

Research Brief

Chicagoans Struggle with Affordability While Grappling with Perceptions of Crime.

A new ChicagoSpeaks survey conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago finds that affordability is a major concern for Chicago residents, with Chicagoans more likely than Americans nationwide to describe the cost of living as unaffordable. Financial strain is especially pronounced among Black and Hispanic residents, who are more likely to report difficulty making ends meet and paying their monthly bills.

At the same time, concerns about public safety remain widespread. Many Chicagoans believe violent crime has increased across the city, and a majority report feeling unsafe walking alone in their neighborhoods at night. Perceptions of crime appear closely tied to social media exposure, with residents who report more frequent encounters with crime-related content online also more likely to believe crime is increasing.

The Chicago poll was conducted June 15-23, 2026, using the ChicagoSpeaks® Panel, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online interviews were conducted with 1,194 adults. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points.

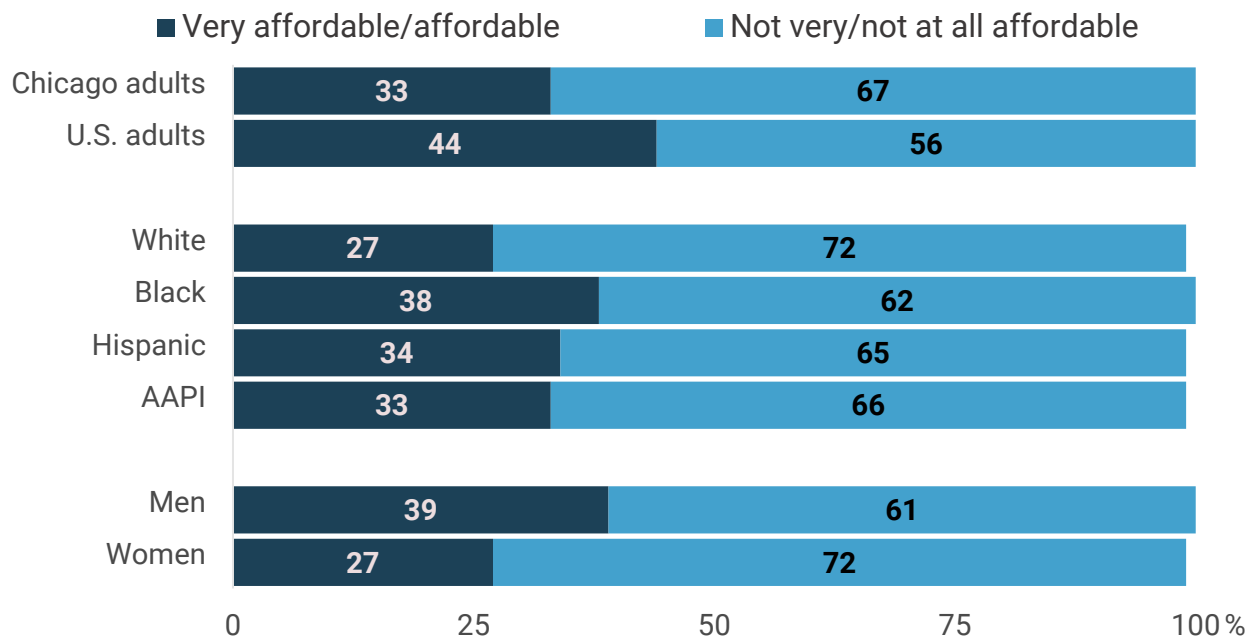
Chicagoans are more likely than Americans overall to view the cost of living as unaffordable. Most report they are just getting by or finding it difficult to get by, with about a third saying they cannot pay their monthly bills in full.

Two-thirds of Chicago residents (67%) describe the cost of living in the area they live as either not very affordable or not affordable at all. While Americans nationwide express similar concerns, the share is somewhat lower: a nationally representative Marist poll conducted in April 2026 found that 56% of Americans characterize the cost of living as unaffordable.

Although a majority of both white and Black adults view Chicago as unaffordable, white adults are more likely than Black adults to describe their area as not very affordable or not affordable at all. Hispanic adults and Asian American and Pacific Islander adults fall between white and Black adults in their perceptions of affordability. Women are also more likely than men to report that the area where they live is not very affordable or not affordable at all.

Most Chicagoans describe the cost of living in in their area as unaffordable.

Percent of adults



Question: Overall, would you describe the cost of living for the average family in the area where you live as:

Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents, Marist National Poll conducted April 27-30, 2026 with 1,322 adults.

*Note: Findings among AAPI and Hispanic adults are not significantly different from other groups.

