

JUNE 2026



**INSTITUTE FOR
GOVERNANCE & CIVICS**
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

IGC POLL REPORT

**Federalism
Part 1 –
*How Much
Influence Does
the Federal
Government
Have? Americans’
Beliefs About
Federal Influence
Across Major
Sectors***

Zach Goldberg,
Ryan Owens, &
James L. Woodworth





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public debate often portrays Democrats and Republicans as deeply divided over the proper role of the federal government. Are they?

To examine this question, the Institute for Governance and Civics at Florida State University surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,533 U.S. adults. Respondents were asked how much influence they believe the federal government has over the economy, healthcare, education, banking and finance, and technology and social media companies. We then asked whether that influence is too much, too little, or about the right amount. Additionally, we compiled and analyzed nationally representative survey data spanning more than five decades to place current opinions in historical context. The results reveal both a widespread belief that federal influence is excessive and a surprising degree of agreement across partisan lines. **Key findings include:**

- **Americans widely perceive that the federal government exercises substantial influence across major sectors—and most believe that influence is excessive.** Large majorities of Americans believe the federal government exerts either “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of influence over the economy (85%), healthcare (79%), education (69%), banking and finance (70%), and technology and social media (54%). Across all five sectors, respondents were substantially more likely to say the federal government has too much influence than too little.
- **Democrats and Republicans agree more than commonly assumed.** In most sectors, partisan differences are modest, and majorities of both Democrats and Republicans conclude that federal influence is excessive.
- **Attitudes toward federal influence are shaped in part by political context.** Historical data show that public attitudes toward government regulation vary depending on which party controls the presidency. Americans tend to be somewhat more supportive of a larger federal role when their preferred party occupies the White House and somewhat more skeptical when political opponents hold power. These dynamics help explain why partisan differences in our survey are smaller than might otherwise be expected.

INTRODUCTION

Debates over healthcare, education, economic policy, financial regulation, and technology often hinge on broader philosophical disagreements about how much influence the federal government should exert over society. Yet despite the prominence of these debates, relatively little is known about how much influence Americans actually believe the federal government currently exercises across major sectors—or whether they view that influence as appropriate.

To address these questions, the Institute for Governance and Civics at Florida State University included a series of questions in its December 2025 nationally representative survey of 1,533 American adults. Respondents were asked how much influence they believe the federal government has over five major sectors: the overall economy, healthcare, education, banking and finance, and technology and social media. They were then asked whether the federal government has too much, too little, or about the right amount of influence over each sector. To place these findings in historical context, we also compiled and analyzed nationally representative survey data spanning more than five decades on public attitudes toward government regulation.

Large majorities of Americans believe the federal government substantially influences major sectors of society. Perhaps most surprisingly, Democrats and Republicans exhibit considerably more agreement than disagreement regarding both the extent and appropriateness of federal influence. Further, the historical data suggest that evaluations of government influence derive, at least in part, from political circumstances, including which party controls the presidency.

AMERICANS GENERALLY BELIEVE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EXERCISES SUBSTANTIAL INFLUENCE

How much influence do Americans believe the federal government possesses over portions of the economy and daily life? Figure 1 summarizes respondents' perceptions of federal influence across five major sectors: the overall economy, healthcare, education, banking and finance, and technology and social media.

As far as you can tell, how much influence do you think the federal government has over each of the following sectors?

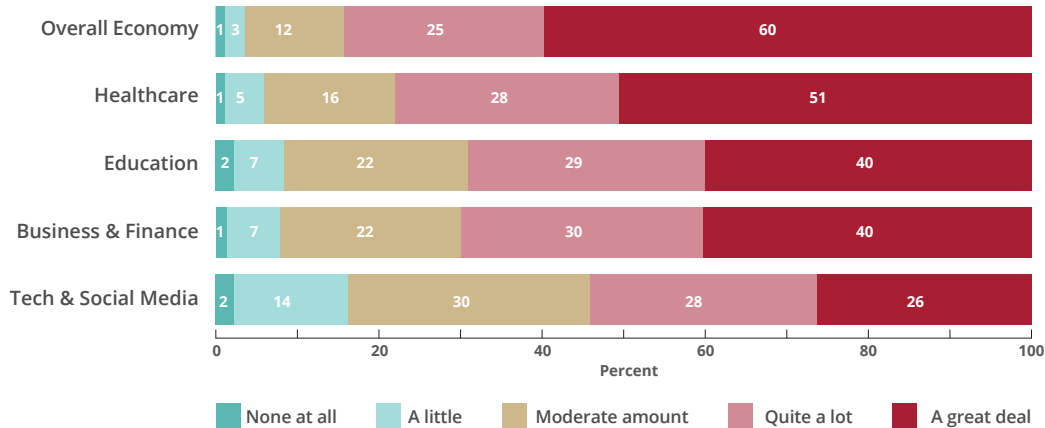


Figure 1. Public Perceptions of Federal Influence, by Sector

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,500–1,514 across sectors). Bars show the distribution of responses for each sector. Respondents who selected “Not sure” (n = 19–33 across sectors) are excluded from the analysis.

As Figure 1 shows, most Americans perceive the federal government exercises at least “quite a lot” of influence across all five sectors examined.¹ Fully 85% of respondents say the federal government has either “a great deal” (60%) or “quite a lot” (25%) of influence over the overall economy. Smaller but still large majorities believe the federal government has either quite a lot or a great deal of influence over healthcare (79%), education (69%), and banking and finance (70%).

Technology and social media companies are the clear exception. While a majority (54%) still believe the federal government exercises either quite a lot or a great deal of influence in this domain, respondents are substantially less likely to hold this view than they are for any of the other sectors examined.

Perceptions of federal influence are also remarkably similar across partisan groups (Appendix Figure A2). There is little difference among Democrats, independents, and Republicans regarding the economy, healthcare, education, and banking and finance. While Democrats are somewhat more likely than Republicans to say the federal government has either “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of influence over education (72% vs. 65%) and technology and social media (58% vs. 48%), these differences are small relative to the broad agreement observed across the other sectors. Overall, Democrats, independents, and Republicans hold remarkably similar views regarding the extent of federal influence across these five sectors.

AMERICANS BROADLY BELIEVE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS TOO MUCH INFLUENCE

Figure 2 shows that Americans are far more likely to say that the federal government has too much influence than too little.² In every sector examined, the majority of respondents say the federal government has too much influence. The share giving a “Too much” response ranges from 53% for technology and social media companies to 60% for the overall economy and healthcare. By comparison, the share saying the federal government has “Too little” influence ranges from just 13% for the economy to 25% for healthcare. The shares who say current levels of influence are “About right” range from 14% (healthcare) to 29% (banking and finance). The percentage of Americans rating federal influence as “About right” was never larger than the percentage selecting “Way too much.”

In your opinion, do you think the federal government has too much, too little, or about the right amount of influence over each of the following sectors?

