concern about the issue, as it may have been "crowded out" by other issues regarded as more pressing in the unusual circumstances of 2020.



CHART 4:

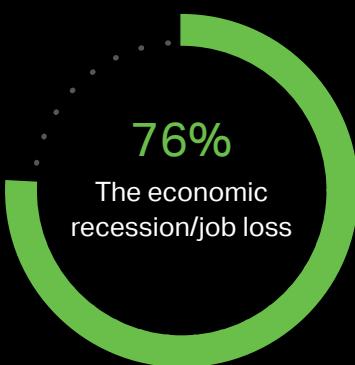
In your opinion, which of the following issues have become more urgent in the past six months? Select all that apply.

Percentage who selected each item.



Economy/job loss

among the most important issues both from a national and local perspective.



Americans were also asked which of the same set of eight issues they felt have become more urgent in the past six months. They were most likely to include the recession and job loss, at 76%, with this figure nearly identical among Democrats (75%) and Republicans (76%). Most also said access to healthcare (62%) and civil rights (55%) had become more urgent in that time.



Health and safety concerns

were the most commonly named barrier to getting people back to work.

A national jobs program would seek to overcome specific barriers to employment in the pandemic-altered economic landscape, including by providing safe working environments at a time when many employees in service industries like retail, hospitality and food service fear exposure to the virus.

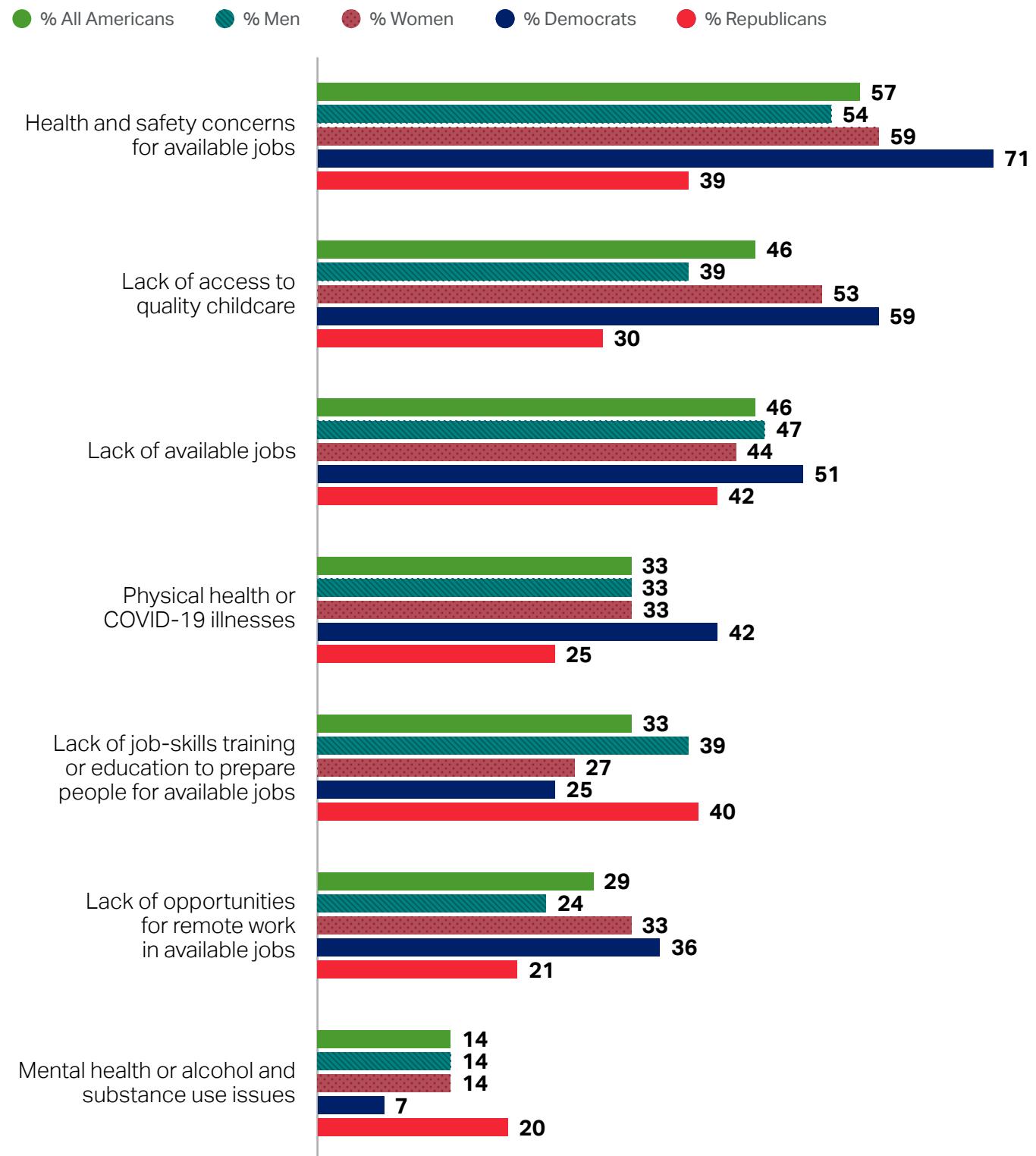
Asked to choose the three greatest barriers for getting people back to work (from a list of eight), Americans were most likely to select health and safety concerns for available jobs (57%). Other commonly chosen barriers included lack of access to quality childcare (46%) and a lack of available jobs (46%). Women were significantly more likely than men to cite lack of childcare (53% vs. 39%), highlighting the disproportionate impact on female workers of the need to care for children who may be attending school remotely from home.

One-third of Americans (33%) chose lack of education or job-skills training as one of the greatest barriers to getting back to work. Republicans were more likely than Democrats to select this item, as well as another barrier to employment that predated the pandemic: mental health or substance abuse issues.

CHART 5:

In your opinion, what are the three greatest barriers to getting people back to work?

Percentage who included each item among their three possible responses.