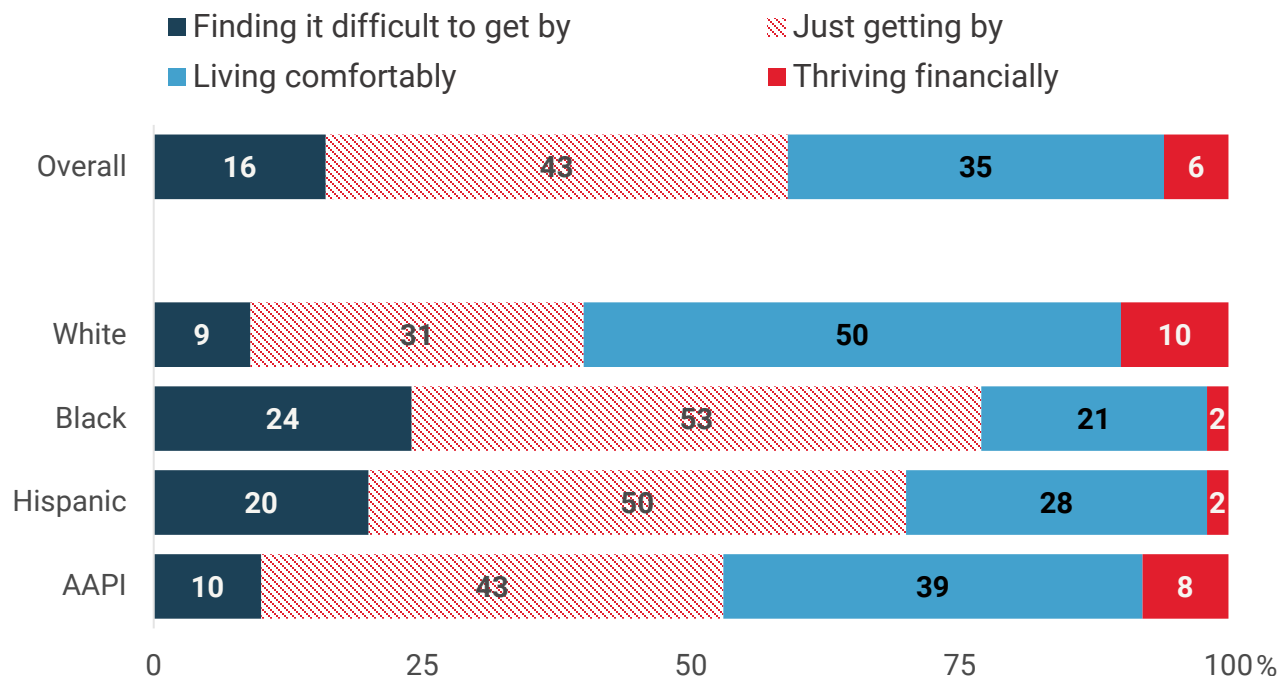


In addition to the two-thirds of Chicagoans who find their local area unaffordable, 16% report struggling to get by financially, and another 43% say they are just getting by. About a third (35%) describe themselves as living comfortably. Few (6%), however, say they are thriving financially.

White adults are more likely than Black and Hispanic adults to say they are living comfortably. On the other hand, Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than white adults to say they are just getting by. Asian American and Pacific Islanders describe their financial situations similar to Chicagoans overall.

The majority of Chicagoans are either just getting by financially or struggling to make ends meet.

Percent of Chicagoans



Question: On the whole, which of the following best describes how well you are managing financially these days?

Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents.

*Note: Findings among AAPI adults are not significantly different from other groups.