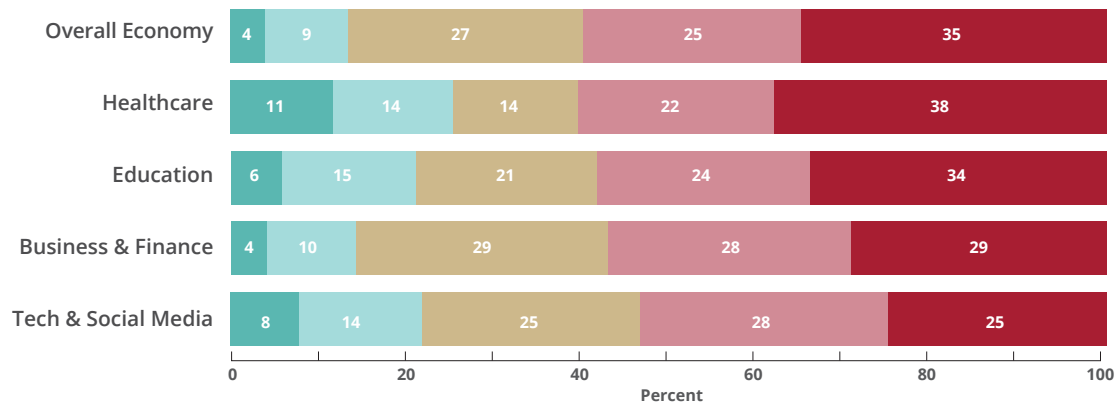


Figure 2. Public Evaluations of Federal Influence, by Sector

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,441–1,473 across sectors). Bars show the distribution of responses for each sector. Respondents who selected “Not sure” (n = 60–92 across sectors) are excluded from the analysis.

Democrats, independents, and Republicans are all more likely to say that the federal government has too much influence than too little (Appendix Figure A4). Across most sectors, differences between Democrats and Republicans are modest. The largest gap occurs for technology and social media companies, where 56% of Democrats and 48% of Republicans say federal influence is excessive.



PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCE STRONGLY SHAPE WHETHER AMERICANS THINK GOVERNMENT HAS TOO MUCH POWER

Up to this point, we have separately examined perceptions of federal influence and evaluations of whether that influence is appropriate. Figure 3 shows how perceptions of federal influence shape judgments about whether government has too much, too little, or about the right amount of influence.

Across all five sectors, perceptions of federal influence are strongly associated with judgments about whether that influence is appropriate. As could be expected, when respondents move from believing the federal government has little influence to believing it has a great deal of influence, the probability of saying government has “too much” influence rises sharply, while the probability of saying government has “too little” influence falls. For example, among respondents who believe the federal government has a great deal of influence, large majorities conclude that government has too much influence—69% in the economy, 73% in healthcare, education, and banking and finance, and 76% in technology and social media.

Additionally, respondents who perceive little or no federal influence are not necessarily inclined to say that government needs more influence. While they are the group most likely to give a “too little” response, these respondents remain divided between saying current levels are too little, about right, or even too much. This pattern is particularly evident outside of healthcare. For example, among respondents who perceive little or no federal influence over the economy, only 45% say government influence is

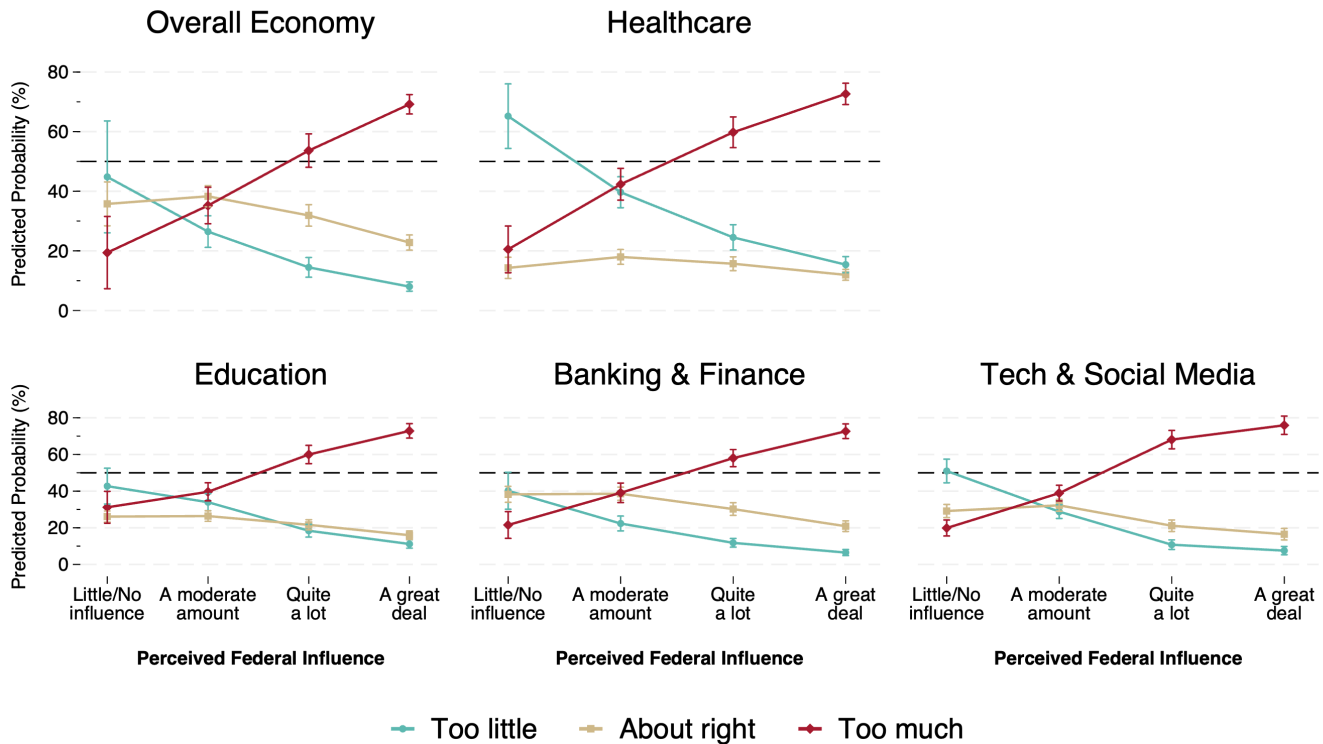


Figure 3. Evaluations of Federal Influence, by Perceived Level of Federal Influence

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,432-1,464 across sectors). Lines represent the predicted probability of reporting that federal influence over a sector is “Too little,” “About right,” or “Too much” at varying levels of perceived influence. Respondents who selected “Not sure” (n = 69-101 across sectors) are excluded from the models.

too little, while 36% say current levels are about right and 19% say government already has too much influence. Similar patterns emerge in education, banking and finance, and technology and social media. Even among those who perceive relatively little federal influence, many Americans remain reluctant to conclude that government should play a larger role.