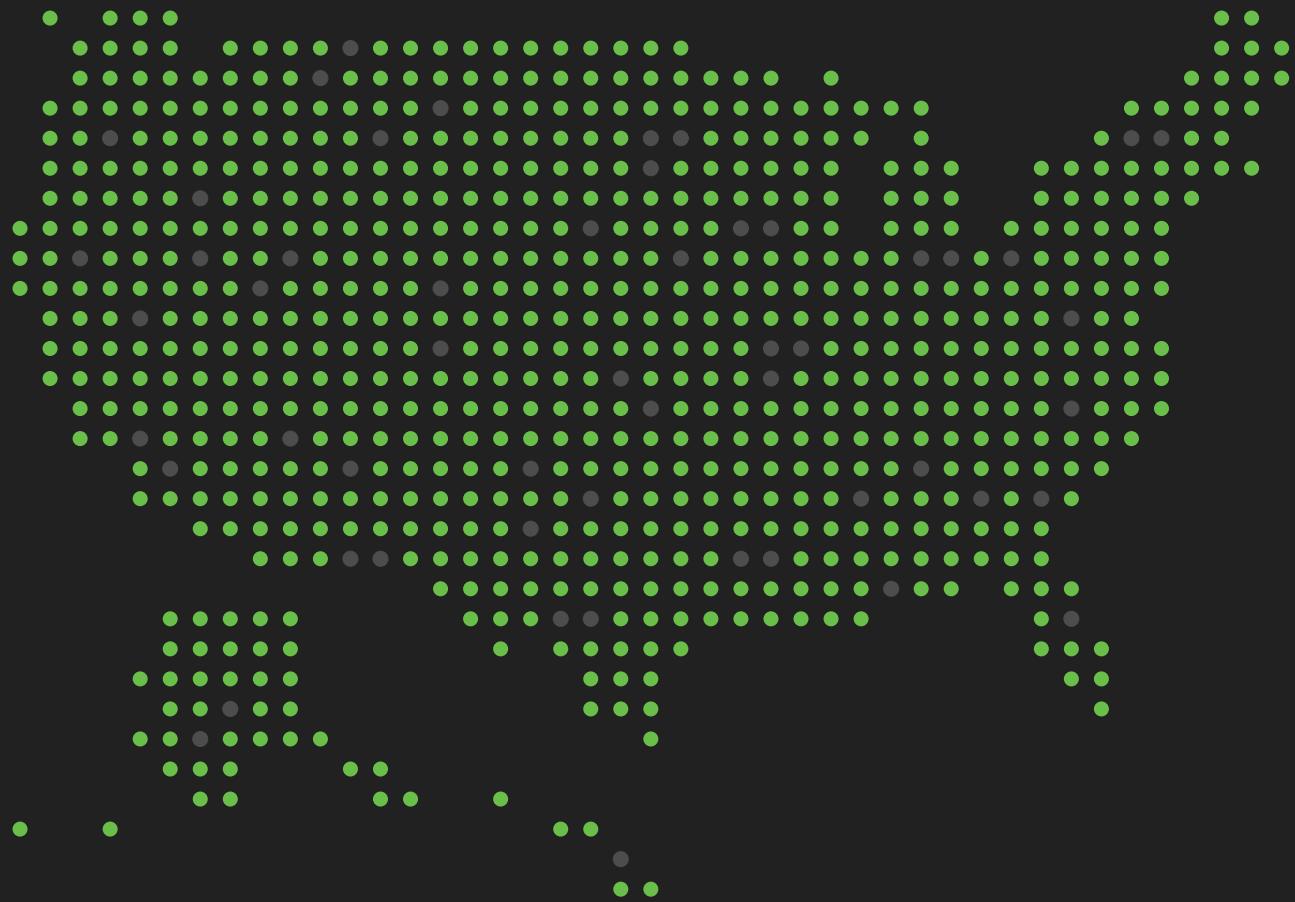
Detailed Findings

Americans' views on a national program combining paid work with relevant education or training

The second part of the *Back to Work* study asked Americans for their opinions of a national program that combines paid work that addresses important local or national issues with related skills training.

- Americans widely favored such a program, particularly as it would help **get people back into the workforce** rather than merely provide financial assistance for those unemployed.
- They believed a **program that combines paid work with education or training opportunities** would be more effective than a program that only offered one or the other.
- Americans would be more likely to favor a national jobs program if it were funded through **a public-private partnership or by state government** and if it contributed to economic growth in the long term.
- **Americans' most prioritized goals for such a program** were caring for vulnerable populations, improving public health and addressing K-12 student learning loss from COVID-19.





More than **nine in 10**
Americans favored a national
jobs-and-training program.

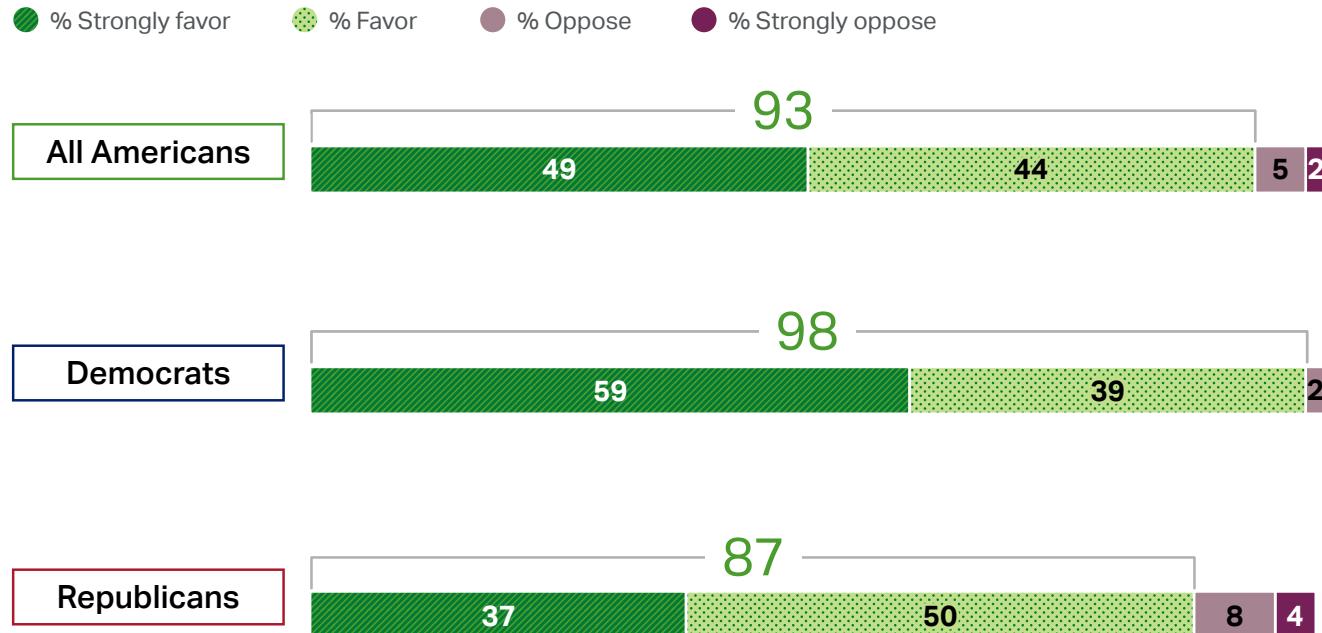
Like many landmark public works initiatives of the past century, a jobs-and-training program would seek to address both the short-term challenges of the current crisis (which Democrats were more likely to name as barriers to employment) and longer-term structural barriers to economic development and job growth (which Republicans were more likely to name).

That twin focus may help explain the high level of bipartisan support seen in the *Back to Work* study for a jobs-and-training initiative as part of the government's COVID-19 economic relief efforts.

More than nine in 10 Americans overall (93%) said they "strongly favor" or "favor" a program that "provides people who have lost their jobs during COVID-19 with paid work opportunities" and helps participants "build skills for future jobs." Almost all Democrats (98%) favored the initiative, as did 87% of Republicans. The potential benefit most often chosen as a reason to support such a program was that it would promote long-term economic growth by putting people back to work and helping them build skills for future jobs. However, there was a greater partisan gap in the percentages who "strongly" favored it, at 59% of Democrats vs. 37% of Republicans.

CHART 6:

Consider a program in which the government provides people who have lost their jobs during COVID-19 with paid work opportunities for the next few years. These jobs address national or community needs while helping people build skills for future jobs. Overall, to what degree do you favor or oppose this program?



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% +/- 1%.

There was also widespread agreement that, in addition to providing financial support to those left jobless by the pandemic, a national jobs-and-training initiative would provide help to improve the economy (76%), help address specific

local and national needs (74%) and decrease dependence on unemployment assistance (66%). Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans agreed with each of these statements about the program.

CHART 7:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about this [national jobs-and-training] program?