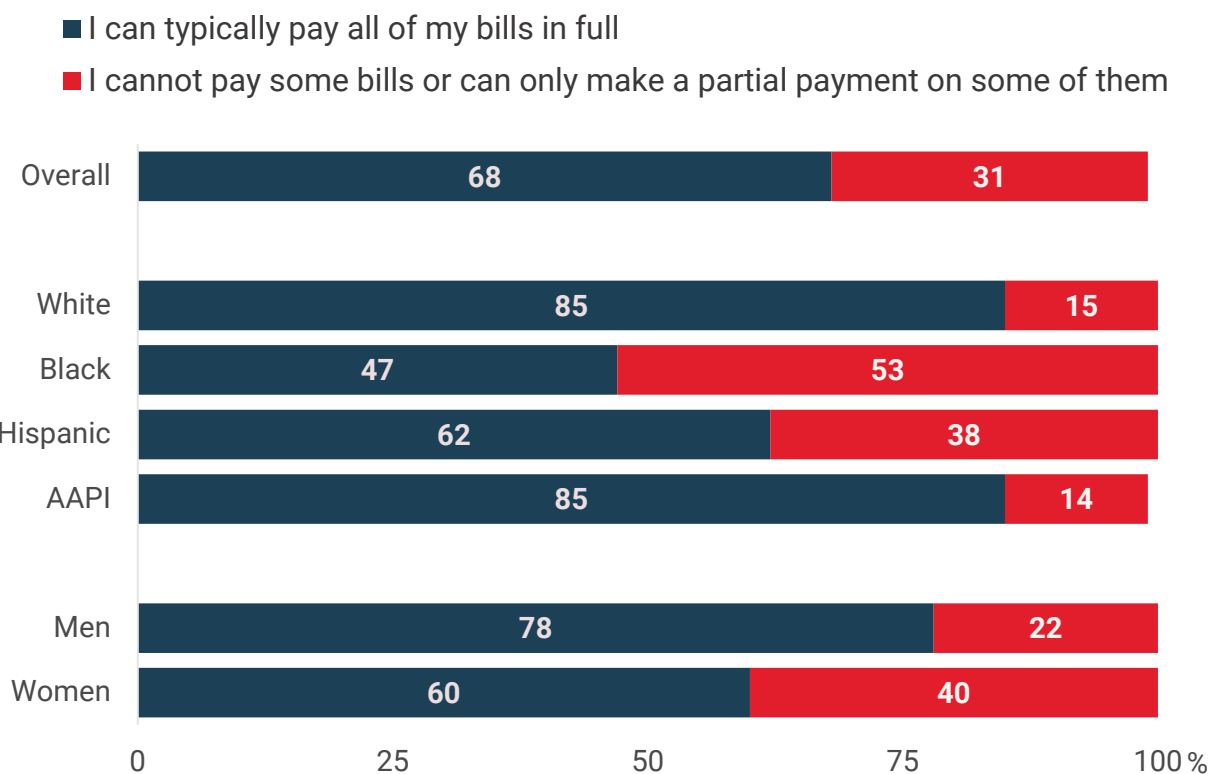


When it comes to the specific financial challenges Chicagoans face, quite a few Chicagoans cite having issues paying their monthly bills. Three in 10 (31%) say they cannot pay some bills or can only make a partial payment on some of them. However, 68% report they can pay all of their bills in full in a typical month.

White adults and Asian American and Pacific Islanders are more likely than Hispanic and Black adults to say they can pay their bills in full in a typical month. Men are also more likely than women to say they can pay their bills in full in a typical month.

Three in 10 Chicagoans are not able to pay all their monthly bills in full.

Percent of Chicagoans



Question: Which best describes your ability to pay all of your bills in full in a typical month?

Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents.



About 2 in 10 (18%) employed Chicagoans think it's likely that they will lose their job in the next year. This is similar to polls taken in Winter 2025 and Spring 2026.

About 4 in 10 Chicagoans feel that violent crime has gone up in the city, and about a third feel it has gone up in their own neighborhoods. Six in 10 report feeling unsafe walking alone in their neighborhoods at night.

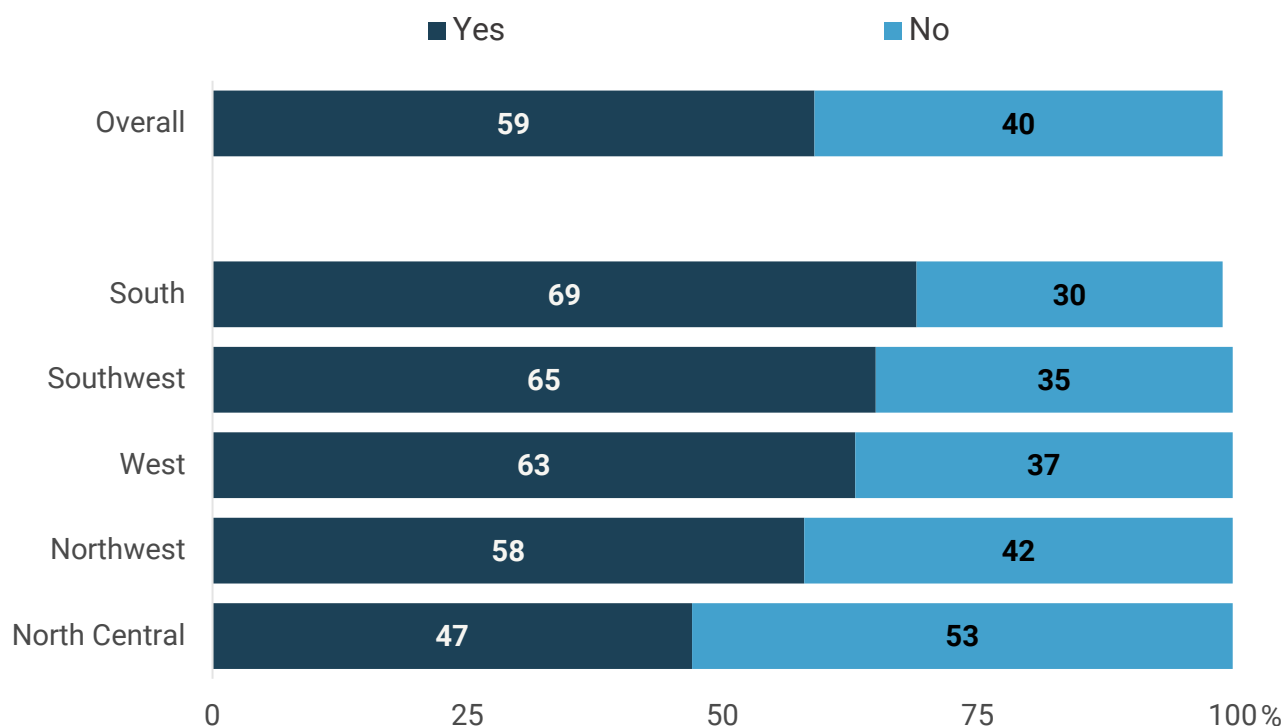
Six in 10 (59%) Chicagoans report that there are areas around their homes where they would be afraid to walk alone at night. This is similar to findings from November 2025, when 58% said the same.

Women are more likely than men to report areas around their homes where they are afraid to walk alone at night. However, concerns about walking alone at night are not limited to women (65%) with about half of men (53%) also reporting the same.

