

WASHINGTONIANS ON THE 2026 MIDTERM ELECTIONS



October 2026

**Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and
Public Service at Washington State University
and Better Choices for Democracy**



Introduction

A new statewide survey finds confidence in Washington's election administration, but widespread concern about false information and doubts that political parties care about people like them.

With just a few days until Election Day, a first-of-its kind benchmark study conducted by the Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service at Washington State University and Better Choices for Democracy finds that Washingtonians are concerned about mail ballots arriving in time to be counted. Washingtonians also express deep concerns about people being misled by AI-generated images, audio, or videos, and the potential for federal interference in elections. On the positive side, voters in the Evergreen state are confident in how elections are administered by state and local election officials.

The survey was fielded to 1,000 Washington state residents, including 874 registered voters, between October 14–24, 2026 using Harris Poll's integrated panel to learn more about their perceptions of how elections and politics are working in the Evergreen state.

Better Choices for Democracy is a national nonpartisan organization working to strengthen representative democracy and create a government that works for everyone through rigorous research, broad public education and advocacy.

The Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service at Washington State University is a bipartisan institute that supports civic education, public service, and public policy research.

Toplines: Washingtonians Express Confidence in Election Officials and Concern About Election Threats

- Washingtonians are highly motivated to vote. Among registered Washington voters, 93% say they have already voted (22%) or plan to vote (71%).
- Among respondents who say they voted or plan to vote by mail, nearly one out of three (31%) worry that their ballot may not arrive in time. Among those who say they are returning their ballot by dropbox, 11% say they usually mail their ballot but changed to deliver by dropbox this year.
- Washingtonians feel disconnected from the two major political parties, with fewer than half perceiving that either party cares about people like them.
- Among registered voters, the most widespread election concerns this year are that people will be misled by false information about candidates (81%) and AI-generated misinformation (78%). Majorities also worry about election officials refusing to certify results (62%) and voting machines being hacked (58%).
- Among key issues for all Washingtonians, cost of living leads at 64%, followed by affordable housing (39%), homelessness (35%), and healthcare (28%).
- Network broadcast news (CBS / ABC / NBC at 36%) and Local TV (32%) are among the top news and information sources across the electorate, however YouTube ranks second overall at 33%, followed closely by Facebook at 28%, which were selected more often than CNN (22%), MSNBC (11%), or the combined Fox News/NewsMax category (17%).
- The bright spot this election season is that Washingtonians express confidence in their local election officials (72%) and in the Washington Secretary of State's Office (67%) to carry out their responsibilities in administering elections. Similar to patterns in other surveys, confidence is significantly lower for election officials nationwide (55%).

Vote Intent and the Care Gap

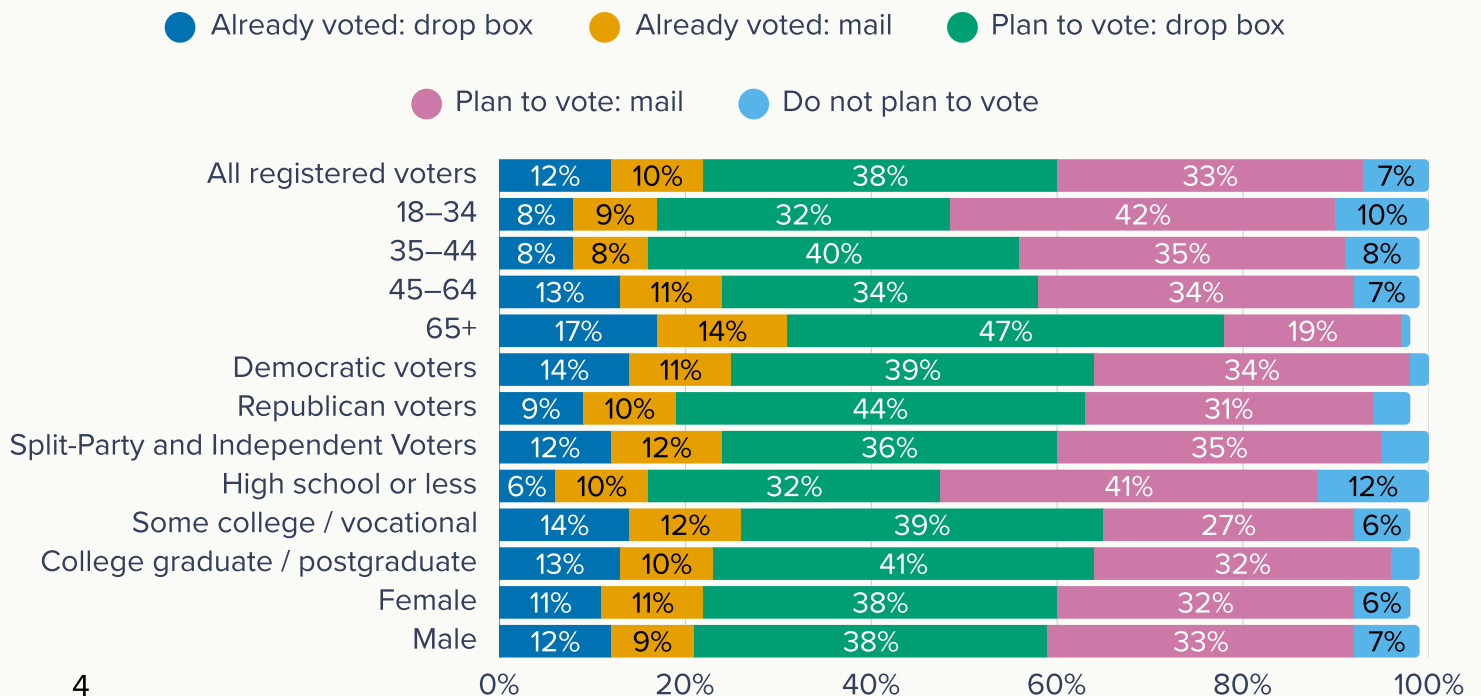
While registered voters express high intention to vote, only 22% reported that they have done so by mailing their ballot or returning to a dropbox. This number is consistent with the Washington Secretary of State's office, which reports that about 20% of ballots have been returned as of Monday, October 26, 2026. Ballot return rates are about the same at this time as they were for the 2022 midterm elections.