● % 4, Agree ● % 5, Strongly agree

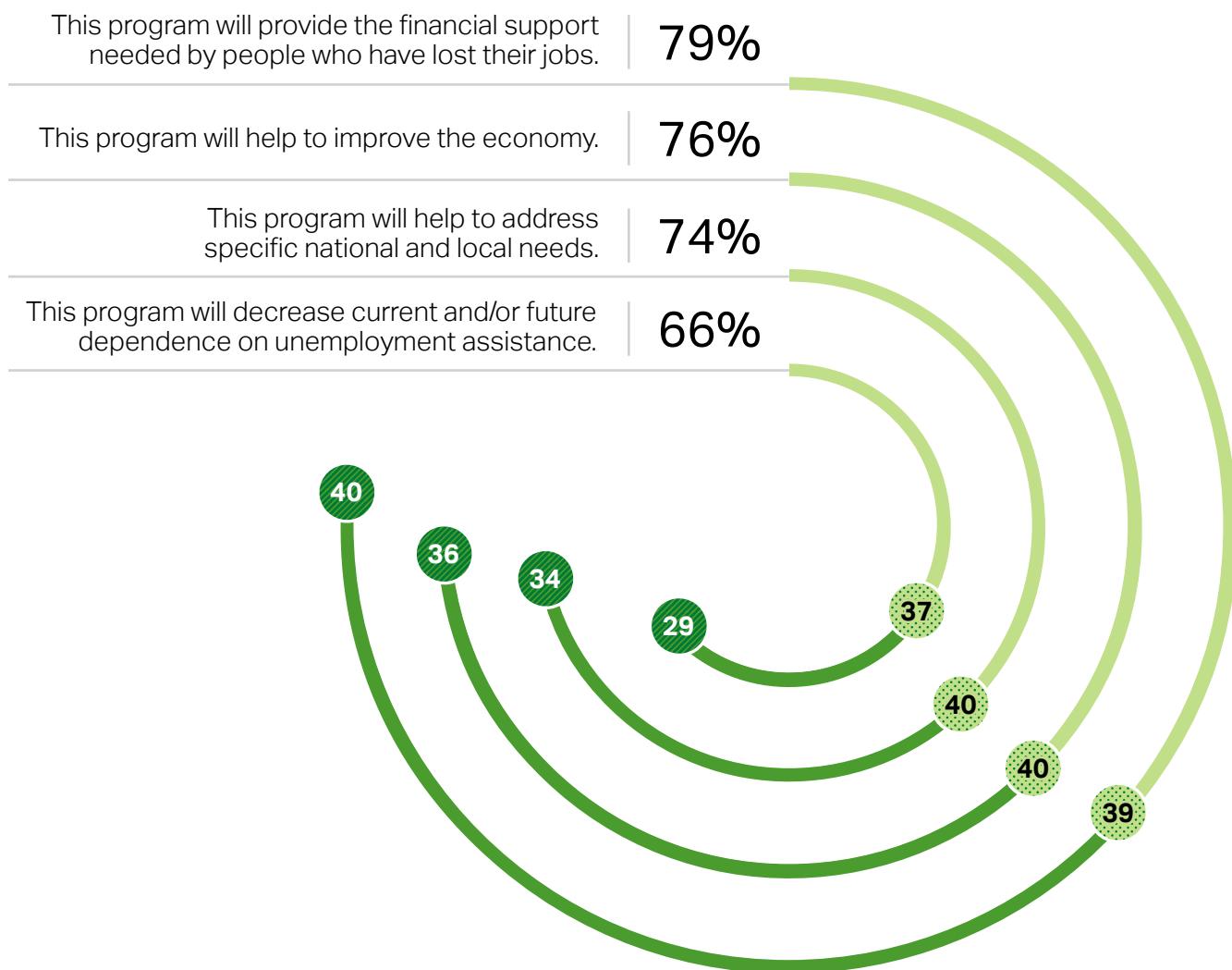


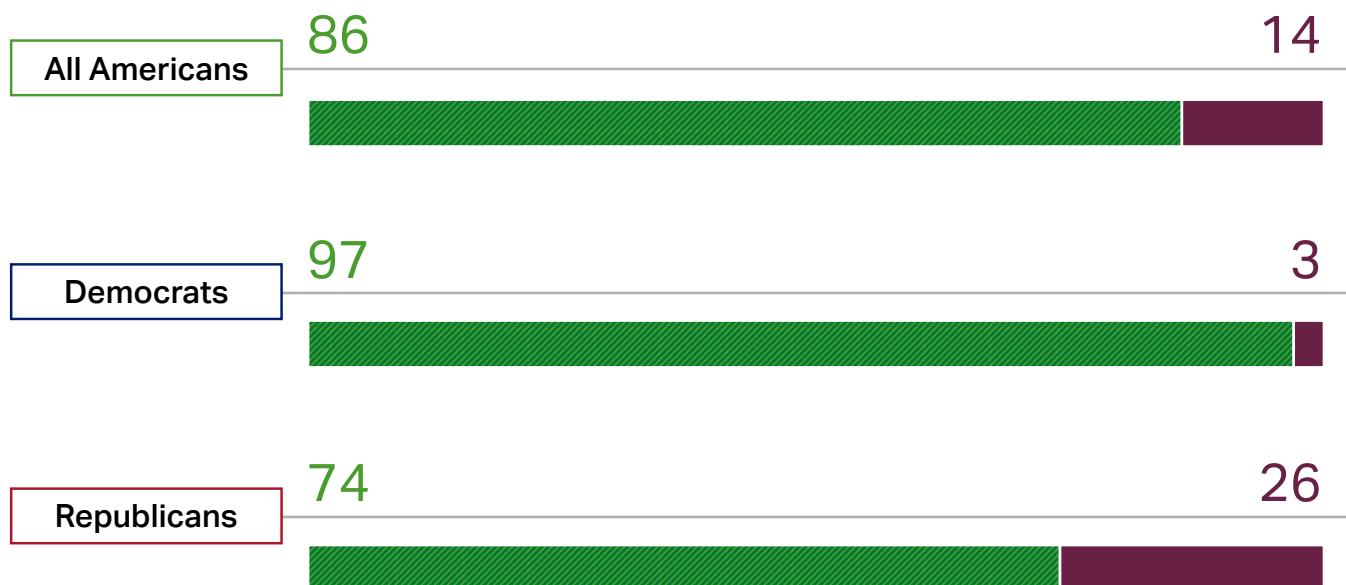
CHART 8:

This [national jobs-and-training] program may cost over \$200 billion. Which of the following comes closest to your opinion?

- 1) *The cost is justified: The benefits outweigh the cost*
- 2) *The cost is not justified: The benefits do not outweigh the cost*

● % Cost is justified

● % Cost is not justified



Given these perceived benefits, it is perhaps not surprising that 86% of Americans — including 97% of Democrats and 74% of Republicans — felt the program would be worth a potential price tag of more than an estimated \$200 billion. As with overall support for such a program, Americans were most likely to cite the idea that it would have long-term economic benefits as a reason to view its cost as “justified.”

