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Since 1972, the General Social Survey (GSS) has chronicled Americans' changing demographics, behaviors, and attitudes. NORC at the University of Chicago conducts the survey at least every two years, and the GSS tracks opinions on a wide variety of key social, economic, and political issues. With many of the core questions remaining unchanged for the last four decades, the GSS provides researchers, journalists, and policymakers with valuable data to monitor American society. In addition, the GSS co-founded the International Social Survey Program in 1985, and these cross-national surveys allow for comparisons across many different countries.

The GSS, which is funded by the National Science Foundation, includes questions on many different aspects of American society. The survey measures attitudes on key policy issues such as spending priorities, tracks Americans' perceptions of the economy, and also measures social topics such as religion in America.

The 2014 GSS featured in-person interviews with nearly 2,500 people in the United States. The results of this nationally representative study contribute data to inform the national conversation about a number of important policy areas in the news in 2015.

This report highlights major findings from the 2014 study across a number of GSS topics, including:

- More Americans support spending increases than budget cuts for a number of different issues, including education, halting crime, and assistance to the poor.
- Americans' confidence in all three branches of government is at or near record low, while confidence in banks has rebounded slightly in recent years.
- Twenty-one percent of Americans report having no religious preference, a record high, but belief that God exists remains strong (58 percent).
- For the first time ever, more Americans support legalization of marijuana (52 percent) than oppose it (42 percent), and support for legalization has increased significantly in the last two years.

- For the first time ever, a majority of Americans support same-sex marriage (56 percent), and support for same-sex marriage is increasing across all age groups.
- Gun ownership and hunting are at or near record lows, with 32 percent of Americans living in a house with a gun.
- Americans have mixed views on the government's role in addressing economic inequality, as 46 percent support government reducing income differences between the rich and poor and 37 percent oppose such action.

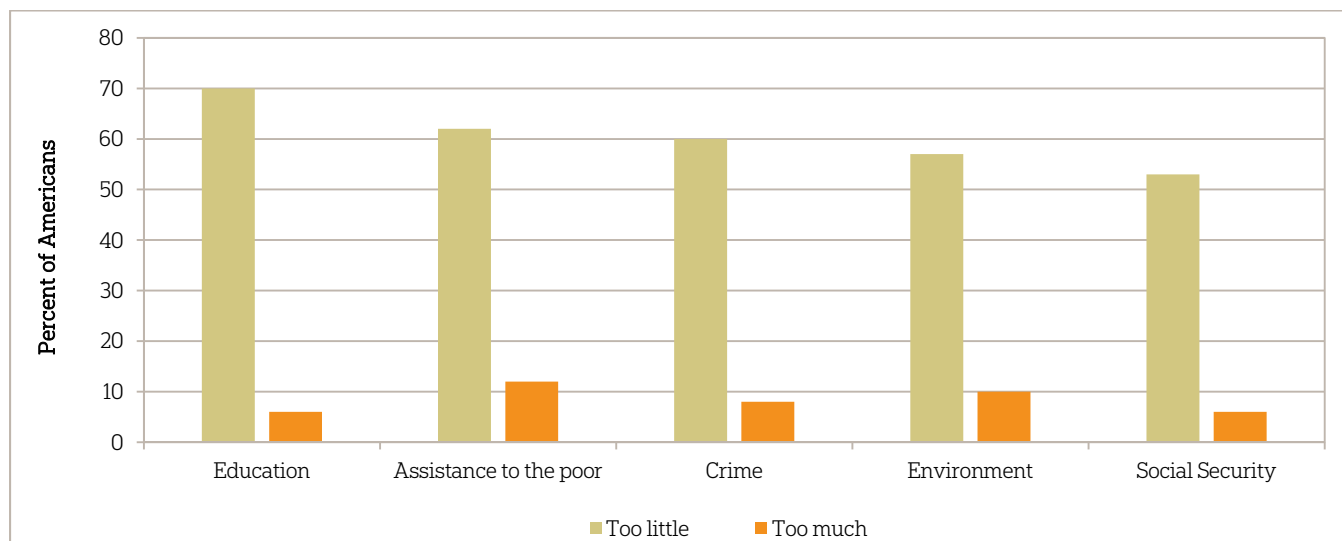
ACROSS MANY POLICY AREAS, MORE AMERICANS WANT TO BOOST SPENDING THAN CUT IT.