Chicago residents in the North Central region (47%) are less likely than all other Chicago regions, including the South (69%), the Southwest (65%), the West (63%), and the Northwest (58%), to report areas around their homes they would be afraid to walk alone at night.

Six in 10 Chicago adults are afraid to walk alone at night around their homes.

Percent of Chicagoans



Question: Is there any area around your home- that is, within a mile- where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?

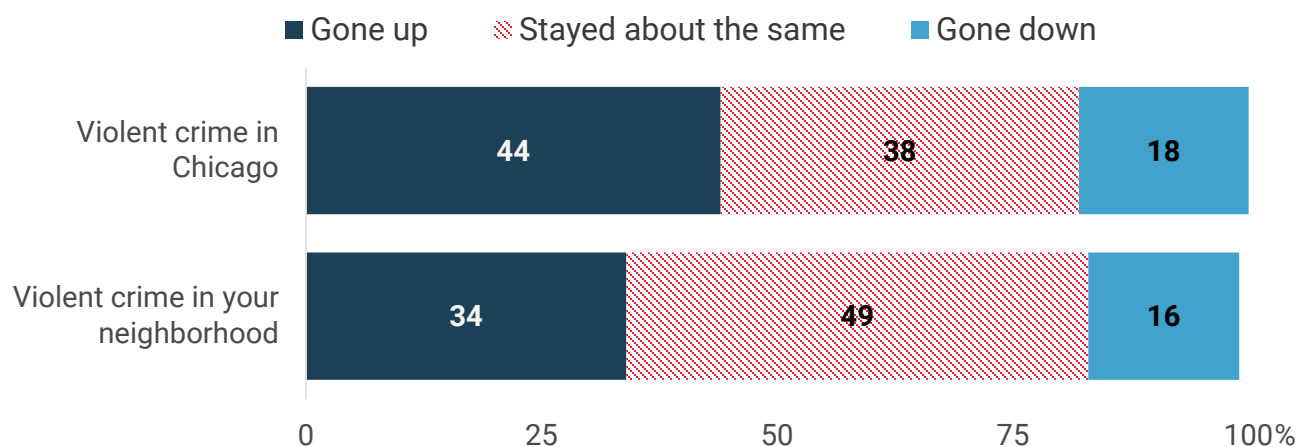
Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents.



Over the past year, 44% of Chicagoans think violent crime overall in the city has gone up some or a lot, while 38% say it has stayed the same. At the same time, about a third of Chicagoans (34%) think violent crime in their own neighborhoods has increased some or a lot while 49% think it has stayed the same. Similar shares think violent crime has gone down some or a lot both in the city of Chicago (18%) and in their own neighborhoods (16%).

More Chicagoans think violent crime has gone up in Chicago overall than in their own neighborhoods.

Percent of Chicagoans



Question: Over the past year, do you think violent crime in [Chicago/your neighborhood] has:

Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents.