The \$200 billion figure is similar to other estimates for a federally funded job creation initiative to address critical national needs and combat pandemic-related unemployment. For example, economist Gregory Acs of the Urban Institute proposed a program that would create 6.5 million jobs in 2021 at \$15 an hour for a 32-hour workweek, at an estimated cost of \$195 billion.²² There were 10.7 million workers unemployed in December 2020, according to the Department of Labor.²³

²² Acs, G. (2020, May 6). *How government jobs programs could boost employment: Revive the WPA*. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/features/how-government-jobs-programs-could-boost-employment>

²³ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020, December 4). *The employment situation — December 2020* [BLS News Release]

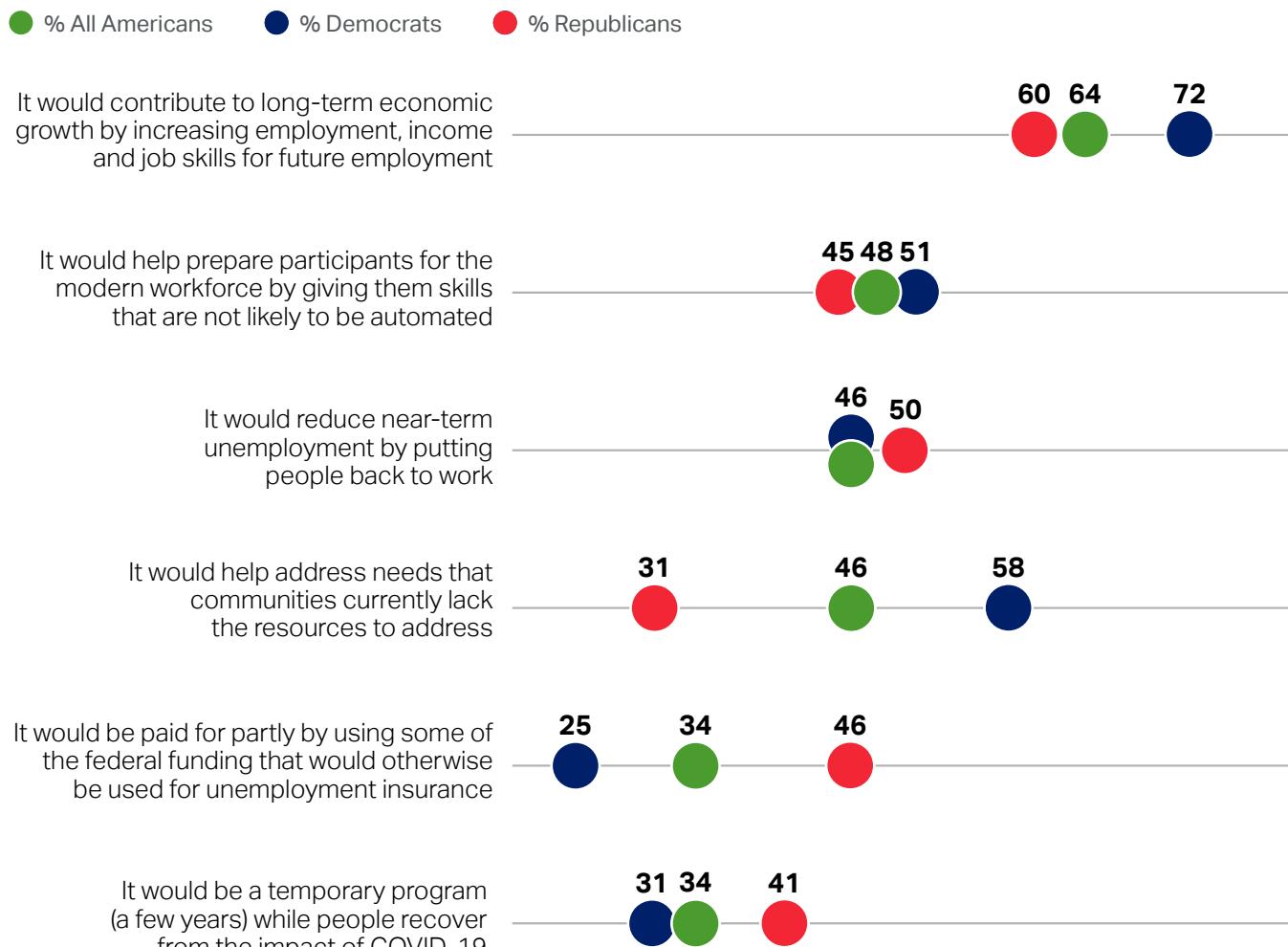
Americans were most likely to say possible long-term benefits are reasons to support a jobs recovery program.

Asked to indicate which of several possible outcomes would make them more likely to favor a jobs-and-training program, Americans most commonly found the idea that such a program would contribute to the country's long-term economic growth persuasive (64%). Almost half (48%) said helping participants develop skills for jobs that are unlikely to be automated was a reason to support a job creation program.

Democrats were more likely than Republicans to favor the idea that the program could address local community needs, while Republicans were more likely to select two items that address cost-containment: It would be paid for partly with funds earmarked for unemployment insurance, and it would be temporary in nature.

CHART 9:

Which of the following would make you more likely to favor the [national jobs-and-training] program? Select all that apply.



Note: "No answer" percentages not shown.

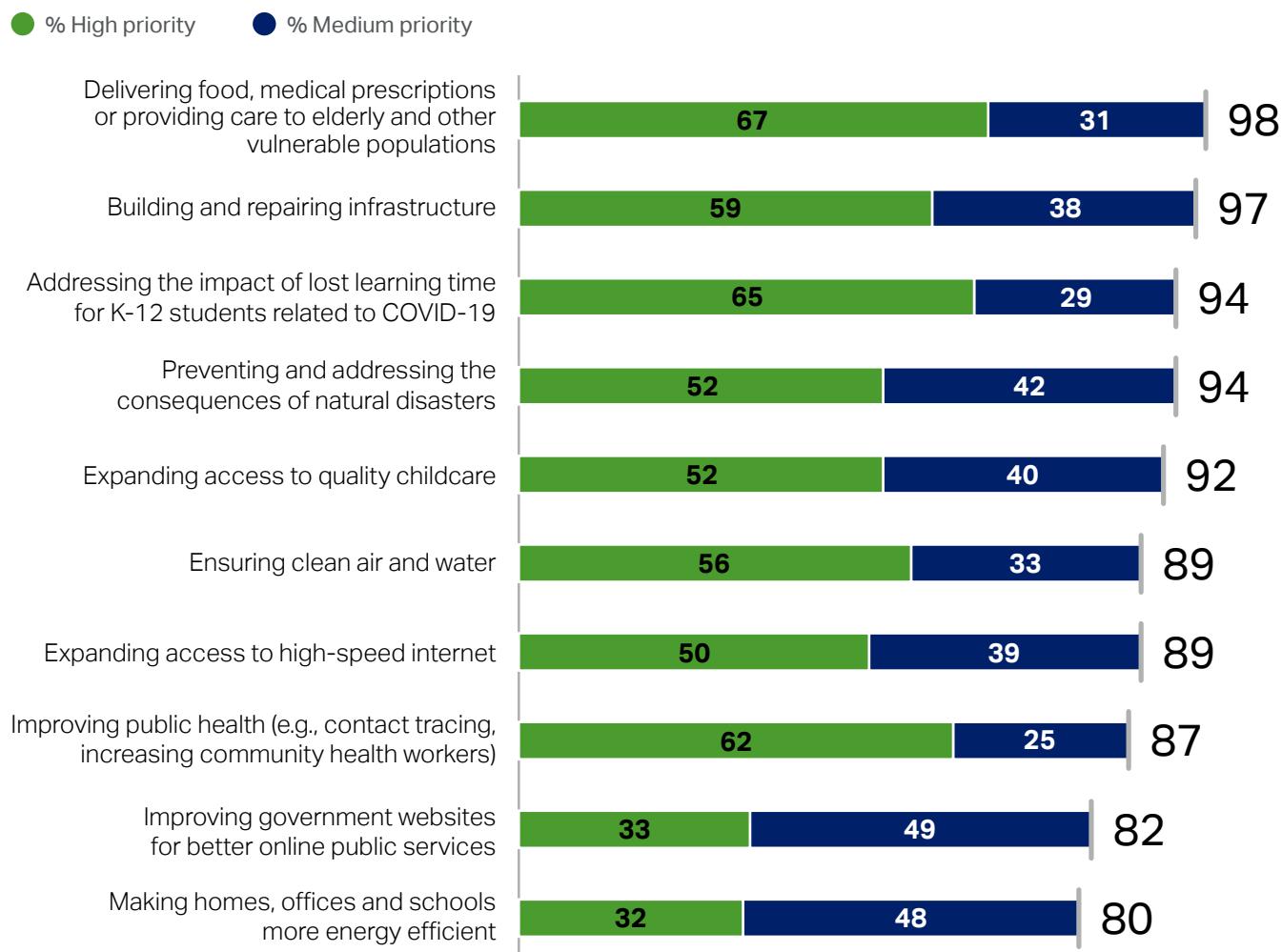
Two-thirds said **caring for vulnerable populations, addressing COVID-19 learning loss** would be high-priority program goals.