Americans favor spending increases rather than cuts for many programs. More Americans support increases in spending rather than decreases for 18 of the 22 issues asked on the GSS, with the exceptions being space, aid to cities, welfare, and foreign aid.

This has long been the case even though most say their own taxes are too high. For example, in 2014, 57 percent said their own federal income tax was too high, 39 percent said about right, and 2 percent said too low.

For the 18th year in a row, the top spending priority was education. Seventy percent of Americans say the country spends too little on education, 22 percent say about the right amount, and 6 percent report too much. The other top spending priorities are assistance to the poor, halting the crime rate, improving and protecting the environment, and Social Security.

A majority thinks America spends too little on a number of major policy areas in 2014



Questions: We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on [Education/Assistance to the Poor/Halting the Rising Crime Rate/Improving and Protecting the Environment/Social Security]?

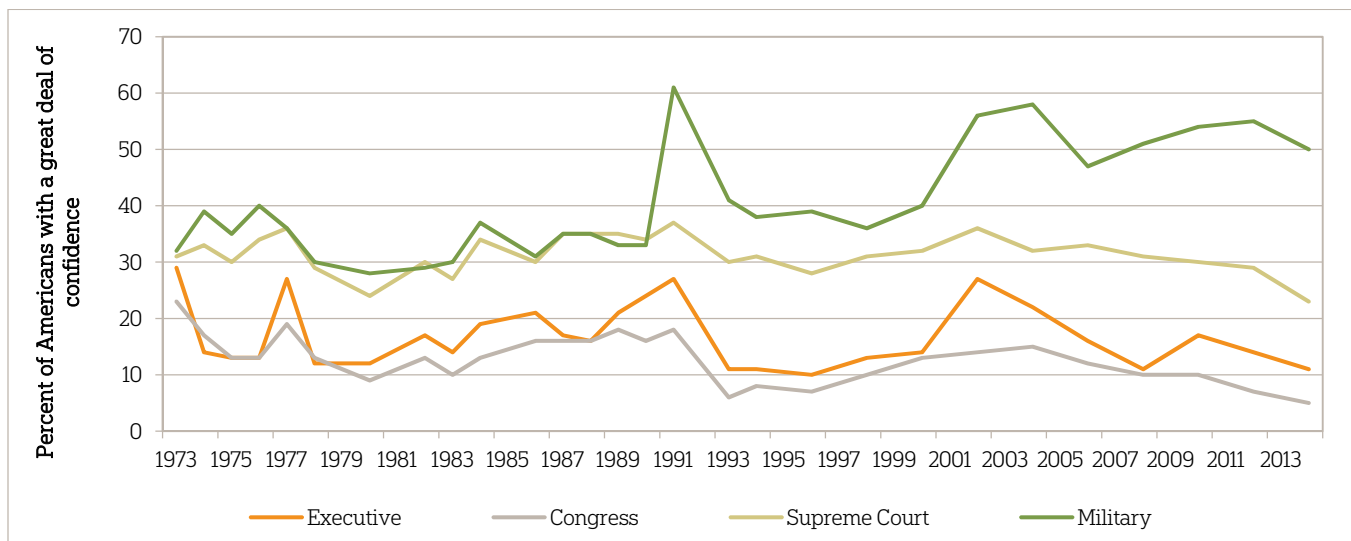
The biggest change in spending priorities in recent years is associated with improving and protecting the nation's health. Fifty-seven percent of Americans report the country spends too little on the nation's health, 28 percent say the right amount, and 13 percent say too much. In comparison, 75 percent said the country spent too little on health in 2008, while only 5 percent said too much. There are significant partisan differences in opinions about spending on health. Sixty-seven percent of Democrats say the country spends too little on health, compared with 58 percent of independents and 41 percent of Republicans.

CONFIDENCE IN ALL THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT IS AT OR NEAR RECORD LOWS.