Although the relationship between perceived influence and evaluations of influence is broadly similar across partisan groups, the overall economy represents a notable exception. Figure 4 shows that Democrats and Republicans who perceive little federal influence over the economy reach relatively similar conclusions about whether current levels are excessive. As perceptions of influence increase, however, Democrats become increasingly more likely to conclude that government has too much influence. Specifically, among respondents who believe the federal government has “a great deal” of influence over the economy, 75% of Democrats say that government has too much influence, compared to 61% of Republicans.

In other words, while Democrats and Republicans agree about the extent of federal influence over the economy, Democrats are significantly more likely to regard that level of influence as excessive. This pattern suggests that evaluations of government may depend not only on perceptions of government activities, but also on how citizens view the policies associated with those activities.

Federal Influence Over the Economy is "Too Much"

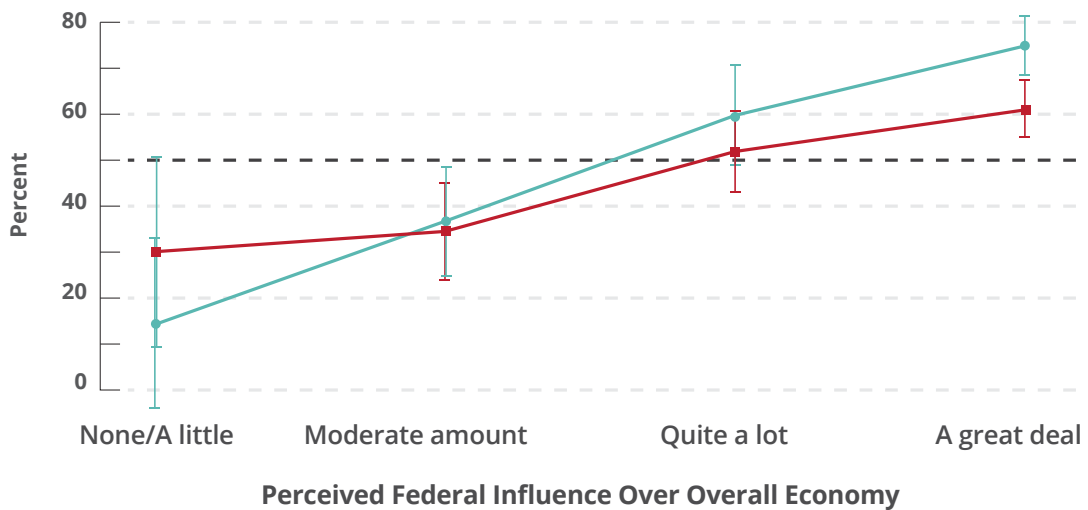


Figure 4. Estimated Percentage Saying Federal Influence Over the Economy Is "Too Much," by Perceived Federal Influence (X-Axis) and Party Affiliation

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,430). Lines represent the predicted probability that respondents say federal influence over the overall U.S. economy is "Too much," by perceived level of federal influence and party affiliation. Estimates are adjusted for demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and political characteristics. Respondents who selected "Not sure" for either the perceived or evaluated influence item (n = 69) and respondents with missing data on one or more control variables (n = 72) are excluded from the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

ATTITUDES TOWARD FEDERAL INFLUENCE FLUCTUATE OVER TIME

The broad agreement observed in our survey raises two important questions. Have Americans always viewed federal influence as excessive, or do these evaluations rise and fall over time? And do Democrats and Republicans consistently differ in their assessments, or do their views often converge—as they do in our survey?

Unfortunately, few historical surveys have asked Americans whether the federal government has too much, too little, or about the right amount of influence over specific sectors. Instead, researchers and polling organizations typically have measured related attitudes by asking whether government regulates particular sectors too much, too little, or about the right amount. Although regulation and influence are not identical concepts, they are closely related. Government regulation is one of the primary ways in which the federal government exercises influence over economic and social institutions.

To place our findings in historical context, we compiled all available nationally representative surveys conducted between 1974 and 2025 that asked Americans whether regulation over a given sector is “too much” (or should be decreased), “too little” (or should be increased), or “about the right amount” (or should be kept at current levels).³

Figure 5 reveals substantial variation in public beliefs that the federal government regulates major sectors too much. Across the six panels, the figures show the percentage of respondents who responded there is “too much” federal regulation of a given sector—rather than “too little” regulation or “about the right amount.” Instead of moving steadily in one direction, attitudes toward federal regulation fluctuate substantially over time, often rising and falling sharply from one period to the next.⁶

ATTITUDES TOWARD FEDERAL REGULATION ARE SHAPED BY WHO CONTROLS THE WHITE HOUSE

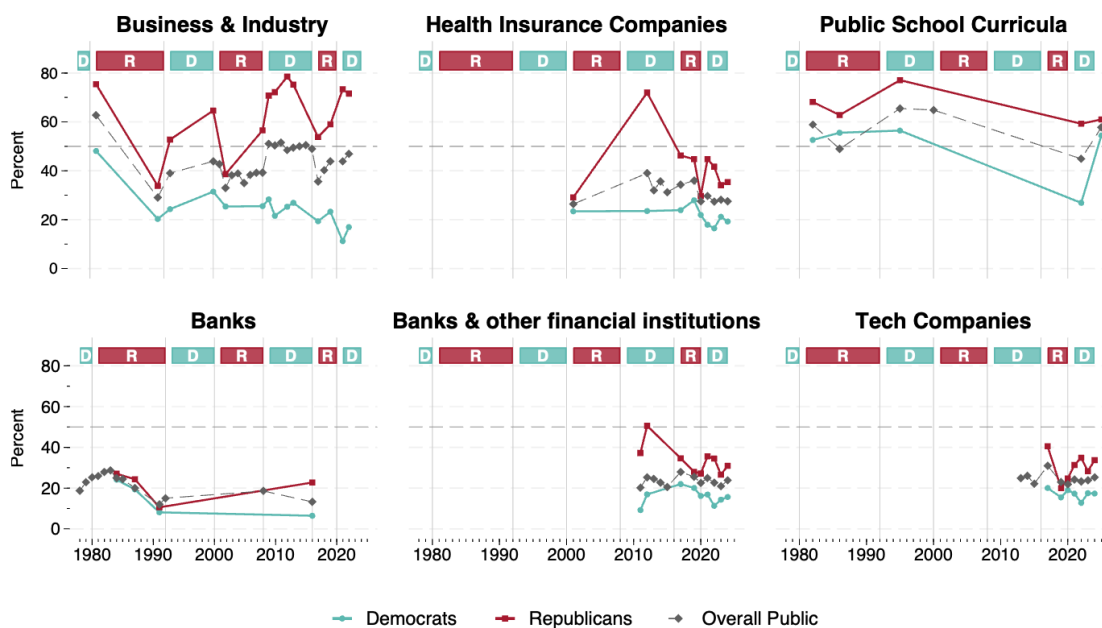


Figure 5. Trends in the Share of Americans Saying There Is “Too Much” Federal Regulation, by Sector and Party (1974–2025)

Note: Each panel displays the percentage of respondents saying there is “Too much” federal regulation over a given sector. Estimates are derived from nationally representative surveys conducted between 1974 and 2025 and compiled from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. Time coverage varies across panels depending on the availability of survey data. Solid lines show responses among Democrats and Republicans; the dashed line shows responses for the overall public. Colored strips above the figure indicate the party holding the presidency during each period (blue = Democratic president; red = Republican president). Because historical surveys rarely used wording identical to our survey, the series should be interpreted as measures of public evaluations of federal regulation rather than direct measures of perceived federal influence. For a complete list of survey items included in each series, see Section A of the Supplementary Appendix.