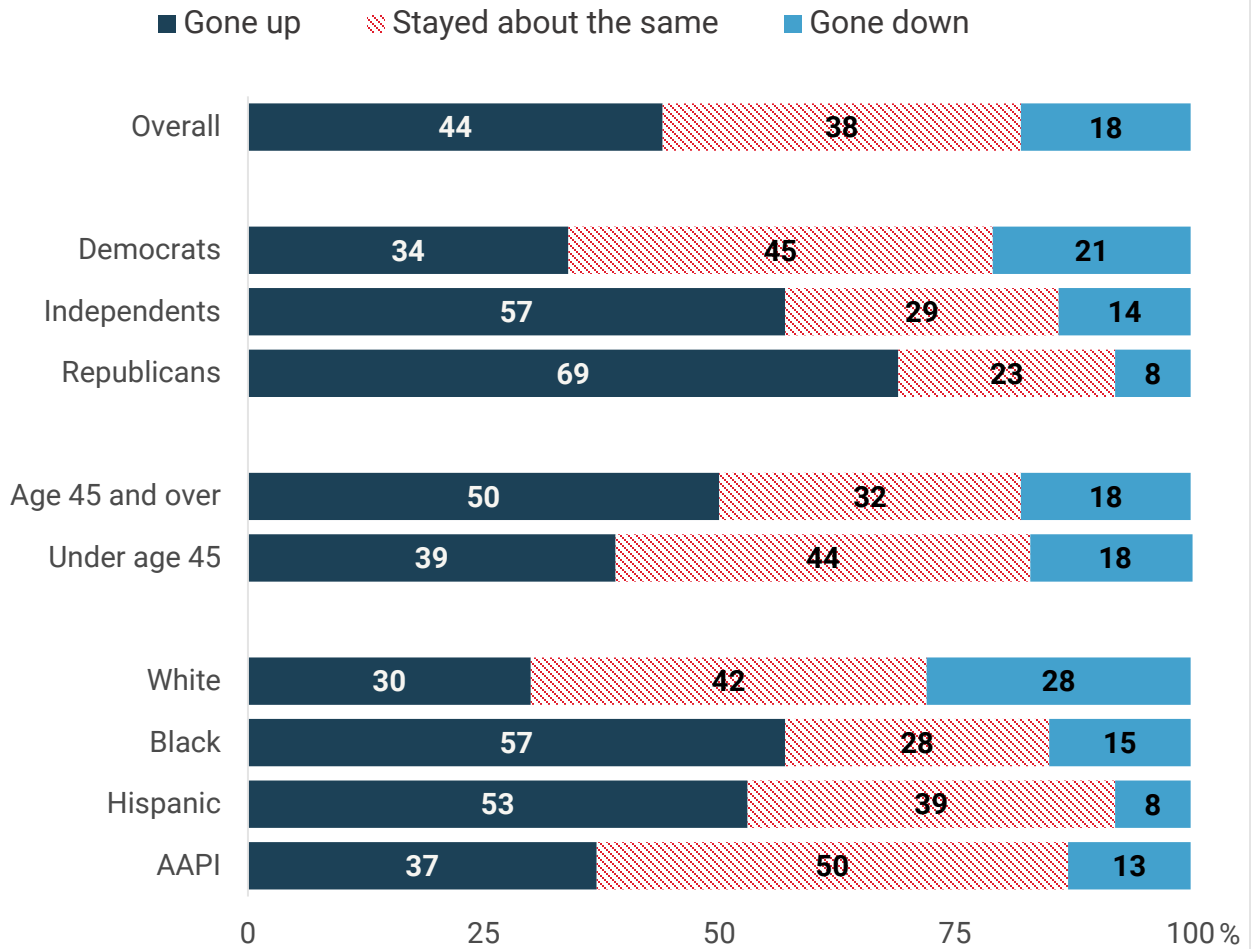


Views on violent crime in Chicago differ by political affiliation and age. Republicans, independents, and adults ages 45 and older are more likely to perceive an increase in violent crime citywide, while Democrats and adults under 45 are more likely to report that crime has stayed about the same or declined.

Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than white adults to say that violent crime has increased in Chicago, while AAPI adults fall between these groups in their perceptions. In contrast, white adults are more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to report that violent crime in Chicago has decreased.

Republicans, older adults, and Black and Hispanic adults are more likely to say crime has gone up in the city of Chicago.

Percent of Chicagoans



Question: Over the past year, do you think violent crime in Chicago has:

Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents.

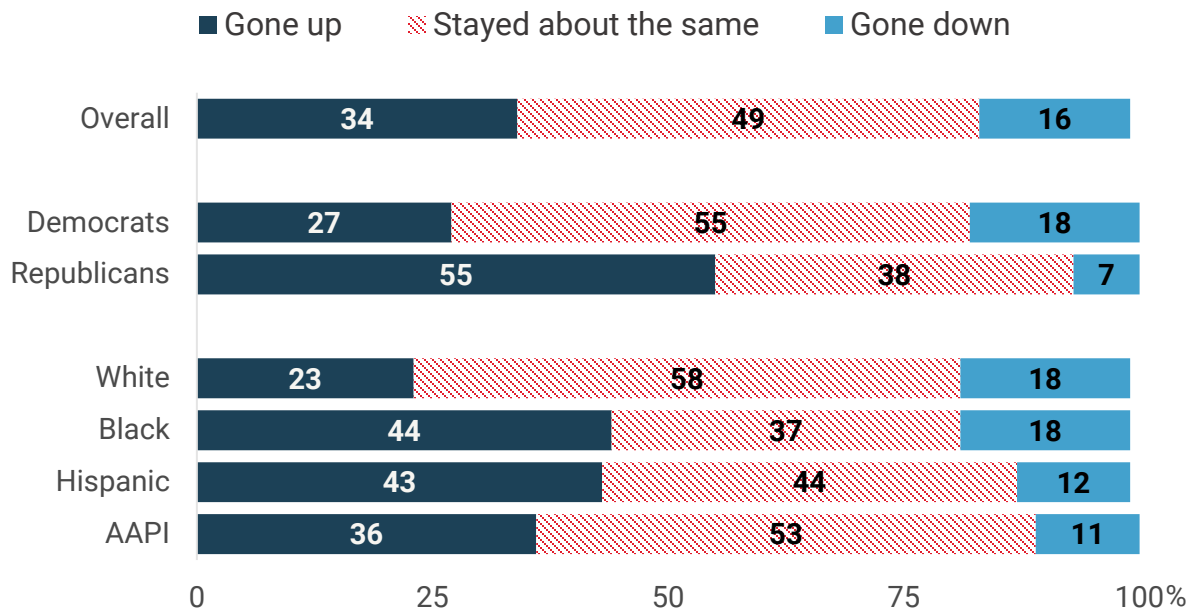
*Note: Findings among AAPI adults are not significantly different from other groups.



Similar patterns emerge with party identification, when it comes to violent crime *in their own neighborhoods*. Democrats are again more likely than Republicans to say crime in their neighborhoods has stayed about the same or gone down, while Republicans are more likely to say the opposite. Hispanic adults are more likely than white adults to say crime has gone up in their neighborhoods, while white adults are more likely than Hispanic adults to say it has remained about the same. About half of AAPI adults say it has remained about the same, and roughly 4 in 10 of Black adults say it has gone up.

Republicans and Hispanic adults are more likely to say crime has gone up in their own neighborhoods.