Few Americans have confidence in the three branches of government. An all-time low 23 percent of Americans express a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court. This represents a 14 percentage point decrease since the all-time high in 1991 when 37 percent of Americans said they have a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court. Even fewer Americans are confident in the executive branch or Congress. Just 11 percent of Americans say they are confident in the executive, the lowest percent since 2008, and just 1 percentage point above the all-time low in 1996. Five percent of Americans say they are confident in Congress, an all-time low. Confidence in Congress has steadily declined 10 percentage points over the past 10 years.

Unlike the three branches of government, a majority of Americans have expressed a great deal of confidence in the armed forces since 2008. Fifty percent of Americans say they have a great deal of confidence in the military.

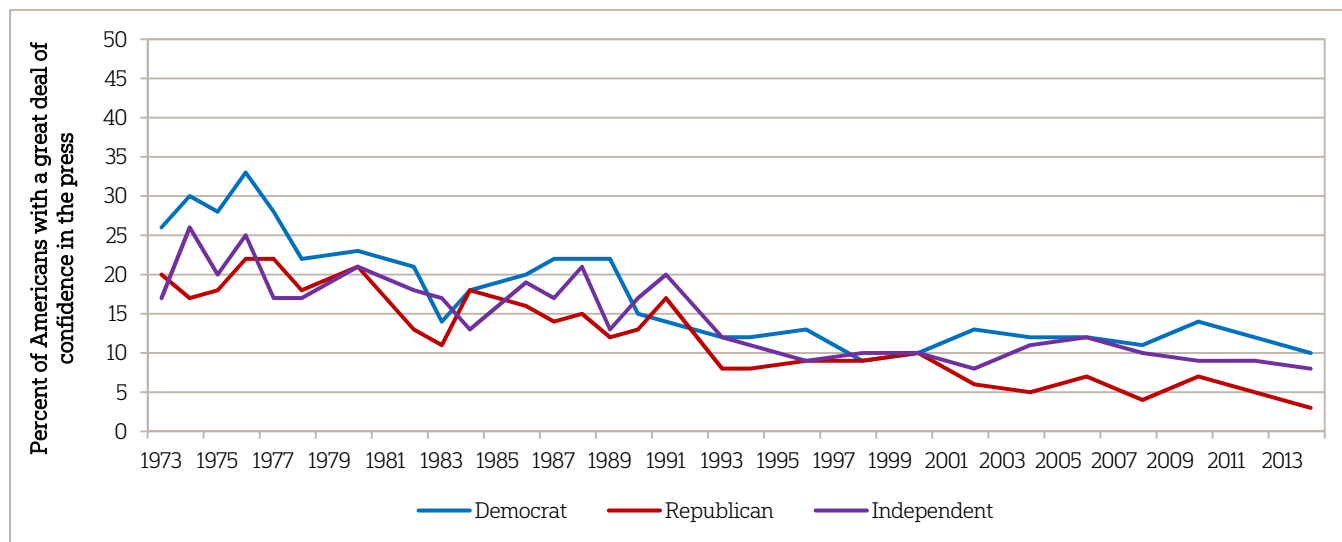
Americans' confidence in the executive branch, Congress, and Supreme Court reach near record lows in 2014



Questions: I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them? [Executive Branch/Congress/Supreme Court/Military]

Confidence in the press is at an all-time low, and this varies by partisanship. Overall, just 7 percent of Americans express a great deal of confidence in the press, an all-time low. Confidence in the press peaked at 28 percent in 1976 and has been on a steady decline ever since. While confidence in the press is low among Republicans, Democrats, and independents, Republicans (3 percent) are significantly less likely than Democrats (10 percent) and independents (8 percent) to express confidence in the press.