Republicans are generally more likely than Democrats to say that federal regulation is excessive, particularly in business and industry, health insurance companies, and financial institutions. At the same time, partisan differences are far from constant. In some periods the two parties diverge considerably, whereas in others they move much closer together. The two parties also often move in the same direction from one period to the next, suggesting that Democrats and Republicans frequently respond to the same political and economic circumstances even when they differ in their views about the appropriate level of regulation.

The patterns shown in Figure 5 suggest that evaluations of federal influence may reflect contemporaneous political circumstances. Americans may become more supportive of a larger federal role when their preferred party controls the White House and more skeptical when political opponents hold power. To test this possibility, we examined how Democrats’ and Republicans’ attitudes toward federal regulation vary under Democratic and Republican presidential administrations.

Democrats show a similar, though generally weaker, pattern. They are more likely to say that regulation is “too much” when a Republican occupies the White House than when a Democrat does (41% vs. 30%). However, presidential control has little effect on the share of Democrats who say regulation is “too little” (31%–32%).

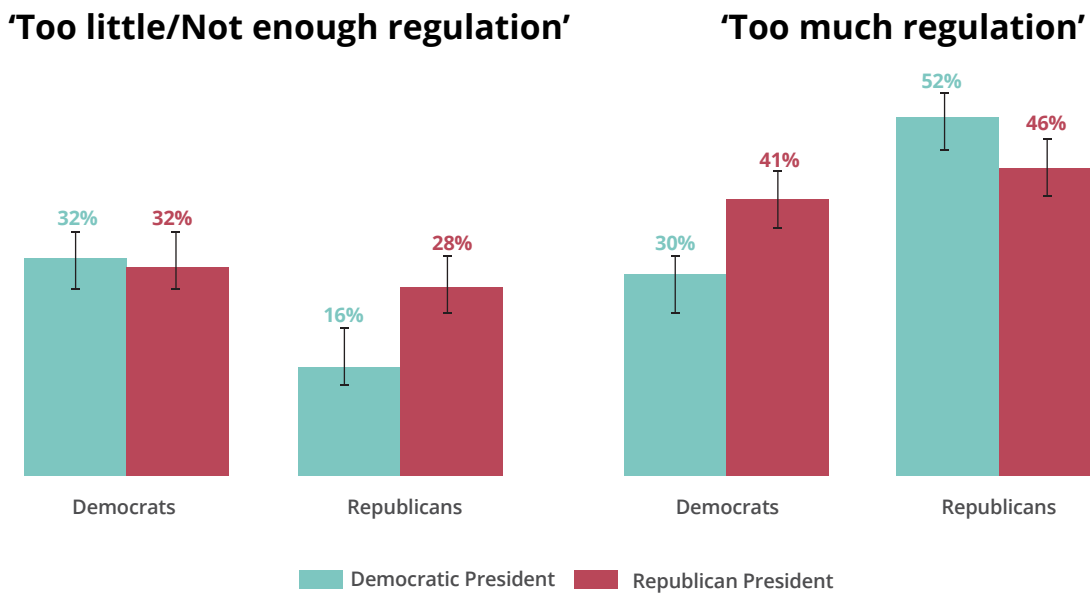


Figure 6. Attitudes Towards Federal Regulation, by Party Affiliation and Party of the Presidency (1974–2025)

Note: Bars show the estimated percentage of Democrats and Republicans saying there is “Too little” or “Too much” federal regulation under Democratic and Republican presidents. Estimates are derived from individual-level regression models pooling multiple nationally representative survey series collected between 1974 and 2025. Models adjust for party control of the House and Senate, consumer sentiment, unemployment, regulatory sector, and a linear time trend. Values represent predicted probabilities; error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. For a list of all survey items included in these models, see Section A of the separate Supplementary Appendix file.



The patterns shown in Figure 5 suggest that evaluations of federal influence may reflect contemporaneous political circumstances. Americans may become more supportive of a larger federal role when their preferred party controls the White House and more skeptical when political opponents hold power. To test this possibility, we examined how Democrats' and Republicans' attitudes toward federal regulation vary under Democratic and Republican presidential administrations.

Figure 6 provides evidence that evaluations of federal regulation are influenced, at least in part, by which party controls the White House.⁷ Republicans are substantially more likely to say that regulation is “too little” when a Republican occupies the presidency than when a Democrat does (28% vs. 16%). Conversely, they are less likely to say that regulation is “too much” under Republican administrations (46% vs. 53%).

These findings suggest that evaluations of federal regulation reflect more than ideological commitments. Americans appear to assess the appropriate scope of government, at least in part, through the lens of which party occupies the White House. When their preferred party holds the presidency, both Democrats and Republicans become somewhat more supportive of government intervention and somewhat less likely to view regulation as excessive.

These findings also help explain why partisan differences in our survey are relatively modest. Historical evidence suggests that attitudes toward federal regulation are shaped not only by ideology but also by which party controls the presidency. Because our survey was conducted during a Republican administration, Republicans may have been somewhat less inclined to view government influence as excessive than they would have been under a Democratic president. Democrats, in turn, may have been somewhat more inclined to do so. The relatively high levels of agreement observed throughout this report may therefore reflect, at least in part, the broader political context in which the survey was conducted.

Another interpretation could be that respondents do not limit their concept of “influence” to just regulation. There are many ways the federal government can influence policies such as budget, programming, public statements, and establishment of agencies. These other activities may be seen as superseding regulations as the mechanism for federal government influence. This means there may not be a conflict between believing there is too much or too little regulation and believing the federal government has too much influence over major portions of our culture.

CONCLUSION

Public discourse often portrays Americans as deeply divided over the proper role of the federal government. Our findings suggest a more nuanced reality. Across the five sectors we examined, large majorities of respondents—including majorities of both Democrats and Republicans—believe that the federal government plays a substantial role. At the same time, most Americans conclude that the federal government’s involvement in these sectors has gone too far. In every domain examined, respondents were more likely to say that government has too much influence than too little.

