

Humphrey Institute and MPR News Poll

Domestic Issues Dominate Campaign but Democrats and Republicans Differ

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance

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According to a Humphrey Institute and Minnesota Public Radio News poll conducted between January 20 and January 27, 2008, Minnesotan Democrats and Republicans are focused on the home front but differ in important respects.

Key results include:

- Domestic issues have replaced national security as dominant concern of Minnesota residents in both political parties.
- Democrats and Republicans differ on the importance of Iraq and terrorism as challenges.
- Despite intense campaigning on taxes and immigration, Republicans and Democrats attach similarly muted importance to each.
- Republicans are uninterested in global warming.
- Democrats are extraordinarily disenchanted with government performance with loyalists in both parties sharply polarized in their evaluations.
- Democrats and Republicans disagree over which party will better handle key issues, though Republicans are a bit more ambivalent about their Party.

Domestic Issues Dominate Public Concerns: Minnesotan Republicans and Democrats share a similar sense that domestic issues are the most important problems facing the country and them personally. The economy and jobs are the primary national problem for all partisans with health care landing further back (second for Republicans and third for Democrats). Partisans also similarly single out the economy as “extremely important” to them personally, with Democrats putting a bit more emphasis on health care.

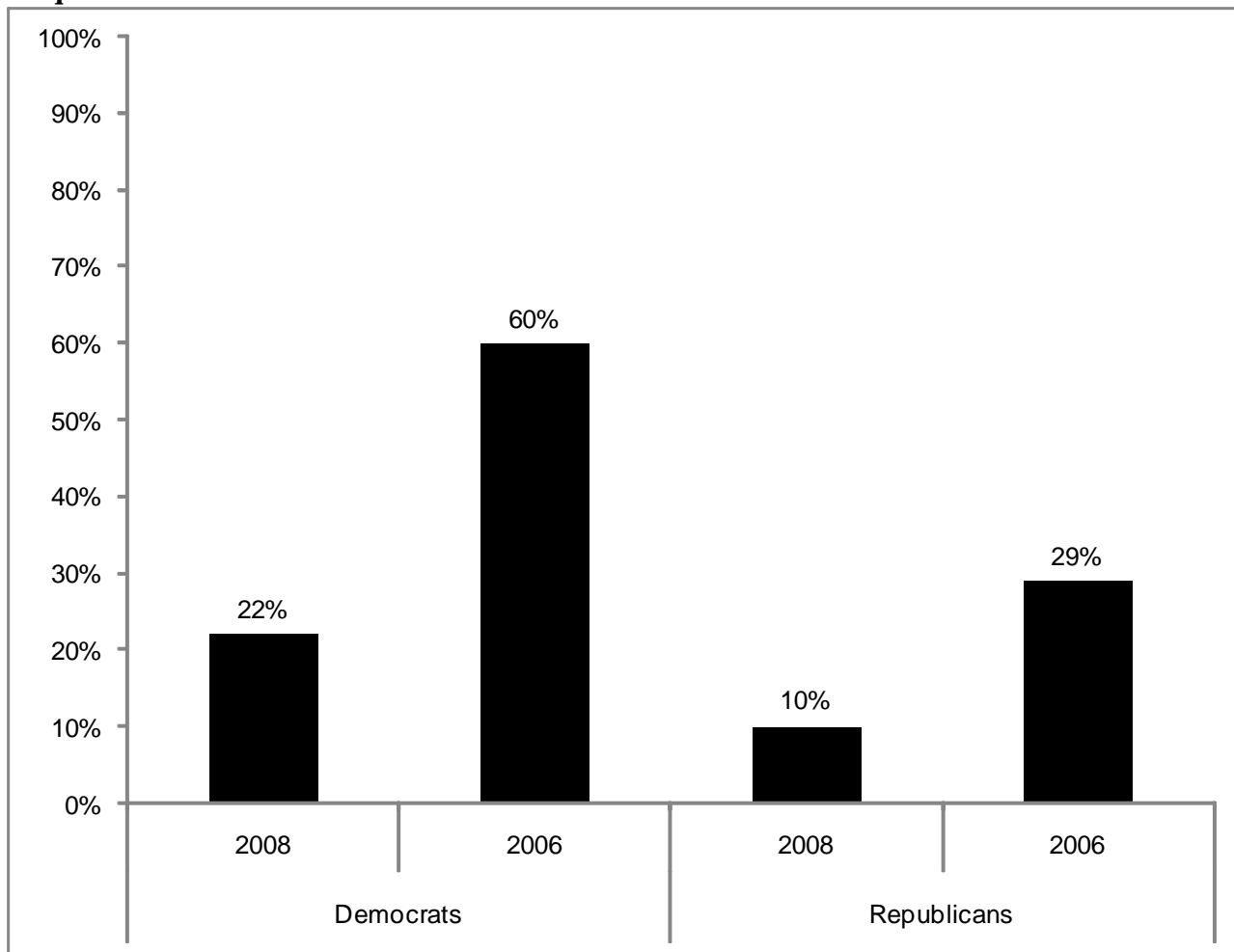
	Rank as Most Important Problem Facing Country		Rating as “Extremely Important” Personally	
	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans
Economy and Jobs	#1 (42%)	#1 (35%)	#2 (49%)	#1 (40%)
Health Care	#3 (15%)	#2 (12%)	#1 (55%)	#2 (33%)