Republicans are less likely than Democrats and independents to express confidence in the press in 2014



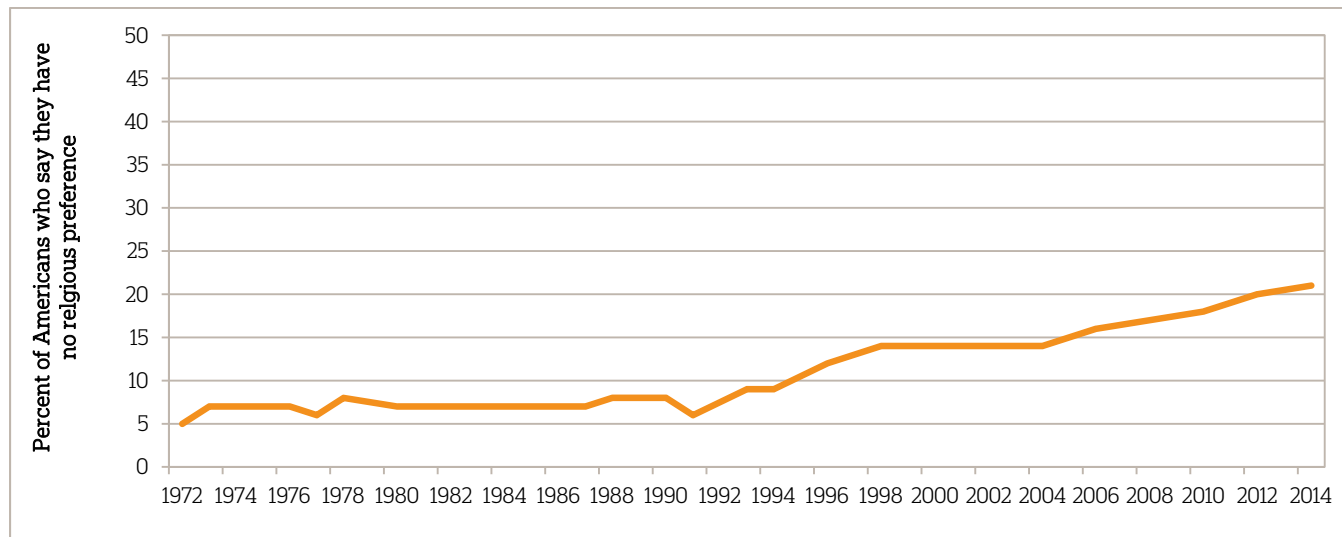
Question: I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them? [Press]

Americans' confidence in business and banks is rebounding, but more than 4 in 5 still lack confidence. Eighteen percent of Americans say they have a great deal of confidence in the people running major companies, 62 percent say they have only some confidence, and 18 percent say they have hardly any confidence at all. For banks and financial institutions, 15 percent of Americans say they have a great deal of confidence, 53 percent say they have only some confidence, and 32 percent say they have hardly any confidence at all. Confidence levels in business and banks have rebounded since dropping to all-time lows in 2010 (13 percent for major companies and 11 percent for banks and financial institutions).

THE NUMBER OF AMERICANS WHO REPORT HAVING NO RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE IS AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH, BUT MAJORITIES STILL BELIEVE IN GOD AND LIFE AFTER DEATH.

An all-time high 21 percent of Americans say they have no religious preference. Since 1990, an increasing number of Americans have said they have no religious preference.

Percent of Americans who say they do not have a religious preference continues to rise



Question: What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?

Among Americans, no single religious denomination garners a plurality of followers. Twenty-eight percent of Americans identify with conservative Christian denominations such as Baptist, Pentecostal, and Church of God in Christ. Twenty-four percent of Americans identify as Catholic, and 21 percent of Americans say they are followers of other Protestant denominations such as Episcopal, Methodist, or Lutheran. Just over 1 percent of Americans identify as Jewish.¹

While religious preferences have changed over the years, Americans' religious beliefs have remained stable. Fifty-eight percent of Americans believe that God exists, 5 percent are agnostic, and 3 percent say they do not believe in God. Seventy percent of Americans believe there is a life after death.