Amid concerns about rejection rates for mail ballots and recent news about the discovery of 92 undelivered ballots in a Seattle dumpster, more than 11% of respondents who said they plan to use a drop box said they prefer this option over mailing their ballot this year, which suggests that voters are adjusting their plans in light of broader disruptions to and debates about potential changes in voting by mail. In an open-ended follow-up question about why they opt to use a dropbox this year, most respondents expressed that they did so to ensure that their ballot arrived and was counted.

"I don't trust the postal service to deliver my ballot in a timely manner."

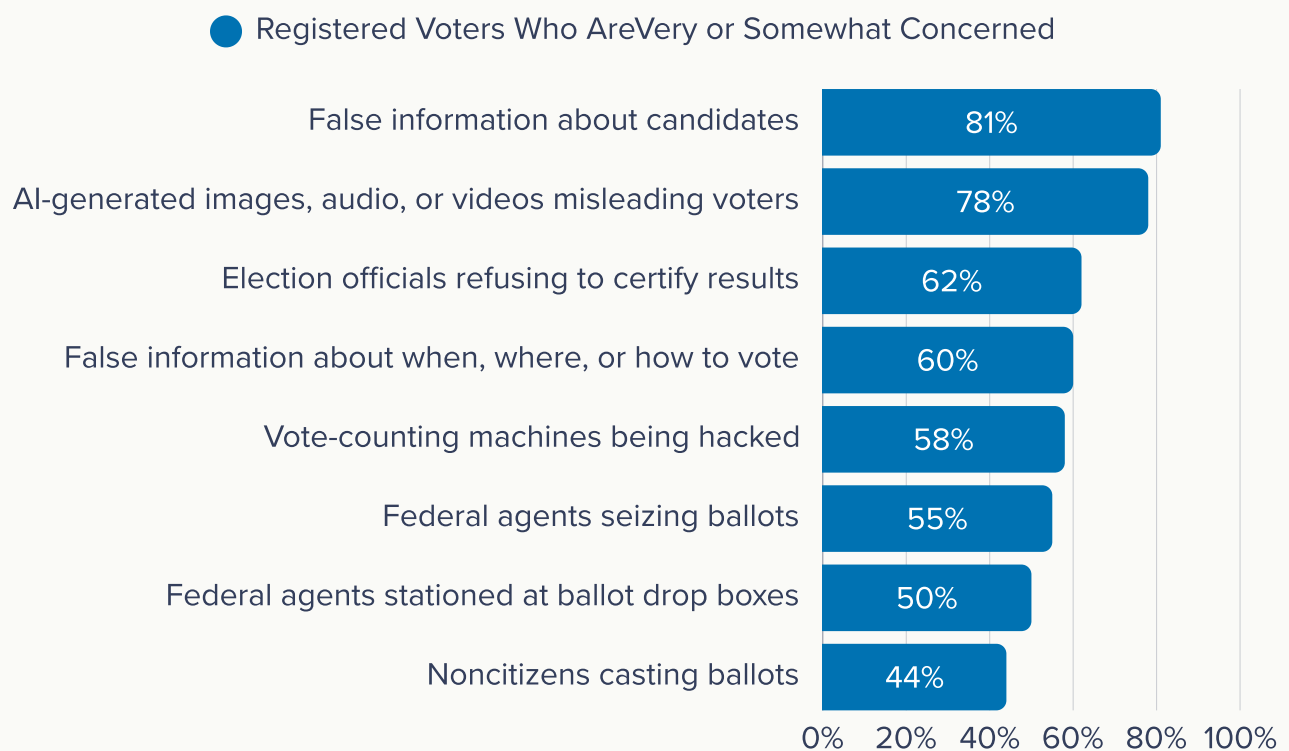
"I want to make sure my vote is counted."