In addition to gauging Americans' reaction to the general idea of a jobs-and-training initiative, the *Back to Work* survey listed 10 national objectives such a program might address, including goals related to health, education and environmental issues as well as infrastructure development. Respondents rated each objective as "high priority," "medium priority" or "not a priority."

At least 80% of Americans assigned medium- or high-priority status to all 10 objectives. However, Americans were most likely to attach high priority to two issues that relate directly to the COVID-19 crisis: Delivering food, medical prescriptions or providing care to elderly and other vulnerable populations (67%) and addressing the impact of lost learning time for K-12 students due to COVID-19 (65%).

CHART 10:

Below are some examples of goals that could be addressed by creating new jobs as part of this [national jobs-and-training] program. In your opinion, what is the priority level of each of these — high priority, medium priority or not a priority?



More than 80% of Democrats and Republicans described **six objectives as “high” or “medium” priority.**

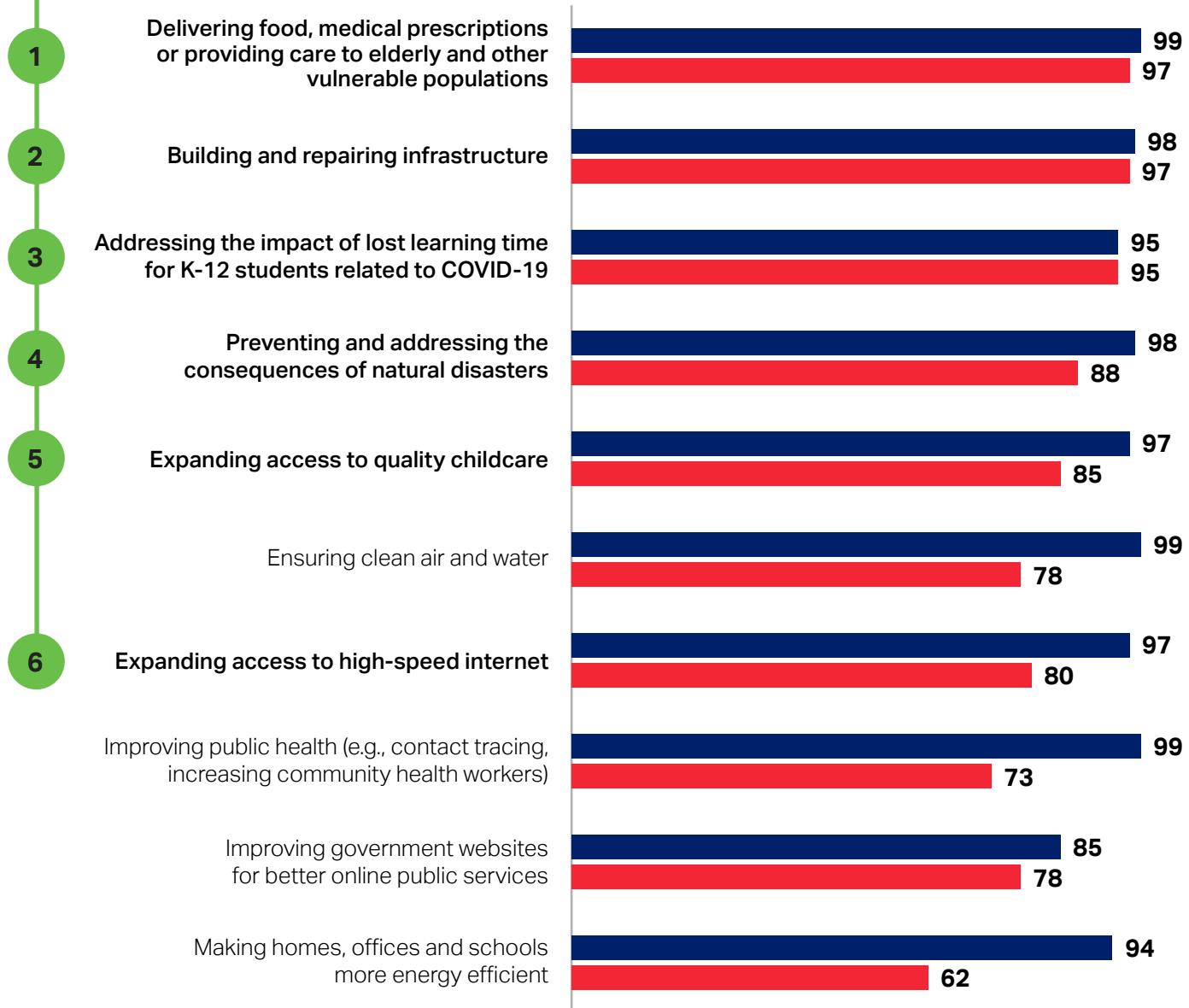
There were larger partisan splits for the remaining items; however, more than 60% of members of both parties felt that all 10 items were at least a medium priority.

CHART 11:

Below are some examples of goals that could be addressed by creating new jobs as part of this [national jobs-and-training] program. In your opinion, what is the priority level of each of these — high priority, medium priority or not a priority?

Percentage who rated each as a “medium” or “high” priority.