Notably, the view that federal influence is excessive is also broadly shared across party lines. Although Democrats and Republicans sometimes differ in their evaluations of particular sectors, the overall pattern is one of substantial agreement. In most cases, members of both parties arrive at remarkably similar conclusions about both the extent of federal involvement and whether current levels are appropriate.

Given the parties’ traditional reputations as champions of larger and smaller government, respectively, this relative absence of partisan disagreement is somewhat unexpected. Why do Democrats and Republicans, despite their broader ideological differences, so often arrive at similar conclusions regarding the scope and appropriateness of federal influence?

Historical evidence showed not only that partisan differences fluctuate over time, but also that they vary depending on which party controls the presidency. Americans appear somewhat more supportive of government regulation when their preferred party occupies the White House and somewhat more skeptical when political opponents hold power.

Viewed in this light, the relatively modest partisan differences observed in our survey become less surprising. They likely reflect both genuine agreement regarding the federal government’s role in society and the broader political context in which those evaluations were made.

POLL INFORMATION

This study was conducted online between December 8–18, 2025 by Social Science Research Services (SSRS) using a probability-based opinion panel. The sample consisted of 1,533 respondents age 18 or older, including an oversample of 263 Florida residents. The margin of error for total respondents is ± 2.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Weighted demographic characteristics of the survey group are presented in Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics by Survey Sample

Category	Main Survey Sample	Florida Sample
Sex		
Male	49%	49%
Female	51%	51%
Age		
18 to 29	20%	18%
30 to 49	34%	30%
50 to 64	23%	23%
65 or older	23%	28%
Race/Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic White	60%	53%
Black	12%	15%
Hispanic	17%	25%
Asian	7%	3%
Other	4%	3%
Income		
Less than \$50,000	43%	40%
\$50,000-\$74,999	16%	19%
\$75,000-\$99,999	13%	16%
\$100,000 and over	29%	24%
Education		
Less than HS	9%	8%
HS Graduate	28%	29%
Some college	26%	27%
BA Degree	21%	23%
Postgrad / Prof. Degree	15%	12%
Parent Status		
K-12 Parent	26%	23%
Not a K-12 Parent	74%	77%
Stated Party		
Democrat	29%	26%
Republican	29%	32%
Independent / Something else	42%	42%
Political Ideology		
Liberal	23%	18%
Moderate	44%	46%
Conservative	33%	36%
N	1,533	263

APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURES

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics by Survey Sample

As far as you can tell, how much influence do you think the federal government has over each of the following sectors?

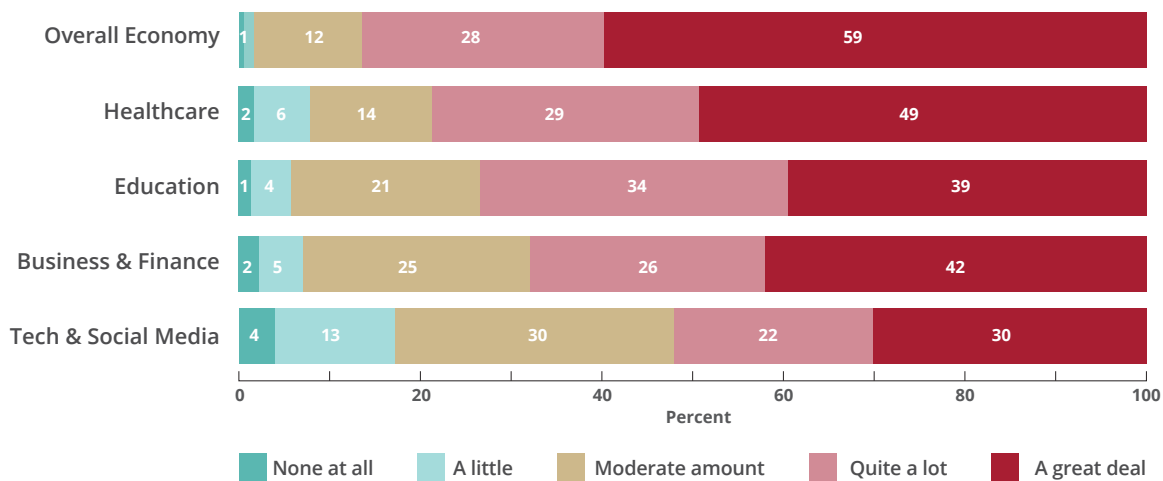


Figure A1. Perceptions of Federal Influence Among Florida Residents, by Sector

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the Florida adult population (n = 255–262 across sectors). Bars show the distribution of responses for each sector. Respondents who selected “Not sure” (n = 1–8 across sectors) are excluded from the analysis.

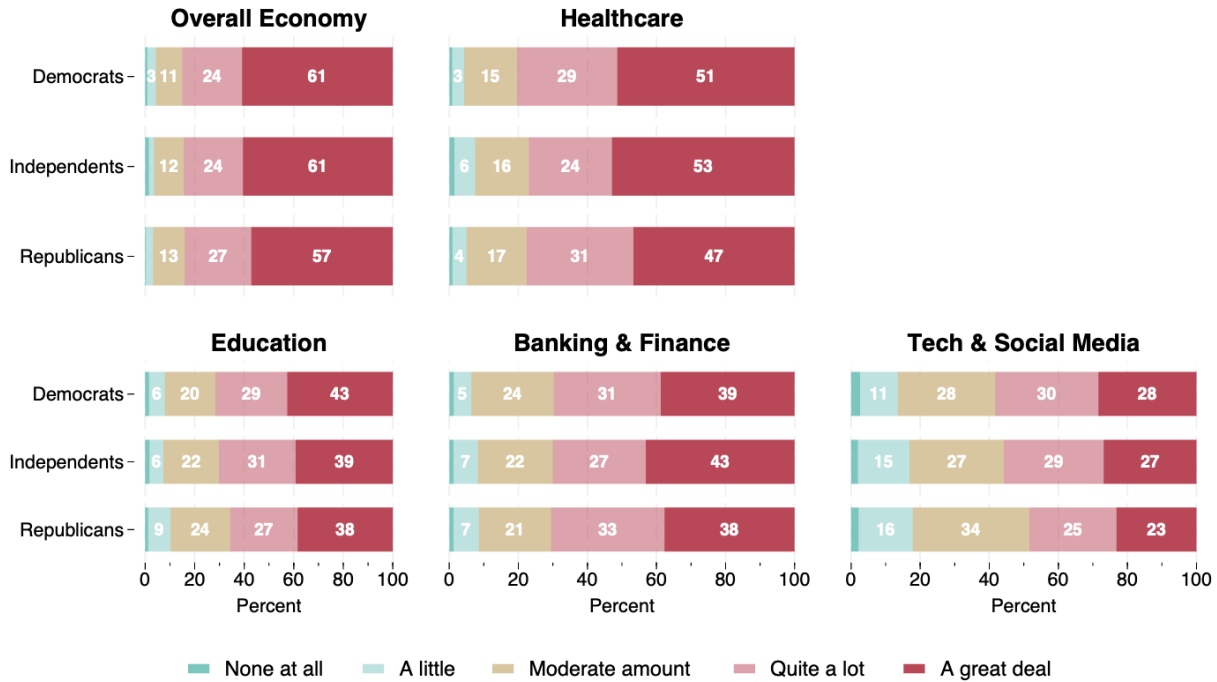


Figure A2. Public Perceptions of Federal Influence, by Sector and Party Affiliation

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,497–1,511 across sectors, including 410–415 Democrats, 525–532 Republicans, and 561–566 Independents). Bars show the distribution of responses for each sector by respondent party affiliation. Respondents who selected “Not sure” (n = 19–33 across sectors) are excluded from the analysis.