Voting intent among Washingtonians, October 2026



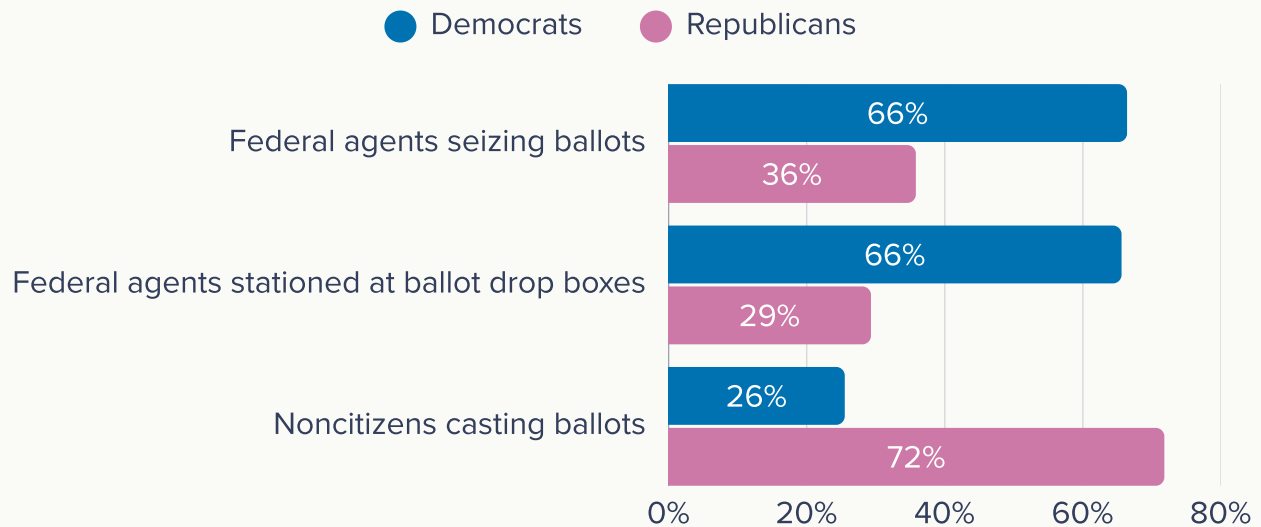
Election Concerns and Care Gap

Across all groups, there is widespread concern for false information this election season, with nearly 4 in 5 respondents worried that people will be misled by false information about candidates and AI-generated misinformation. A majority of Washingtonians are also concerned that election officials will refuse to certify results and about voting machines being hacked. Concerns about federal agents at drop boxes or seizing ballots and noncitizen voting reveal sharp partisan differences.



Partisan Gaps on Election Concerns

Concern about noncitizens casting ballots was 72% among those who identified as Republican voters versus 26% who identified as Democratic voters. The pattern reversed for federal agents seizing ballots (66% Democratic versus 36% Republican) and being stationed at drop boxes (66% versus 29%).