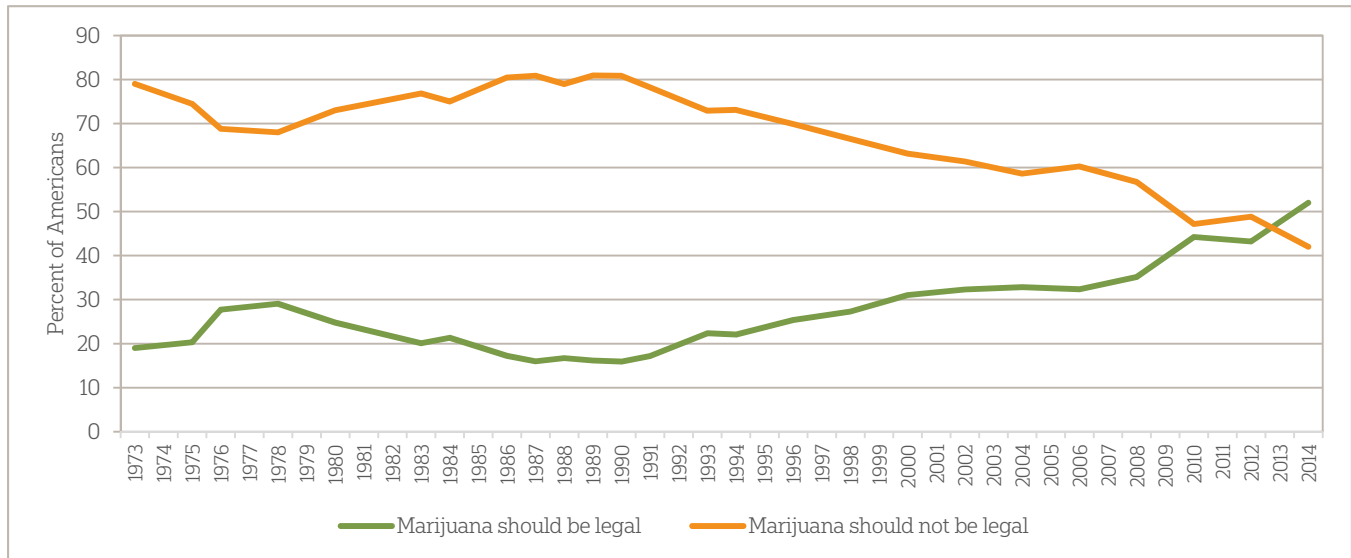
Religious preferences vary considerably by age and political ideology. Adults age 65 or older (9 percent) are less likely than those age 18 to 34 (30 percent), 35 to 49 (23 percent), and 50 to 64 (17 percent) to say they have no religion. Political conservatives (11 percent) are less likely than political liberals (33 percent) and political moderates (20 percent) to say they have no religion. However, each ideological group mirrors the overall upward trend of increasing numbers of Americans saying they have no religion. Just 5 percent of conservatives, 7 percent of moderates, and 12 percent of liberals in 1990 said they have no religious preference.

¹ The GSS asks people who expressed a religious preference, "What specific denomination is that, if any?" People have named over 300 specific denominations over the years. Scholars classify those responses in various ways. Most scholars concur that most Baptist denominations, Pentecostal ones, and the Church of God in Christ are among a doctrinally conservative group while Protestant denominations such as Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian are more doctrinally moderate or liberal. We use that distinction here to distinguish two kinds of Protestant; we also distinguish Catholics and Jews from other religions.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, A MAJORITY OF AMERICANS SUPPORT THE LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA.

In 2014, following a steady rise in levels of support that started two and a half decades ago, more Americans now say that the use of marijuana should be legal (52 percent) than say it should be illegal (42 percent). This is a significant increase since 2012, when just 43 percent said it should be legal. It marks the first time more Americans favor legalization than oppose it, erasing a substantial gap between the two sides that has existed for decades. As recently as 1990, just 16 percent said the use of marijuana should be legal, compared to 81 percent who said it should be illegal.

The number of Americans who support legalization of marijuana has increased steadily since the early 1990s



Question: Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal or not?

Racial differences emerge in levels of support for legalization. Majorities of blacks (59 percent) and whites (52 percent) support legalizing marijuana, while significantly fewer Hispanics (38 percent) show support.

Support for legalization has risen among all age groups since 2012. Support is highest among Americans age 18-34, with 61 percent supporting legalizing its use, compared to 49 percent of those age 35-49, 54 percent of those age 50-64, and 38 percent of those age 65 and older. Support increased 10 percentage points since 2012 among the youngest age group, 6 percentage points among those 35-49, 9 percentage points among those 50-64, and 9 percentage points for those 65 and older.