In your opinion, do you think the federal government has too much, too little, or about the right amount of influence over each of the following sectors?

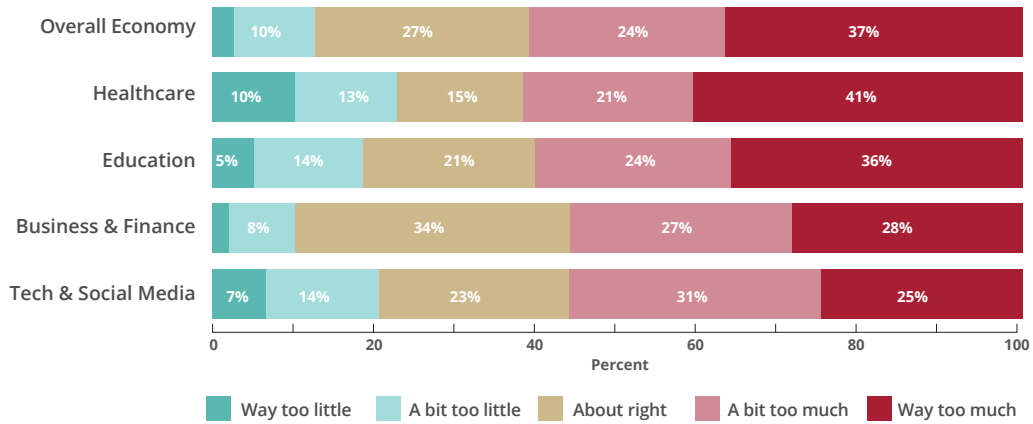


Figure A3. Evaluations of Federal Influence Among Florida Residents, by Sector

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the Florida adult population (n = 248–254 across sectors). Bars show the distribution of responses for each sector. Respondents who selected “Not sure” (n = 9–15 across sectors) are excluded from the analysis.

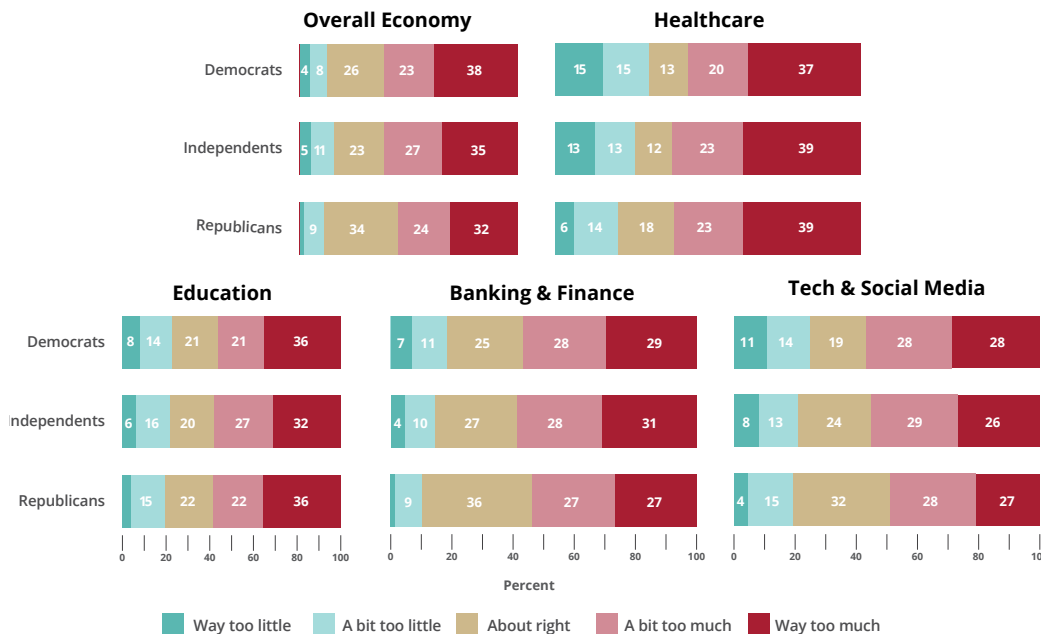


Figure A4. Public Evaluations of Federal Influence, by Sector and Party Affiliation

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,439–1,470 across sectors, including 396–407 Democrats, 506–519 Republicans, and 535–548 Independents). Bars show the distribution of responses for each sector by party affiliation. Respondents who selected “Not sure” (n = 60–91 across sectors) are excluded from the analysis.