Age Gaps on Election Concerns

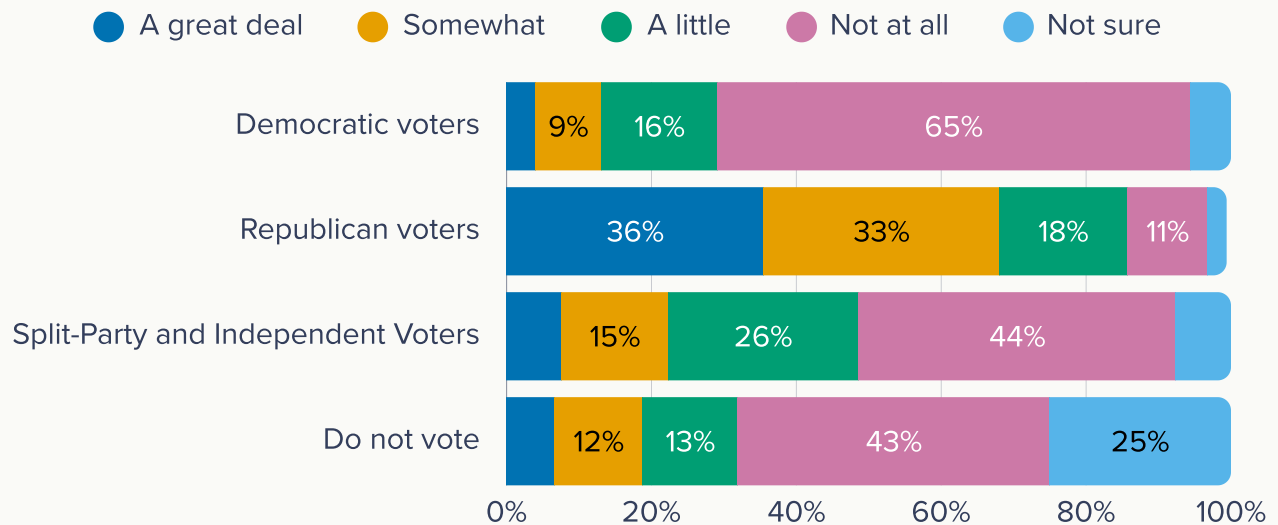
Younger voters expressed greater concern about the potential for disruptions to voting. Compared with those 65 and older, respondents ages 18–34 were more concerned about machines being hacked (66% versus 43%), officials refusing to certify results (64% versus 49%), and people being misled by false voting information (65% versus 50%). Older voters expressed particularly high concern about people being misled by false information about candidates (85%).

Party Disconnect

Another concerning finding related to the health of political institutions is that respondents largely perceive that the political parties do not care about them, with only 32% of registered voters believe that the Republican Party and only 45% believe the Democratic Party cares about people like them. This disconnect with the two major political parties is correlated with lower intentions to vote.

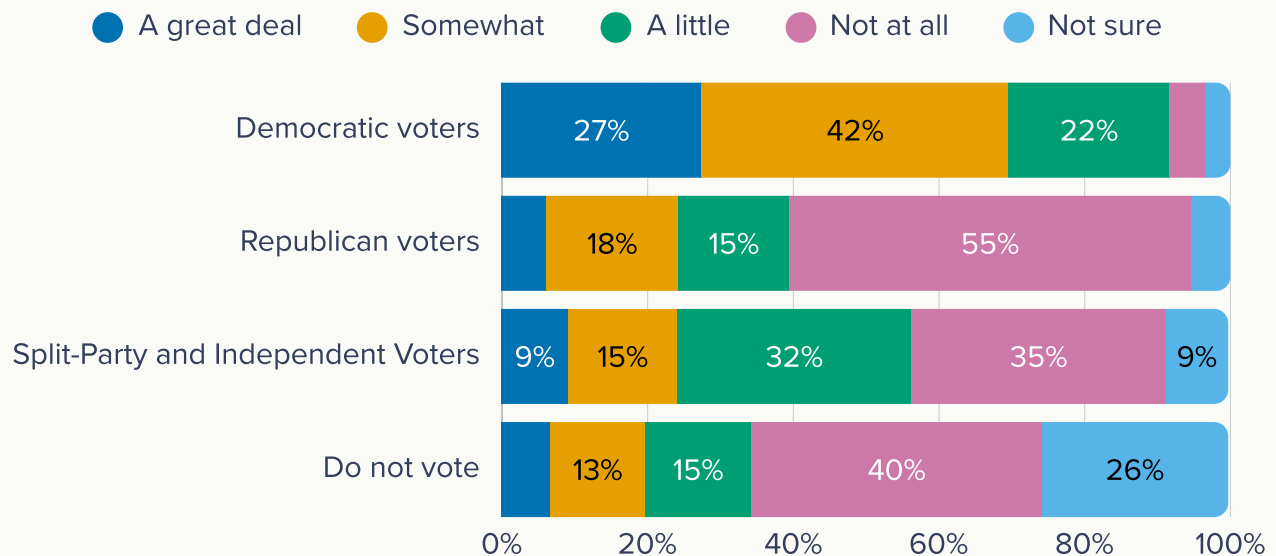
Perhaps not surprisingly, neither major political party has built a compelling value proposition of genuine care for unaffiliated voters. Furthermore, education is also correlated to perceptions of care with college graduates perceiving higher levels of care (52% for the Democratic Party, and 38% for the Republican party) compared to voters who have high school or less (36% for the Democratic Party, 29% for the Republican party).