● % Democrats ● % Republicans

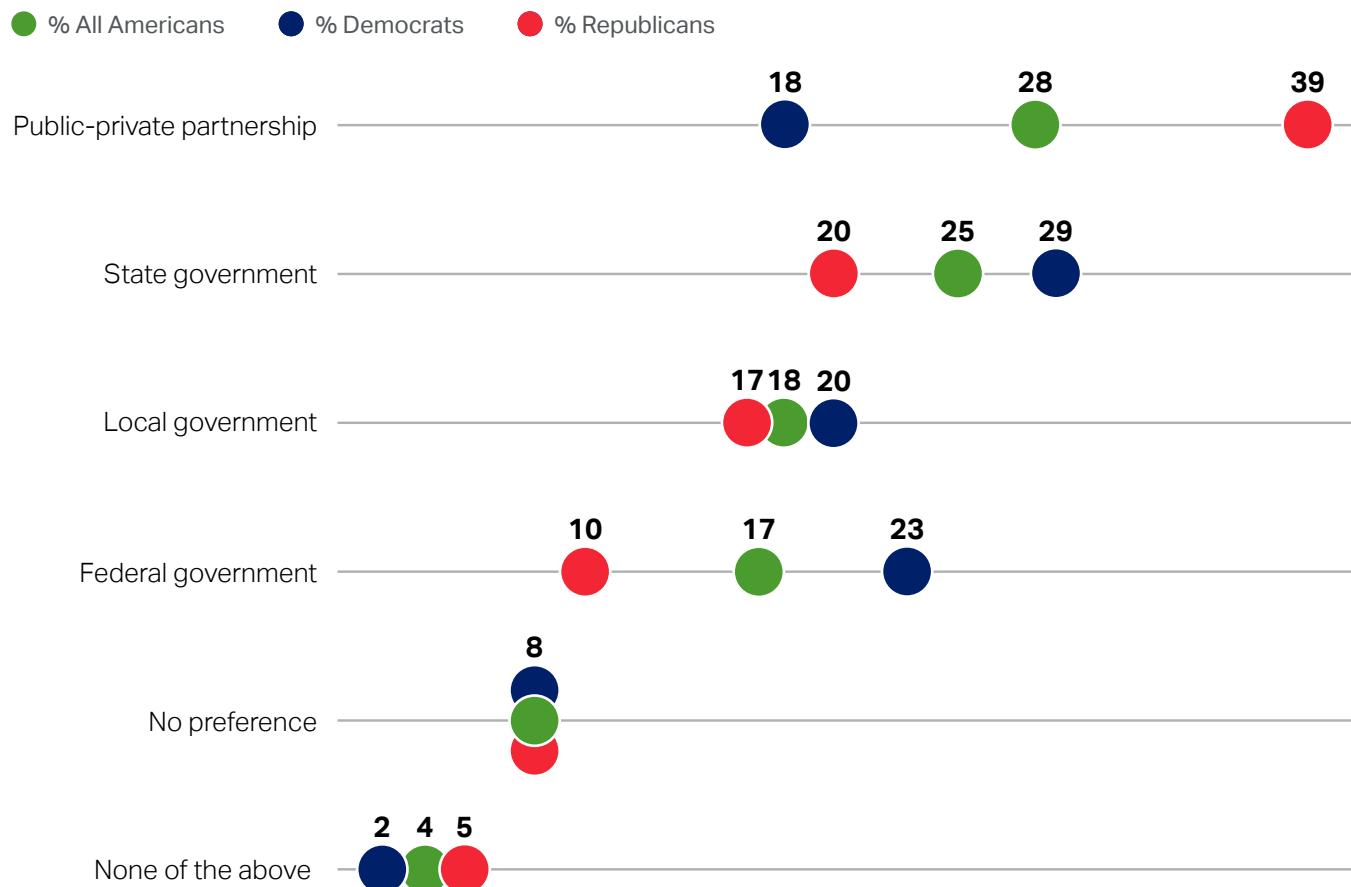




Asked who should mostly implement the program on a day-to-day basis, Americans were most likely to say public-private partnerships (28%) or state governments (25%). However, Republicans were more than twice as likely as Democrats to choose public-private partnerships — 39% vs. 18%, respectively.

CHART 12:

If the federal government funded this [national jobs-and-training] program, who should mostly determine how the program is implemented on a day-to-day basis?



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% +/- 1%.



Democrats and
Republicans nationwide
recognized an **urgent need**
for job creation as a driver
of economic recovery.

Support for national jobs program

reflects bipartisan recognition of the need to get people back to work.

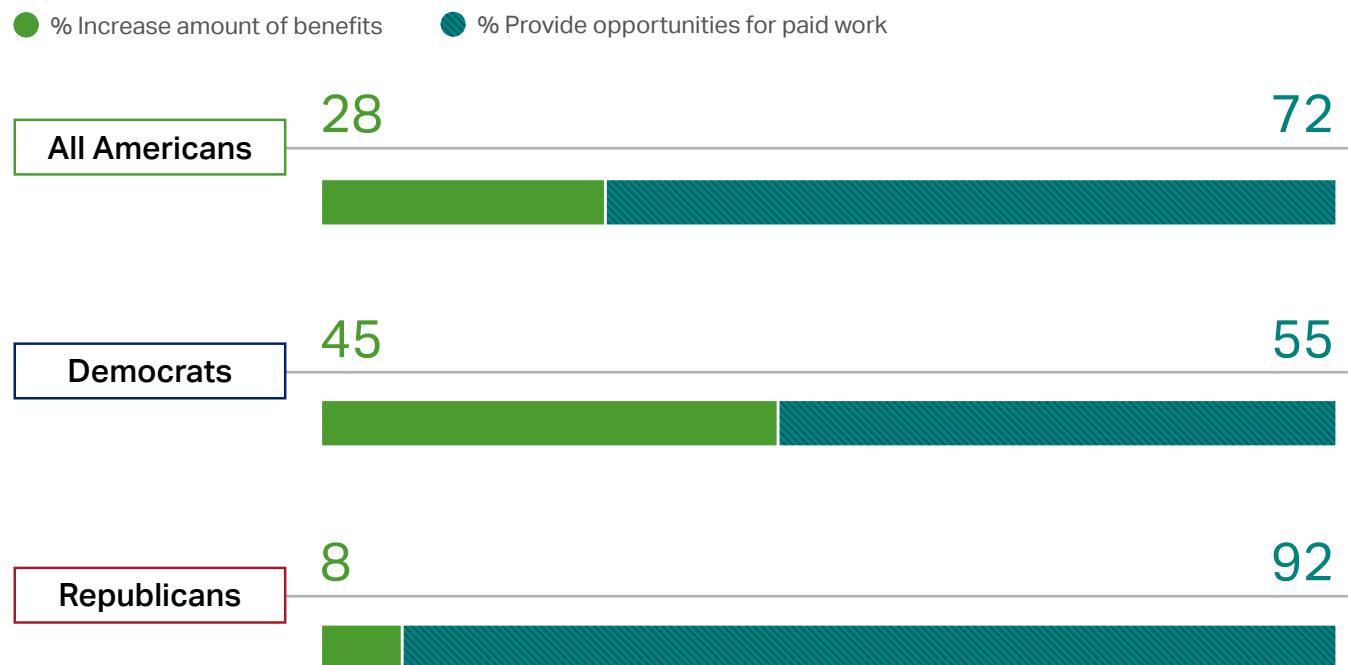
Despite ideological differences between Republican and Democratic leaders, the *Back to Work* survey demonstrates that getting people back into the workforce is a “through-line” priority for supporters of both parties. Democrats and Republicans nationwide recognized an urgent need for job creation as a driver of economic recovery.

Republicans were particularly likely to favor recovery efforts that avoid simply giving unemployed people more financial support, such as an additional stimulus payment. Overall, when asked to select the best addition to unemployment insurance, 72% of Americans chose providing paid work opportunities, but this idea resonated far more widely with Republicans (92%) than Democrats (55%).

Notably, Americans without college degrees were particularly likely to say providing opportunities for paid work constitutes the “best addition” to assist people collecting unemployment insurance amid the ongoing pandemic, at 78%, compared to 60% of those with college degrees.

CHART 13:

While the economy is recovering from the impact of COVID-19 over the next few years, which of the following do you think is the best addition to help people who are collecting unemployment insurance?





Americans saw **combining work experience with skills training** as an effective way to prepare workers for long-term success.

Like publicly funded job creation initiatives, the idea that the U.S. government should help address skill shortages and retrain workers who were displaced by automation and technology has a decades-long history. Retraining and reskilling opportunities have become increasingly important over the past 20 years, with advances in digital technology and artificial intelligence²⁴ threatening to replace many workers whose jobs consist mainly of routine physical and cognitive tasks.²⁵

In light of that need, most Americans valued the idea that a national jobs-and-training initiative could work to prepare participants for long-term job prospects. Asked to choose the three most important objectives for a program that creates paid work opportunities for those who have lost their jobs during the pandemic, a majority of Americans across party lines were most likely to select providing a source of income. The next most commonly chosen objective — building job skills/work experience — was the only other option with majority bipartisan support.