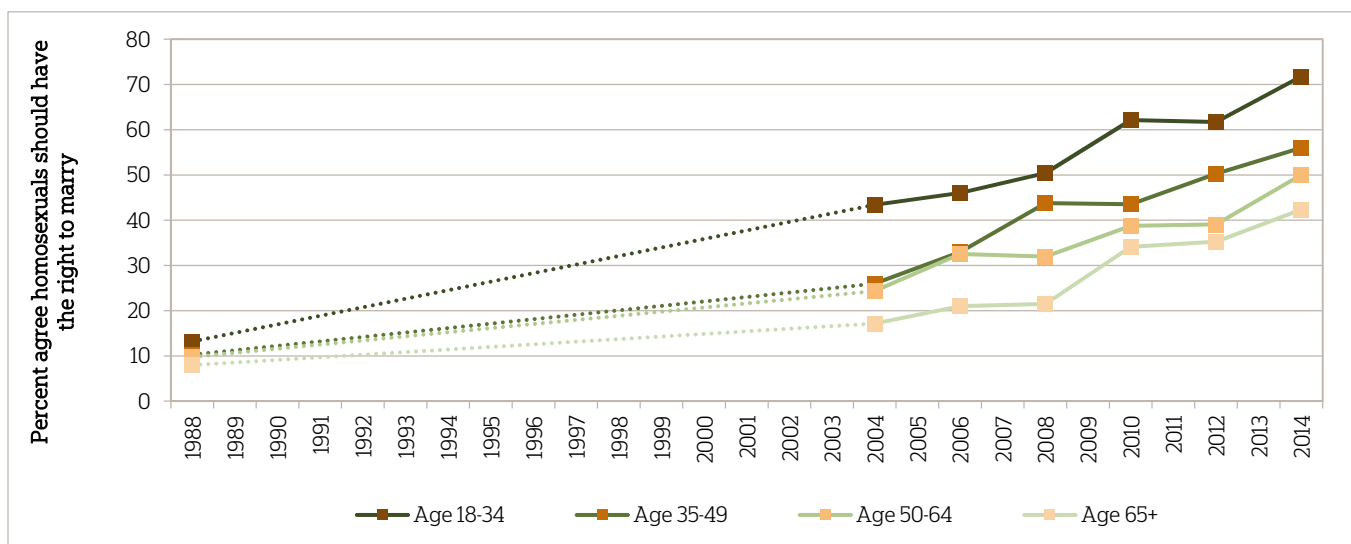
FOR THE FIRST TIME, A MAJORITY OF AMERICANS SUPPORT SAME-SEX COUPLES' RIGHT TO MARRY.

For the first time, a majority of Americans (56 percent) agree or strongly agree that gay couples should have the right to get married. Thirty-two percent disagree or strongly disagree. Support for same-sex marriage has increased 8 percentage points since 2012 and 45 percentage points since the question was first asked in 1988.²

Support for same-sex marriage still differs across political parties, although the gap in support between Democrats and Republicans has narrowed considerably in recent years. Republican support jumped 14 percentage points between 2012 and 2014, with 45 percent of Republicans now agreeing that same-sex couples should have the right to marry. However, support among Republicans for same-sex marriage is still significantly lower than support among Democrats (65 percent) and independents (54 percent). Support for same-sex marriage has also edged up slightly among Democrats and independents since 2012 (5 percentage points and 2 percentage points, respectively).

Adults 18-34 years old overwhelmingly support same-sex marriage, but support is increasing across all age groups. In 2014, 72 percent of adults age 18-34 favor same-sex marriage compared to 56 percent of 35-49 year olds, 50 percent of 50-64 year olds, and 42 percent of people age 65 and older. All age groups showed increases in support of at least 6 percentage points since 2012.