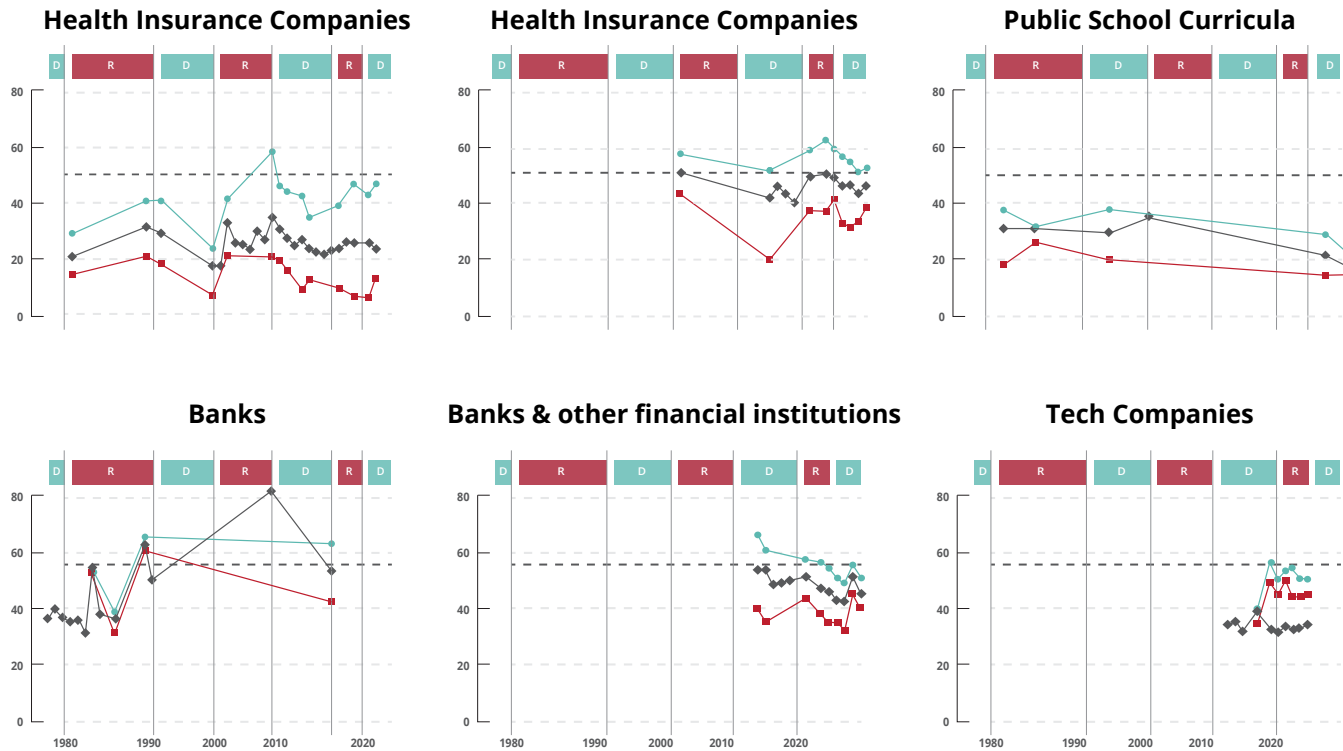


Figure A5. Trends in the Share of Americans Saying There Is “Too little” Federal Regulation, by Sector and Party (1974–2025)

Note: Each panel displays the percentage of respondents saying there is “Too little” federal regulation over a given sector. Estimates are derived from nationally representative surveys conducted between 1974 and 2025 and compiled from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. Time coverage varies across panels depending on the availability of survey data. Solid lines show responses among Democrats and Republicans; the dashed line shows responses for the overall public. Colored strips above the figure indicate the party holding the presidency during each period (blue = Democratic president; red = Republican president). Because historical surveys rarely used wording identical to our survey, the series should be interpreted as measures of public evaluations of federal regulation rather than direct measures of perceived federal influence. For a complete list of survey items included in each series, see Section A of the Supplementary Appendix.

APPENDIX B: SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS

Appendix Figure B1 extends the analysis presented in Figure 5 by combining 11 nationally representative survey series into long-run indexes of attitudes toward federal regulation. Following a methodology developed by political scientist James Stimson, we use the Dyad Ratios Algorithm to estimate a latent measure of public attitudes toward federal regulation from multiple survey questions that were not asked consistently across years.^{viii} The resulting sample index incorporates 120 survey measurements collected across 47 time points between 1974 and 2025. These measurements include survey questions asking Americans whether regulation of business, banking, financial institutions, health insurance companies, technology companies, and public school curricula is “too much,” “too little,” or “about the right amount,” as well as questions asking whether regulation in these sectors should be increased, decreased, or kept at current levels. Values can be interpreted as the average level (%) of opposition to federal regulation across the available surveys, with higher values indicating greater opposition to federal regulation. The resulting sample index accounts for approximately 60 percent of the variation in the underlying survey series. Separate indexes were also estimated for Democrats and Republicans using 74 partisan-specific measurements spanning 33 time points.^{ix} These partisan indexes account for approximately 63 percent and 68 percent of the variation in the underlying Democratic and Republican survey series, respectively.

Consistent with the patterns shown in Figure 5, attitudes toward federal regulation exhibit substantial fluctuation over time rather than a steady movement in one direction. Periods of increasing opposition to regulation are frequently followed by periods of declining opposition, producing a recurring pattern of increases and decreases that persists across much of the last five decades. Republicans generally express greater opposition to regulation than Democrats, but the size of this partisan difference varies considerably across time. In some periods the two parties move in broadly similar directions, while in others their attitudes diverge substantially.

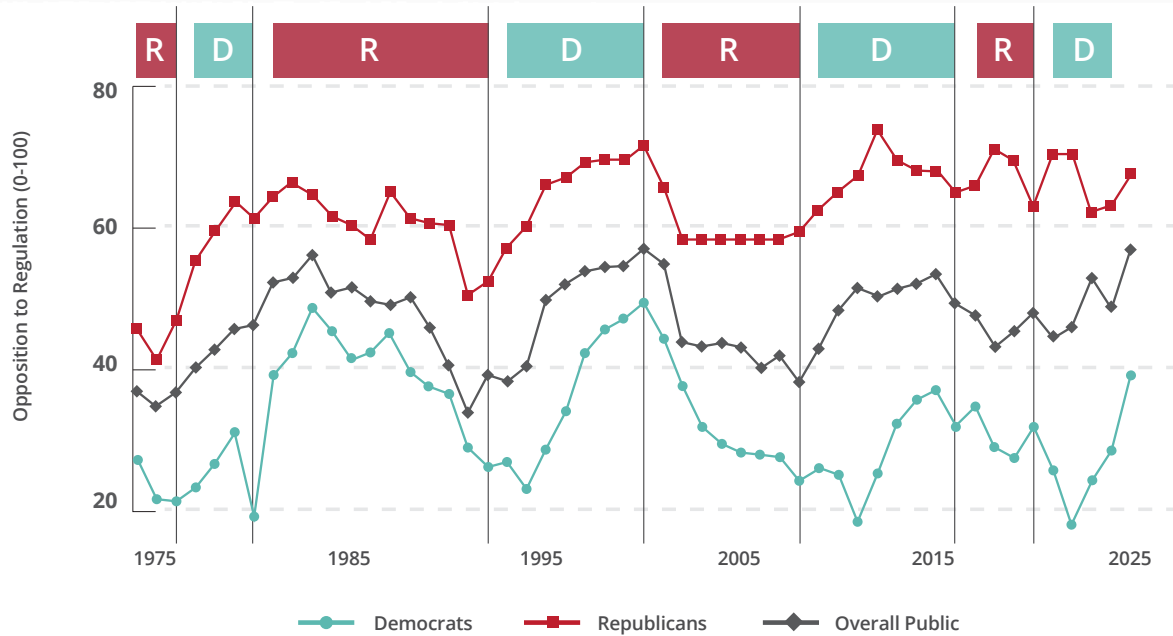


Figure B1. Long-Term Trends in Public Opposition to Federal Regulation, 1974–2025

Note: Lines show long-run indexes of opposition to federal regulation, constructed from nationally representative surveys using Stimson’s Dyad Ratios Algorithm and scaled from 0 to 100. Higher values indicate greater opposition to federal regulation. Colored strips above the figure indicate the party holding the presidency during each period (blue = Democratic president; red = Republican president). See Section A of the separate Supplementary Appendix file for a list of all survey items, their question wording, and the surveys from which they originate.