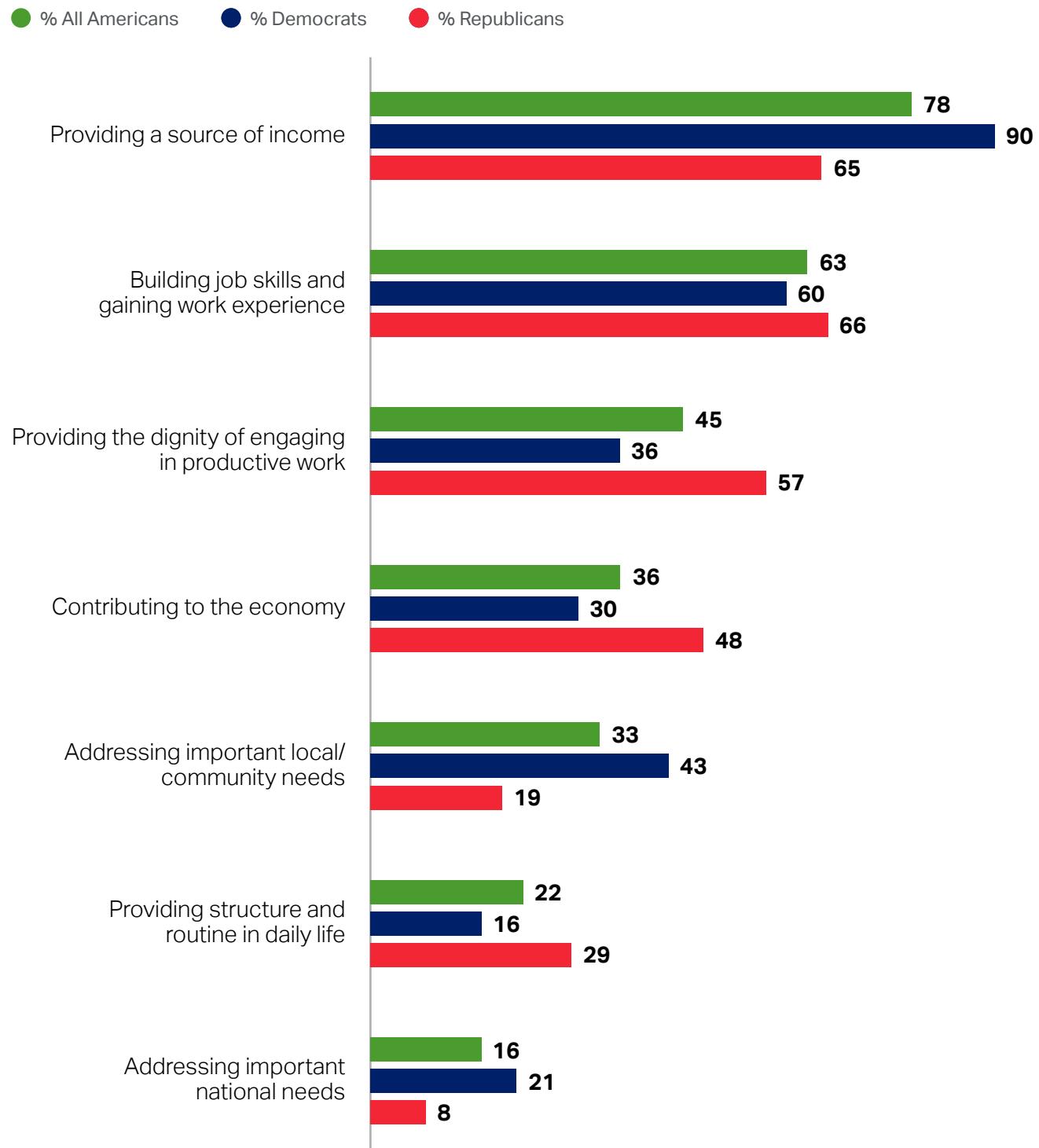
24 Alden, E., & Taylor-Kate, L. (2018). *The work ahead: Machines, skills and U.S. leadership in the 21st century*. Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force Report No. 76.

25 Muro, M., Maxim R., & Whiton, J. (2019, January 24). Automation and artificial intelligence: How machines are affecting people and places. *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/automation-and-artificial-intelligence-how-machines-affect-people-and-places/>

CHART 14:

In your opinion, which three of the following are the most important objectives for providing paid work opportunities for people who have lost their jobs during COVID-19?

Percentage who included each item among their three possible responses.



Among other possible objectives, almost half of Americans (45%) chose providing the dignity of productive work as an important goal, while at least one-third chose contributing to the national economy (36%) and addressing important local needs (33%).

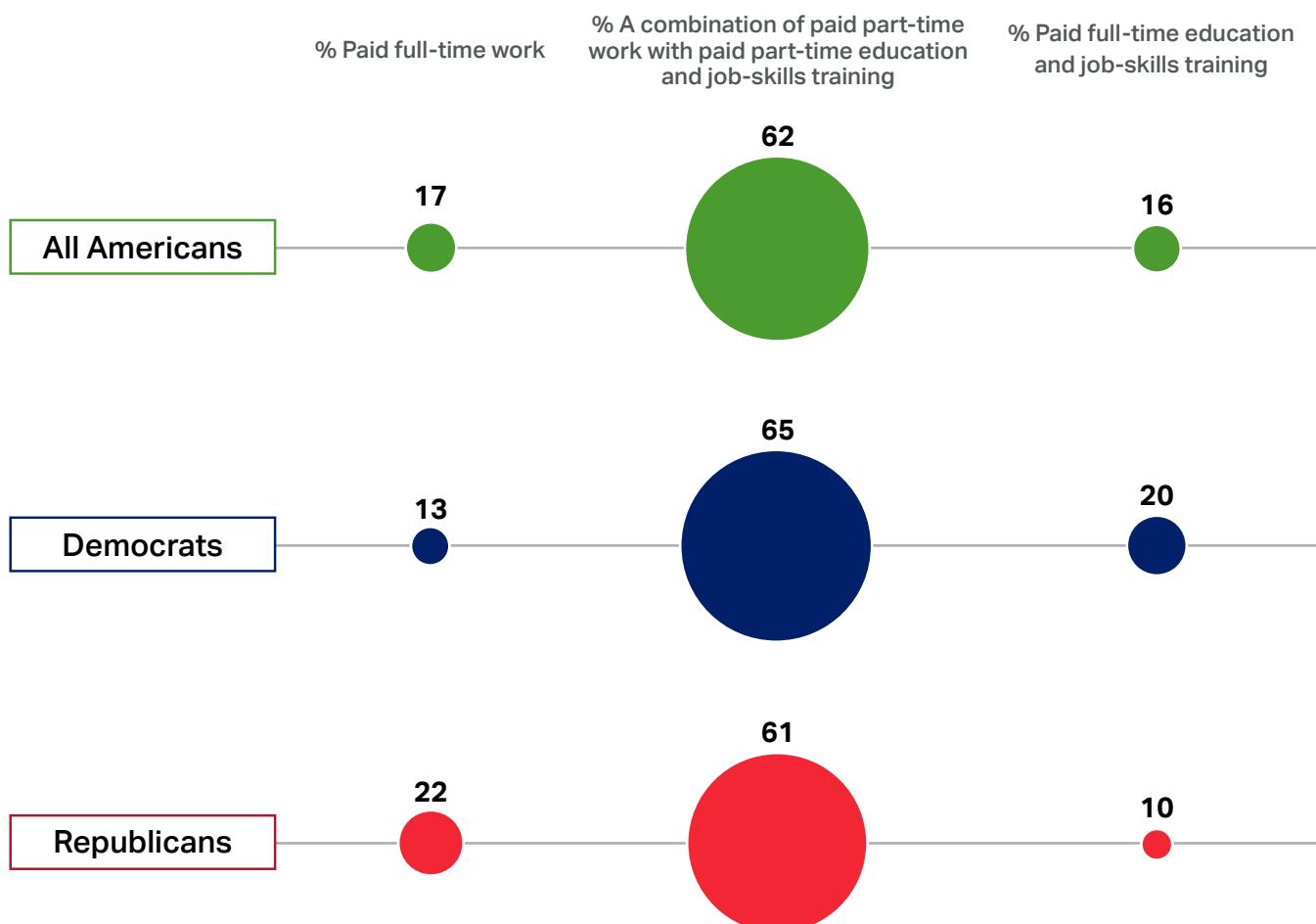
Republicans were more likely than Democrats to choose items that reflect the importance of work to personal wellbeing, including providing dignity as well as structure and routine in daily life. Democrats were more likely than Republicans to prioritize addressing community needs.