Percent of Chicagoans



Question: Over the past year, do you think violent crime in your neighborhood has:

Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents.

*Note: Findings among Black and AAPI adults are not significantly different from other groups.



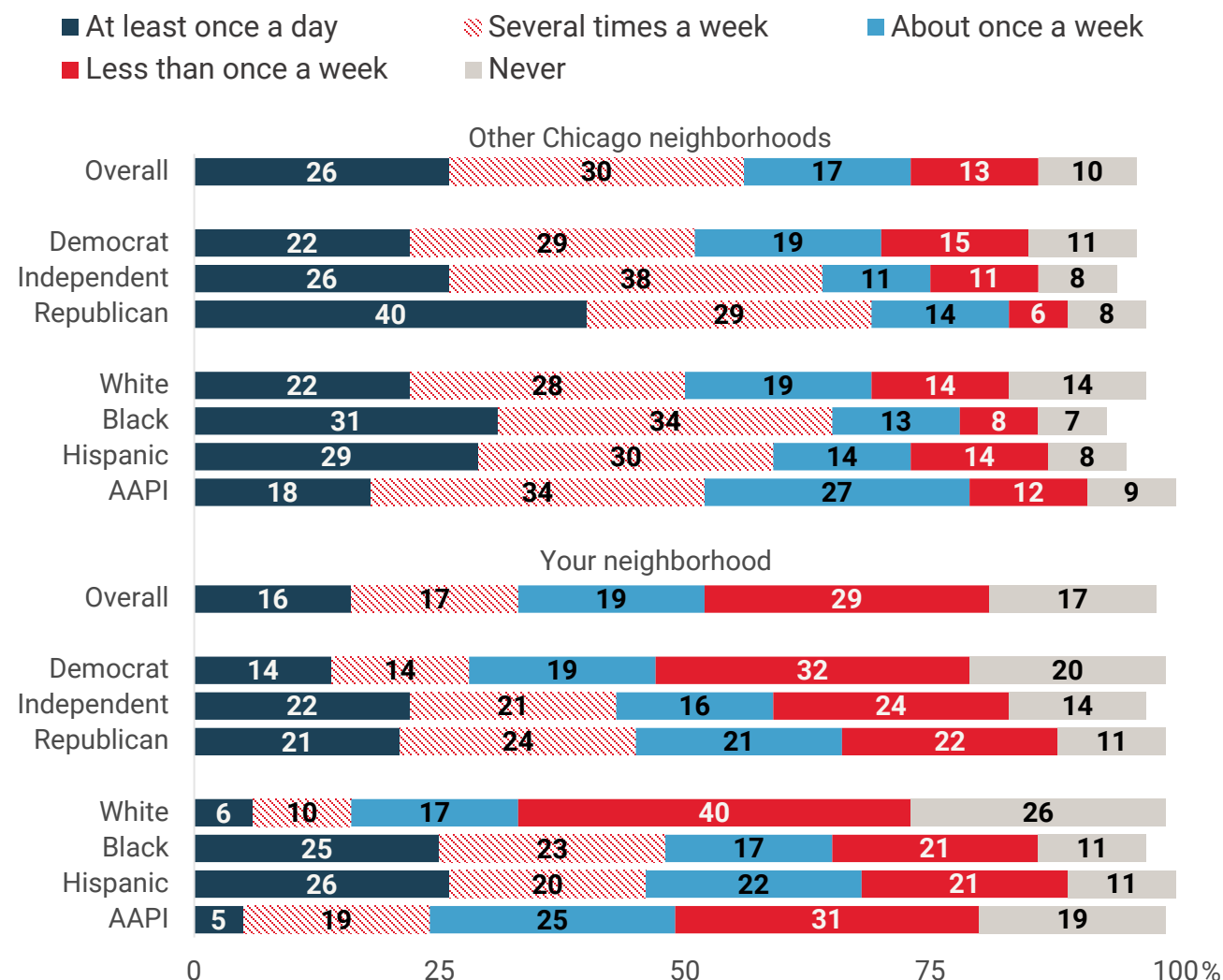
Similar to how Chicagoans view violent crime in Chicago versus their own neighborhoods, more claim they see information on social media platforms about violent crimes occurring in other Chicago neighborhoods at least once a day or several times a week compared to in their own neighborhoods.

Republicans are more likely than Democrats to report seeing information about violent crime in both their own neighborhoods and other parts of Chicago at least several times a week. In contrast, Democrats are more likely to say they encounter this type of content only about once a week or never, regardless of whether it concerns their own neighborhood or other areas of the city.

Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than white and AAPI adults to report frequently seeing social media content about violent crime in their own neighborhoods. Black adults are also more likely than white adults to say they encounter information about violent crime in other Chicago neighborhoods on a daily basis.

More Chicagoans report frequently seeing social media content about violent crime in other Chicago neighborhoods than in their own communities.

Percent of Chicagoans



Question: How often do you see information on social media platforms (e.g., Citizen, X/Twitter, Facebook, TikTok) about violent crimes occurring in each of the following areas?

Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents.