How much do you think the Republican Party cares about people like you?



Party Disconnect

How much do you think the Democratic Party cares about people like you?



Do elected officials care?

While a majority of all respondents (55%) perceive that their local elected officials care about them, less than a majority (48%) say so about state elected officials and less than 2 in 5 respondents (38%) believe that their member of Congress cares about people like them. Women feel less cared for than men across all categories, and voters with high school or less feel less cared for than college graduates.



55% believe that their local elected officials care “a great deal” or “somewhat” about people like them



48% believe that their state elected officials care “a great deal” or “somewhat” about people like them



Just 38% believe that their member of Congress cares “a great deal” or “somewhat” about people like them

Confidence in Election Administration

Despite the concerns about elections among Washingtonians, there is a bright spot this election season. Overall, voters are confident that their vote will be counted accurately by local and state election officials, that Washington elections will be conducted fairly, and that every eligible citizen who wants to vote in Washington State will be able to do so.

Four in five voters say they are confident that their vote will be counted as they intend. About the same percentage are confident that votes in Washington State will be counted as voters intended (80%). When respondents are asked about confidence in the accuracy of the vote count nationwide, the percentage of respondents expressing that they are confident drops, with only 67% saying they are somewhat confident that votes across the United States will be counted as voters intend.

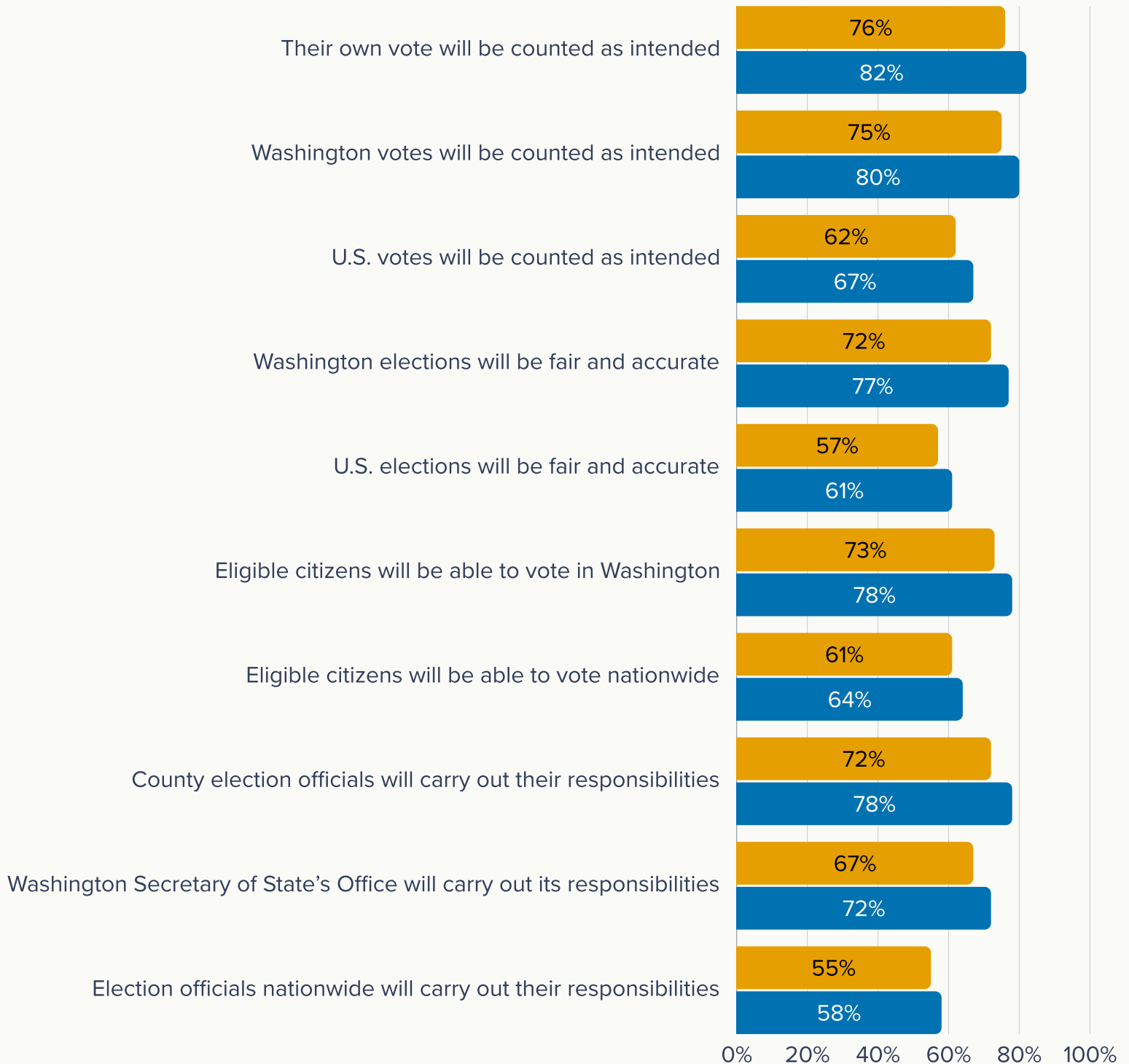
77% of voters also say that they are very or somewhat confident that elections in Washington State will be conducted fairly and accurately. However, when asked about whether elections across the United States will be conducted fairly and accurately, only 61% express confidence.