Almost three-quarters of people age 18 to 34 support same-sex marriage



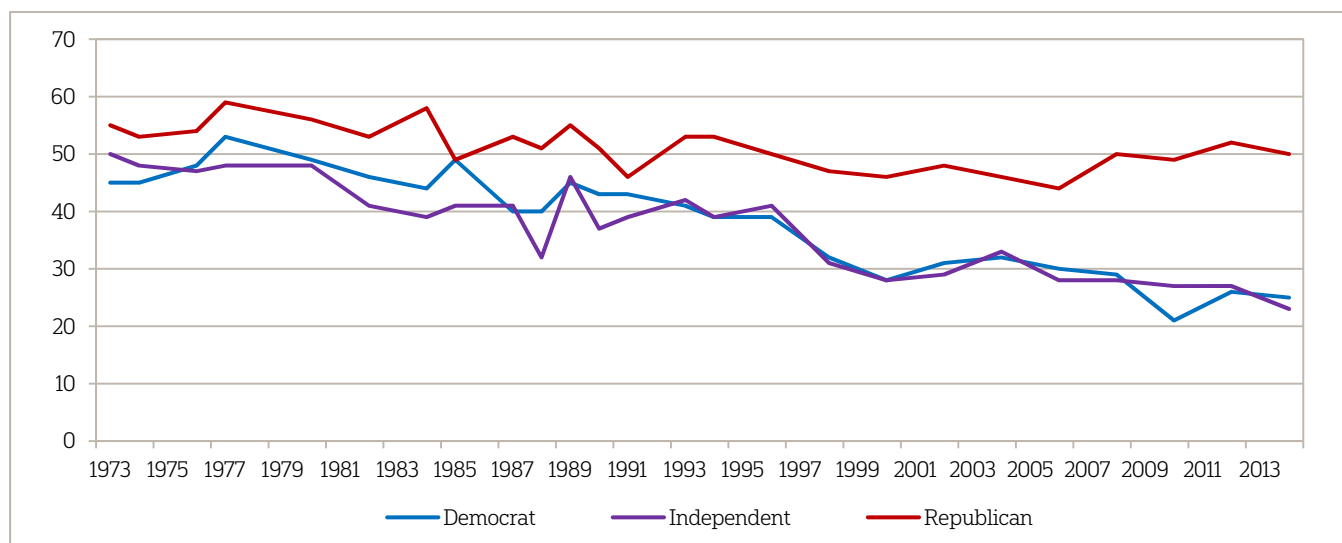
Question: Do you agree or disagree? Homosexual couples should have the right to marry one another.

² The question about same-sex marriage was not asked on the GSS from 1990 to 2002.

GUN OWNERSHIP AND HUNTING IS AT RECORD LOWS, AND PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD GUN PERMITS HAS CHANGED LITTLE IN RECENT YEARS.

Thirty-two percent of American households own a gun, which equals an all-time low set in 2010. Gun ownership peaked at 54 percent in 1977, and the number of households owning a gun fell steadily until 2000 when it leveled off around 1 in 3. Gun ownership varies by partisanship, and Republicans are twice as likely to own a gun (50 percent) as Democrats (25 percent) or independents (23 percent).

Republicans are twice as likely as Democrats or independents to live in a house with a gun



Question: Do you happen to have in your home or garage any guns or revolvers?

Hunting also hit a record low in 2014, with only 9 percent reporting they hunted and 4 percent reporting their spouse hunted. Hunting peaked at 19 percent in 1977, but has remained around 1 in 10 Americans for the last decade.