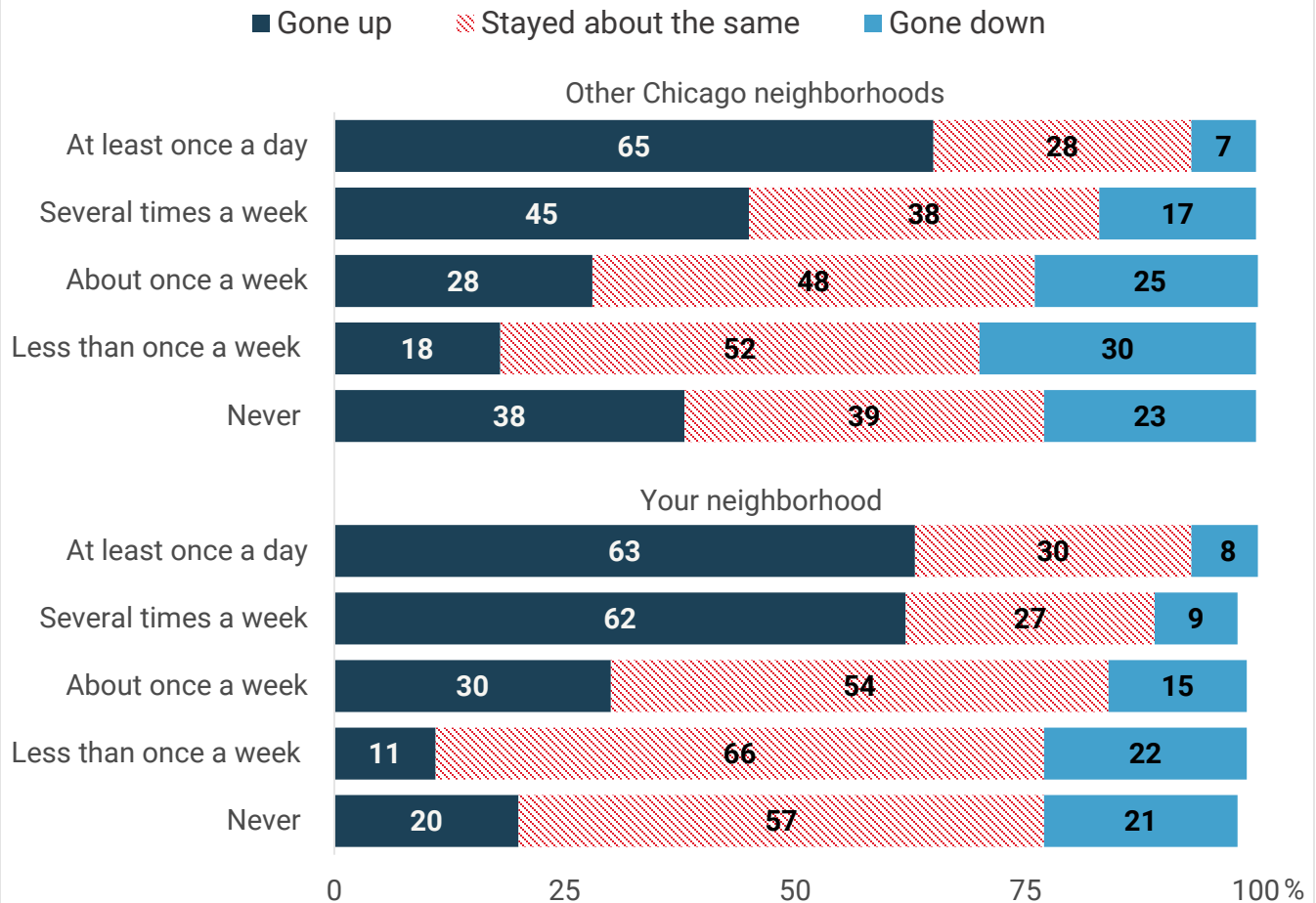


Perceptions of violent crime are closely tied to exposure to crime-related information on social media. Chicagoans who report seeing social media content about violent crime in their own neighborhoods or elsewhere in the city more frequently are more likely to believe that violent

crime has increased. In contrast, those who encounter such content less often are more likely to say that violent crime has remained about the same or decreased.

Chicagoans who have seen violent crime content on social media more frequently are more likely to say crime has gone up.

Percent of Chicagoans



Question: Over the past year, do you think violent crime in your neighborhood has; How often do you see information on social media platforms (e.g., Citizen, X/Twitter, Facebook, TikTok) about violent crimes occurring in each of the following areas?

Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents.



When asked what they would do if they were experiencing an ongoing non-emergency conflict with someone on their block, Chicagoans most often say they would first contact the police (33%) or try to resolve the situation themselves (33%). Others would call city services (14%). Fewer would