Number of Republican Minnesotans interviewed, 317; Margin of Error of 5.5; Number of Democratic Minnesotans interviewed, 478; Margin of Error, 4.5. Ratings of personal importance may total more than 100 because the issues were asked independent of one another.

National security no longer dominant concern but source of partisan divide: Iraq continues to be identified as a primary national problem but it has slid from the dominant perch it once enjoyed.

In October 2006, Iraq was the single most important problem facing the country in the minds of both Democrats (60%) and Republicans (29%) who were likely voters. By January 2008, the top ranking of Iraq had plummeted among Minnesotans in both parties – 22 percent among Democrats and 10 percent among Republicans.

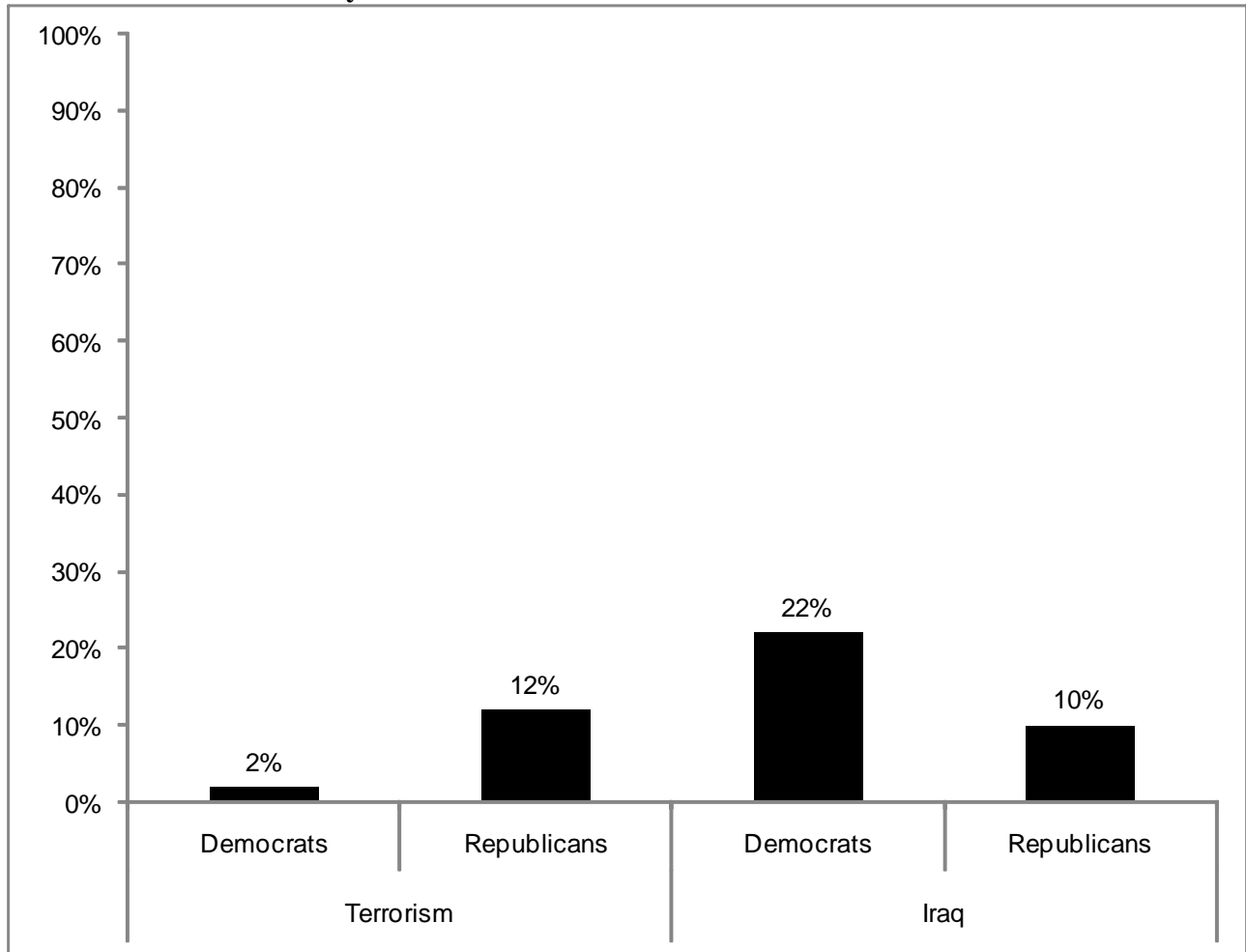
Iraq's Slide as National Problem



Note: The 2008 survey is based on sample of Minnesota residents; the October 2006 survey was based on sample of 663 likely voters.