Americans were also much more likely to say combining part-time work with part-time skills training would be more effective in helping people gain the job qualifications they need than either full-time work or full-time training. This finding was consistent across members of both major parties; however, Democrats were somewhat more likely to favor full-time education over full-time work, while the reverse was true for Republicans.

CHART 15:

The following are examples of ways that participants in this [national jobs-and-training] program could attain skills and credentials needed for good jobs as part of an "earn and learn" program.

Please select the option you think would be most effective.



Note: "No answer" percentages not shown.

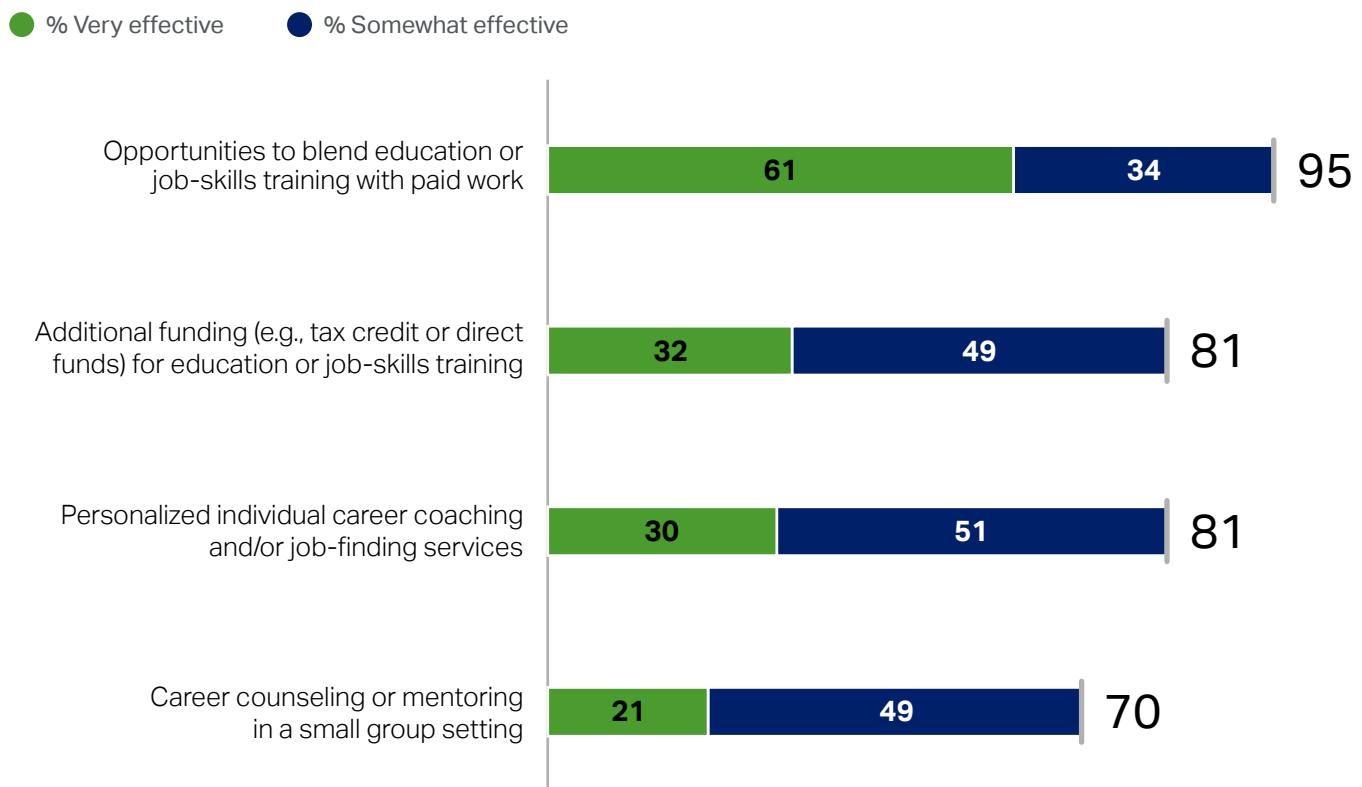
More than nine in 10 Americans

said opportunities to blend education or job-skills training with paid work would be "very effective" or "somewhat effective."

Asked in a separate question about several approaches to helping people gain qualifications for good jobs, six in 10 Americans said opportunities to blend education or job-skills training with paid work would be "very effective" (61%), while 34% said it would be "somewhat effective." Though most Americans also viewed three other approaches to helping people find jobs as at least somewhat effective, no more than a third saw them as very effective. These included additional funding for education or skills training, personalized career coaching and career counseling or mentoring in a small group setting.

CHART 16:

How effective do you believe providing each of the following would be for helping people gain the skills and qualifications they need to get good jobs?





Conclusion

Strong public support for the idea of a national jobs-and-training program signals the impact the COVID-19 crisis has had on American workers, particularly those who have been unable to find a job for six months or more. However, such support also appears to reflect the appeal of looking past the current crisis to find creative solutions to the longer-term challenges it has highlighted — most notably, the need to better prepare workers to meet current labor market needs.

Many of the jobs affected by the pandemic were already vulnerable to automation or changing consumer behaviors. The crisis has accelerated trends that were previously reducing demand for workers in certain industries, such as the shift toward e-commerce rather than physical stores, streaming movies at home rather than going to the theater, or videoconferencing rather than taking business trips.

In recognition of those trends, a jobs-and-training initiative could ensure participants learn skills that strengthen America's growth in critical sectors like education and healthcare. Those tasked with helping the elderly and other vulnerable Americans through the pandemic will need training in home healthcare and counseling services. Those focused on helping K-12 students overcome COVID-19-related learning loss will need training in basic instructional techniques. Those working on infrastructure projects will need to spend training hours learning up-to-date technical skills for jobs in construction, for example, or IT maintenance.

Several program objectives to which Americans attach high priority require relational or judgment skills that are difficult for machines to replicate. Providing opportunities in such areas would address Americans' recognition of the need to create not just short-term jobs, but pathways to more secure and higher-paid employment as well as broader-based economic growth.

Appendix: Methodology

The *Back to Work* study is based on a nationally representative web-based survey of 1,993 Gallup Panel members conducted Oct. 21 to Nov. 5, 2020. For results based on the total sample, the margin of sampling error is $\pm 2.6\%$ percentage points at the 95% confidence level, accounting for the design effect from weighting.

The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults who Gallup selects using address-based sampling methods and random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landline and cellphones. Gallup weights the obtained samples to correct for nonresponse. Nonresponse adjustments were made by adjusting the sample to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. population.

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