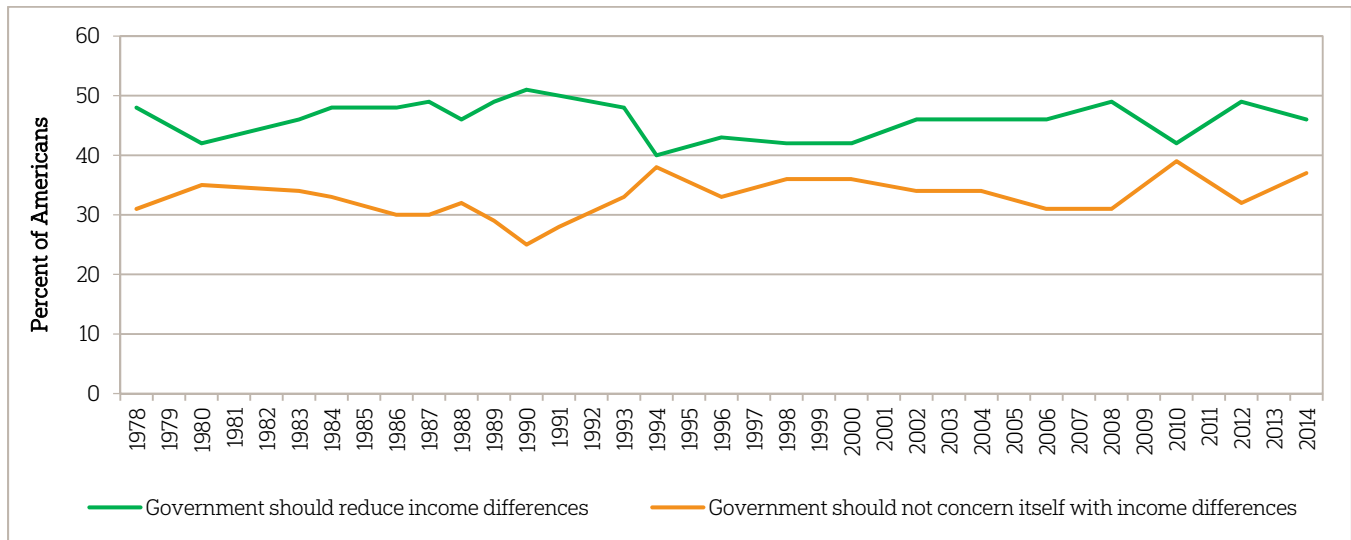
Public opinion toward gun permits has changed little in recent years. Seventy-two percent of Americans favor gun permits, and 27 percent oppose them. There has been a gradual decline in support for gun permits since hitting a record high 82 percent support in 1998. Whites are less likely to favor gun permits (68 percent) than either blacks (82 percent) or Hispanics (80 percent).

THERE IS NO CLEAR MAJORITY ON GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN REDUCING INCOME DISPARITIES, AND BELIEFS VARY BY PARTISANSHIP, INCOME, AND AGE.

When asked about the government's role in reducing inequality, 46 percent of Americans report the government should reduce income differences between the rich and poor, and 37 percent say the government should not concern itself with these differences.

Americans' attitudes toward government reducing income differences has changed little in the last three decades, with between 40 and 50 percent favoring government action.

Percent of Americans who report that government ought to reduce income differences between rich and poor has remained relatively stable



Question: Some people think that the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor. Others think that the government should not concern itself with reducing this income difference between the rich and the poor. Here is a card with a scale from 1 to 7. Think of a score of 1 as meaning that the government ought to reduce the income differences between rich and poor, and a score of 7 meaning that the government should not concern itself with reducing income differences. What score between 1 and 7 comes closest to the way you feel?

There are significant partisan differences in opinion about government addressing income inequality. Republicans are less likely to report government should reduce income differences (24 percent) than either Democrats (60 percent) or independents (51 percent). Support among Republicans for reducing income differences is at a record low.

Age and household income are also both associated with beliefs about reducing inequality. Americans with household incomes of more than \$75,000 a year are less likely to say the government should reduce income differences (36 percent) than those with incomes between \$30,000 and \$75,000 a year (48 percent) or those with household incomes of less than \$30,000 a year (55 percent).

Adults age 18-34 are more likely to support the government addressing income differences (52 percent) than those 35-49 years old (45 percent), those 50-64 years old (44 percent), and those 65 years and over (43 percent).

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The GSS is administered by NORC at the University of Chicago, primarily using in-person interviewing. The GSS started in 1972 and completed its 30th round in 2014. For the last 40 years, the GSS has been monitoring societal change and the growing complexity of American society. The GSS is the largest project funded by the Sociology Program of the National Science Foundation. The typical sample size was 1,500 prior to 1994, but increased to 2,700-3,000 until 2008 and decreased to 2,000-2,500 for the most recent surveys. Resulting margins of error are between +/- 3.1 for the smaller sample sizes and +/- 2.2 percentage points for the larger sample sizes at the 95 percent confidence level. The GSS 1972-2014 Cumulative File was utilized to produce the statistics presented.