On voting access, 78% of voters say they are very or somewhat confident that every eligible citizen who wants to vote in Washington State will be able to do so. By comparison, only 64% are confident in this nationwide.

Voters are also more confident that local (78%) and state officials (72%) will carry out their responsibilities than they are that election officials nationwide will (58%).

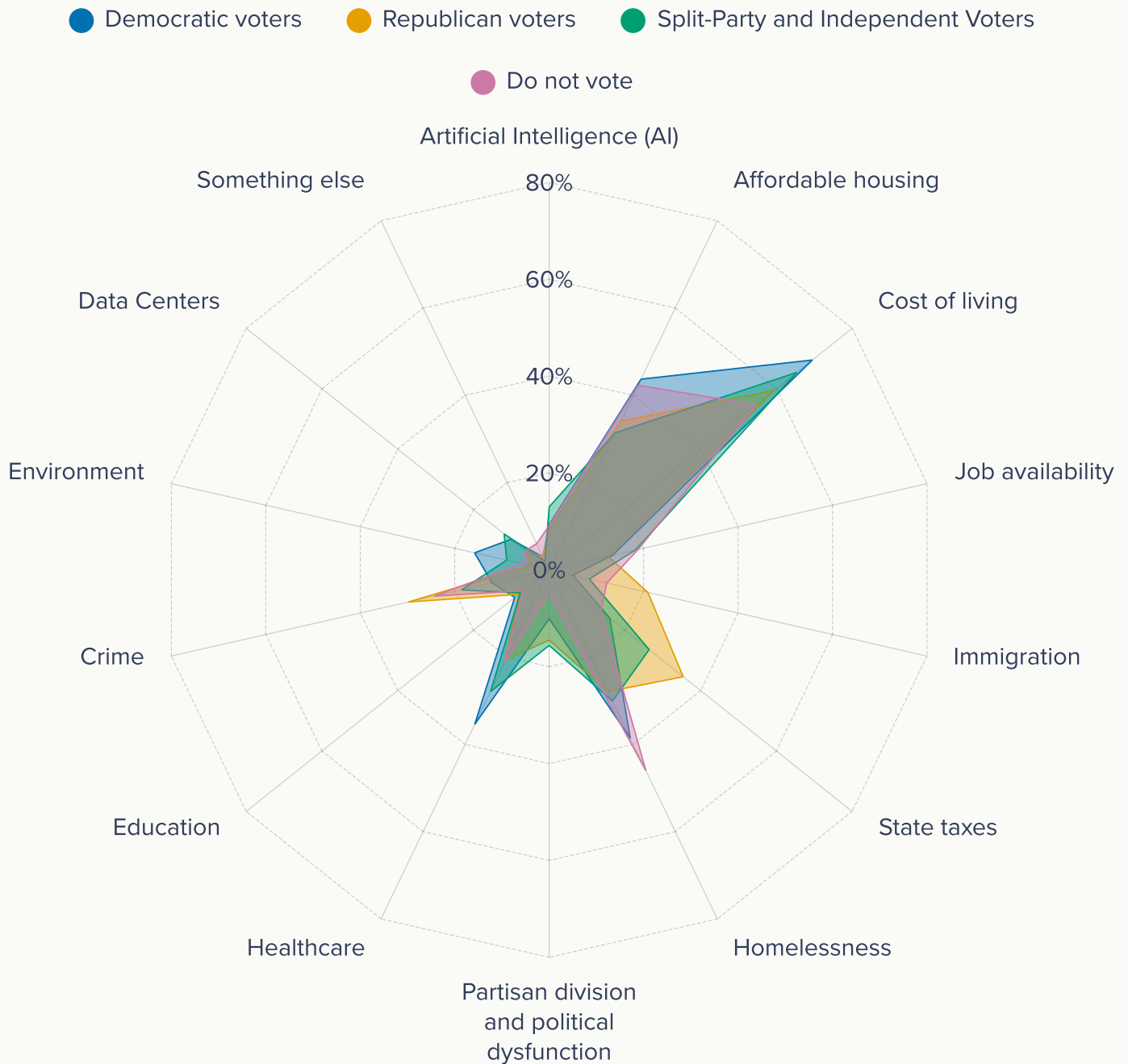
Confidence in Election Administration

● All adults ● Registered Voters



Top Issues for Washingtonians October 2026

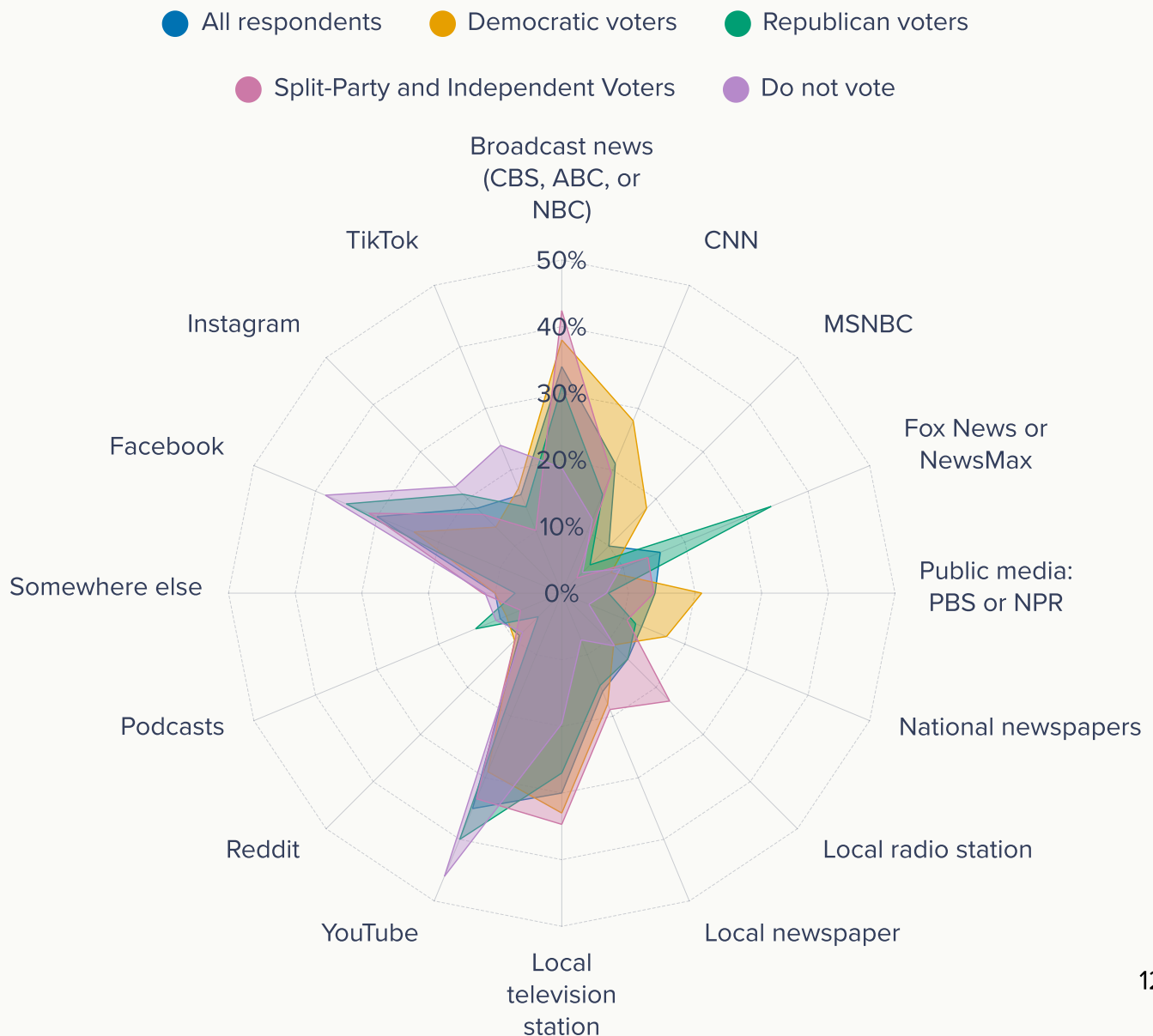
Among key issues Washingtonians are concerned about this year are cost of living (64%), followed by affordable housing (39%), homelessness (35%), and healthcare (28%).