To examine the extent to which Democratic and Republican attitudes toward federal regulation have moved together over time, Appendix Figure B2 plots rolling ten-year correlations (e.g., the value for 1983 corresponds to the period 1974–1983) between the partisan indexes shown in Figure B1. Positive values indicate periods in which Democratic and Republican attitudes generally rose and fell together, whereas lower or negative values indicate periods in which the two groups moved more independently or in opposite directions.

Consistent with the discussion in the main text, the degree of correspondence between Democratic and Republican attitudes toward regulation has varied substantially over time. Throughout much of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, correlations were generally positive and often moderately strong, suggesting that shifts in attitudes toward regulation frequently affected both parties in the same direction. More recently, however, the relationship weakened considerably, with correlations falling toward zero and, in several windows, becoming negative. These findings indicate that partisan attitudes toward federal regulation have become less synchronized over time, helping to explain why Democrats and Republicans sometimes move together but at other times diverge sharply in their evaluations of federal regulation.

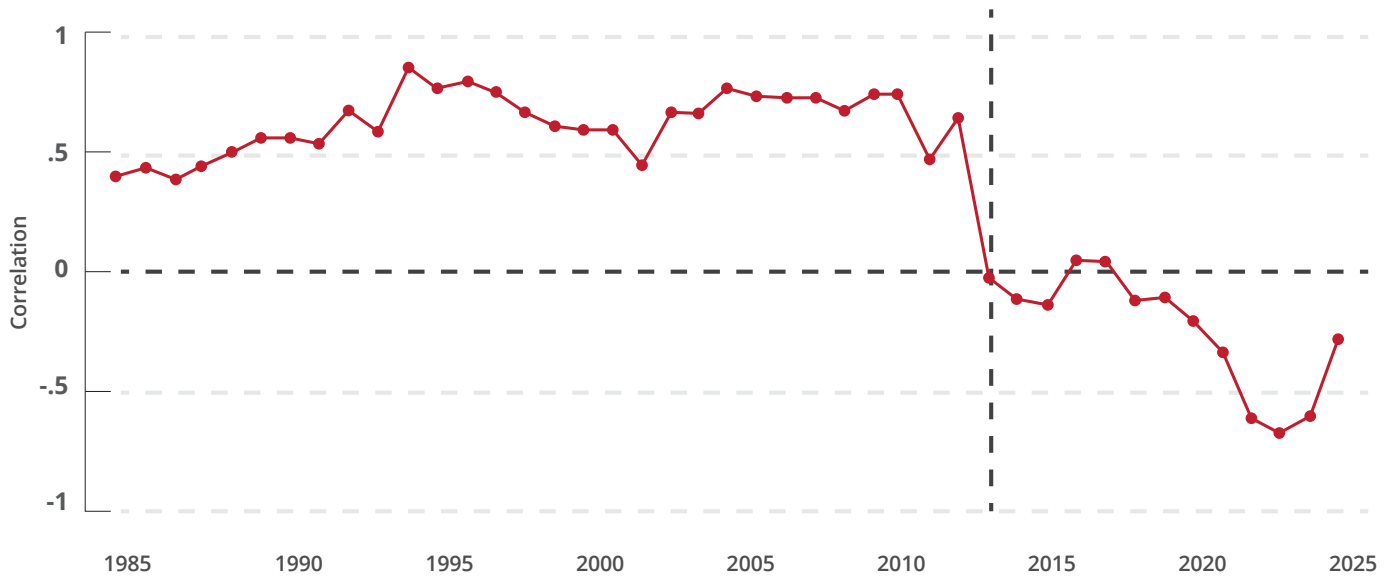


Figure B2. Rolling Correlations Between Democratic and Republican Attitudes Toward Federal Regulation, 1974–2025

Note: Points represent rolling ten-year correlations between the Democratic and Republican anti-regulation indexes shown in Figure B1. Each observation corresponds to the correlation between the two series over the preceding ten-year period (e.g., the value for 1983 is based on the years 1974–1983). Positive values indicate that Democratic and Republican attitudes toward regulation generally moved in the same direction during a given period, whereas negative values indicate that the two series moved in opposite directions. The horizontal dashed line denotes a correlation of zero.

¹ Florida residents express perceptions of federal influence that are broadly similar to those of the national public (Appendix Figure A1). As in the national sample, large majorities of Floridians believe the federal government exercises either “Quite a lot” or “A great deal” of influence over the economy (87%), healthcare (78%), education (73%), and banking and finance (68%). Floridians are somewhat more likely than Americans overall to perceive substantial federal influence over technology and social media companies (52% vs. 54% nationally). Overall, the Florida results closely mirror the national pattern.

² Results among Florida residents closely mirror those observed nationally (Appendix Figure A3). In each sector, a majority of Florida respondents say the federal government has too much influence, ranging from 55% for banking and finance to 62% for healthcare.

³ Because these surveys rarely used wording identical to ours, we selected items that most closely matched the sectors examined in our survey. When no broad sector measure was available, we relied on the closest available indicator with sufficient historical coverage. The resulting series should therefore be interpreted as measures of public evaluations of federal regulation rather than direct equivalents of our survey questions. Nevertheless, they provide a useful—though imperfect—window into how Americans have evaluated the scope of federal influence over time.

⁴ See Section A of the separate Supplementary Appendix file for a list of all survey items, their question wording, and the surveys from which they originate. See Section B to download a dataset containing all individual survey items, metadata, and available covariates.

⁵ See Appendix Figure A5 for a version of this chart that shows time series of “Too little” responses.

⁶ Using a harmonization algorithm developed by political scientist James Stimson, we combined the six survey series shown in Figure 5, along with five additional nationally representative survey series, into long-run indexes of public attitudes toward federal regulation. Together, these data encompass 120 survey measurements collected between 1974 and 2025. A broader analysis based on these indexes confirms that public support for federal regulation has fluctuated substantially over time rather than moving steadily in one direction (Appendix Figure B1). Additional analyses indicate that the degree to which Democratic and Republican attitudes move together has declined since the late twentieth century, suggesting that the two parties increasingly respond to different political and social forces (Appendix Figure B2).

⁷ The patterns shown in Figure 6 are robust to the inclusion of respondent-level demographic controls, including sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, and census region (results not shown). This finding suggests that the observed relationships are unlikely to be driven primarily by changes in sample composition over time.

⁸ For more on the Stimson methodology, see Stimson, J. A. (2018). The dyad ratios algorithm for estimating latent public opinion: Estimation, testing, and comparison to other approaches. *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de méthodologie sociologique*, 137(1), 201-218.

⁹ See Section B of the separate Supplementary Appendix for additional methodological details and a downloadable dataset containing the Stimson estimates.