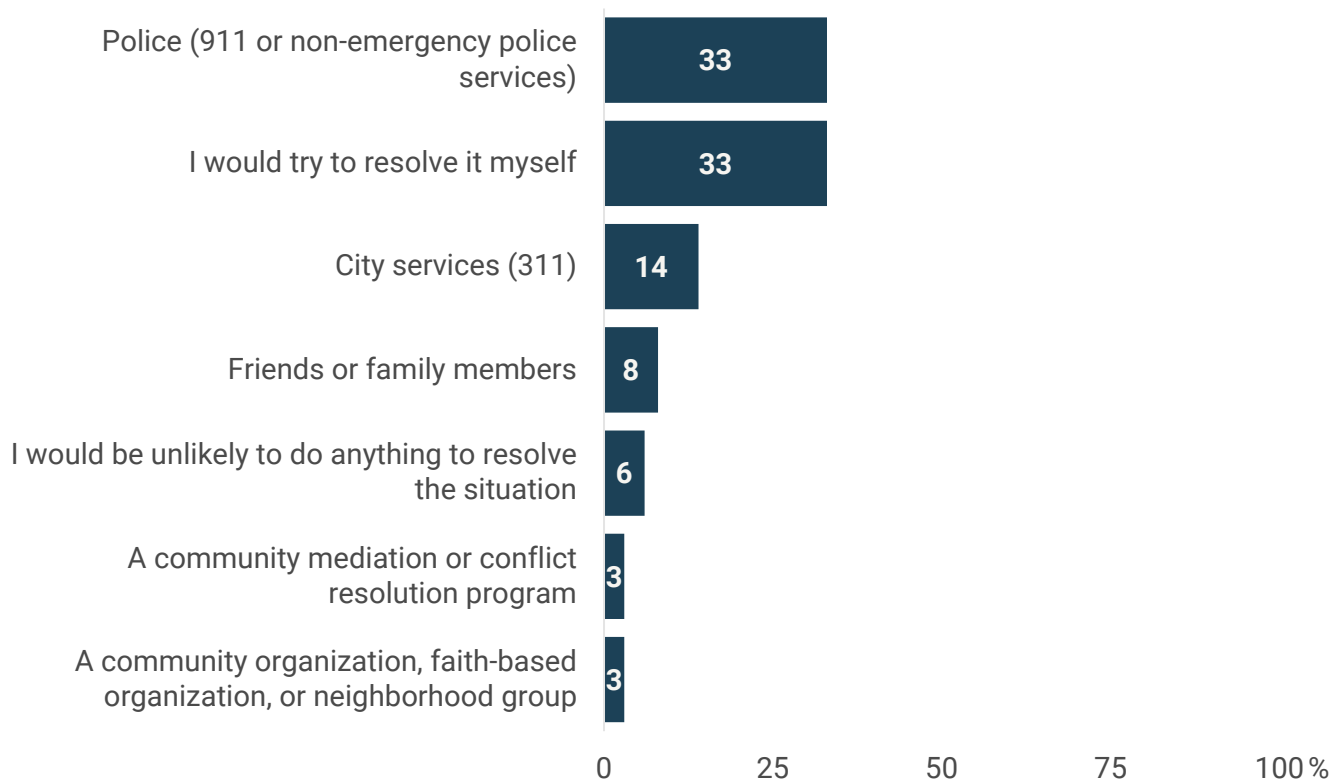
use community programs or organizations, or friends or family members. Six percent say they would not do anything at all.

Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say they would call the police (44% vs 30%), while Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say they would handle the situation themselves (35% vs 24%). White adults are more likely than Asian American and Pacific Islanders to say they would handle the situation themselves (40% vs 22%).

Women are more likely than men to say they would call the police (38% vs 28%), while men are more likely to say they would handle it themselves (40% vs 26%). Those without a college degree lean more toward calling the police than those with a college degree (40% vs 25%), while those with a college degree would handle it themselves (41% vs 25%).

A majority of Chicagoans would either call the police or handle a non-emergency conflict themselves.

Percent of Chicagoans



Question: If you were experiencing an ongoing non-emergency conflict with someone on your block, which of the following would you be most likely to contact or use first to help resolve the situation?

Source: ChicagoSpeaks Poll conducted June 15-23, 2026 with 1,194 adult Chicago residents.



Study Methodology

Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, ChicagoSpeaks® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the Chicago household population. NORC conducted the ChicagoSpeaks summer 2026 survey using two sample sources: (1) NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panelists who reside in Chicago and (2) NORC's ChicagoSpeaks Panelists.

AmeriSpeak and ChicagoSpeaks are probability-based panels. The final survey estimates were calibrated to account for these different sample sources. This research was done to support a scientifically rigorous, community-driven research resource for informing policymakers and the public with accurate information about the experiences and opinions of all Chicago residents.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between June 15-23, 2026, with Chicago residents aged 18 and older, the overall study target population. Overall, 1,194 Chicago residents completed the survey. AmeriSpeak panelists were invited through the password-protected AmeriSpeak Mobile App and received email reminders and SMS reminders. ChicagoSpeaks panelists received a combination of email and SMS communications. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference, using an online survey. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for completing the survey. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error and there may be other unmeasured error in this or any other survey.

Quality assurance checks were conducted to ensure data quality. In total, 30 interviews were removed for nonresponse to at least 50% of the questions asked of them or for completing the survey in less than one-third the median interview time for the full sample. These interviews were excluded from the data file prior to weighting.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design. Poststratification variables included Chicago region, age, sex, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment. The sociodemographic characteristics are weighted to benchmarks from the American Community Survey 2024 1-year estimates.

For more information, email ChicagoSpeaks-BD@norc.org or visit go.norc.org/ChicagoSpeaks.

<https://www.norc.org/research/projects/chicagospeaks.html>