Where Washingtonians Get Political News and Information, October 2026

In terms of sources of political news and information, YouTube (35%), network broadcast news (CBS / ABC / NBC at 34%) and Local TV and Facebook (both at 30%) are among the top sources of political news and information for all Washingtonians.

Washingtonians aged 18–34 are most likely to get their political news and information from YouTube (49%), Facebook (33%), Instagram (34%), and TikTok (32%), while Washingtonians 65+ are most likely to watch CBS / ABC / NBC (51%), Local TV (43%), and read local newspapers (22%) and social video channels drop off dramatically (TikTok at 3%, Instagram at 2%).



Methodology and Weighting

This survey was fielded to 1,000 Washington residents between October 14–24, 2026. Participants were recruited using Harris Poll's online Integrated Panel. Respondents were screened for quality. By default, Harris QuestDIY applies a nationally representative (NatRep) sample quota structure based on the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data (or local census data if fielding outside the U.S.). The panel included 874 registered Washington voters and 126 respondents not registered, unsure, or ineligible.

Results are weighted to Washington adults age 18+ by age, gender, race/ethnicity and education. Age, sex, race/ethnicity and education benchmarks come from the 2024 ACS Washington PUMS. ACS sex is used as a proxy for survey gender.

Effective sample size is 881 and carries a weight-only design effect of 1.14 and a weight range: .31-2.92.

Weights sum to 1,000 and match the applied targets. No trimming was applied. Ages 18–34 are combined for reporting because the 18–24 effective base is 76.9; weighting retains the two younger age bands separately. Ages 85+ are combined with 65–84.

Demographic profile and Census benchmarks

Age and education use the adult 18+ population, selecting Washington PUMS records aged 18 or older and summing ACS person weights. The applied targets preserve the observed combined share of unclassified gender (12), race/ethnicity (13) and education (4) responses. Education groups trade/vocational responses with some college/associate's as an approximate nondegree postsecondary category.

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Dimension	Category	Raw n	Raw %	ACS %	Applied target	Weighted %
Age	18–24	88	9%	11%	11%	11%
Age	25–34	176	18%	19%	19%	19%
Age	35–44	195	20%	19%	19%	19%
Age	45–64	344	34%	29%	29%	29%
Age	65+	197	20%	22%	22%	22%
Gender	Male	437	44%	50%	49%	49%
Gender	Female	551	55%	50%	49%	49%
Gender	Unclassified	12	1%	—	1%	1%
Race	White, non-Hispanic	682	68%	65%	64%	64%
Race	Black, non-Hispanic	87	9%	4%	4%	4%
Race	Hispanic, any race	113	11%	13%	12%	12%
Race	Other / multiracial, non-Hispanic	44	4%	7%	7%	7%
Race	Asian / Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	61	6%	12%	12%	12%
Race	Unclassified	13	1%	—	1%	1%
Education	High school or less	302	30%	31%	31%	31%
Education	Some college / vocational	338	34%	31%	30%	30%
Education	College graduate / postgraduate	356	36%	38%	38%	38%
Education	Unclassified	4	0%	—	0%	0%

Party voting tendency

Democratic voters combine “Always vote Democrat” and “Usually vote Democrat, but sometimes vote Republican” (n = 429). Republican voters combine the corresponding always/usually Republican responses (n = 281). Split-Party and Independent Voters combine respondents who vote for both major parties equally (n = 65) with always or sometimes third-party voters (n = 99), for a combined n = 164. This category reflects voting tendency, not a separate measure of independent party identification. Those who do not vote (n = 126) remain separate. Each respondent is counted once, according to their self-reported voting tendency.

Category	Raw n	Raw %	Weighted %
Democratic voters	429	43%	42%
Republican voters	281	28%	27%
Split-Party and Independent Voters	164	16%	17%
Do not vote	126	13%	14%