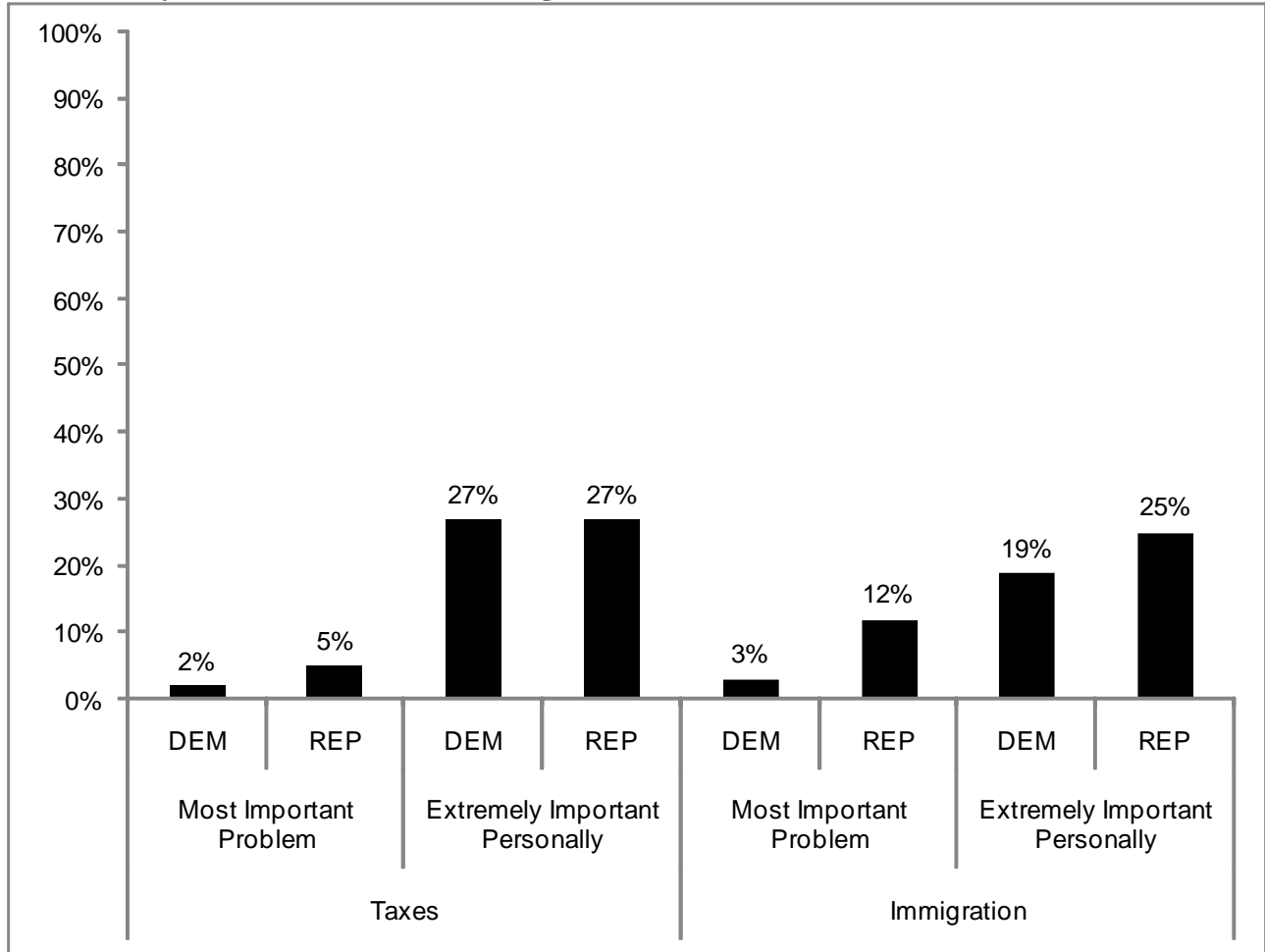
Importance of Iraq and terrorism divide partisans in 2008. Terrorism is singled out by far more Republicans (12%) than Democrats (2%). By contrast, Iraq is identified as the country's most pressing problem by more Democrats (22%) than Republicans (10%).

The New National Security Divide



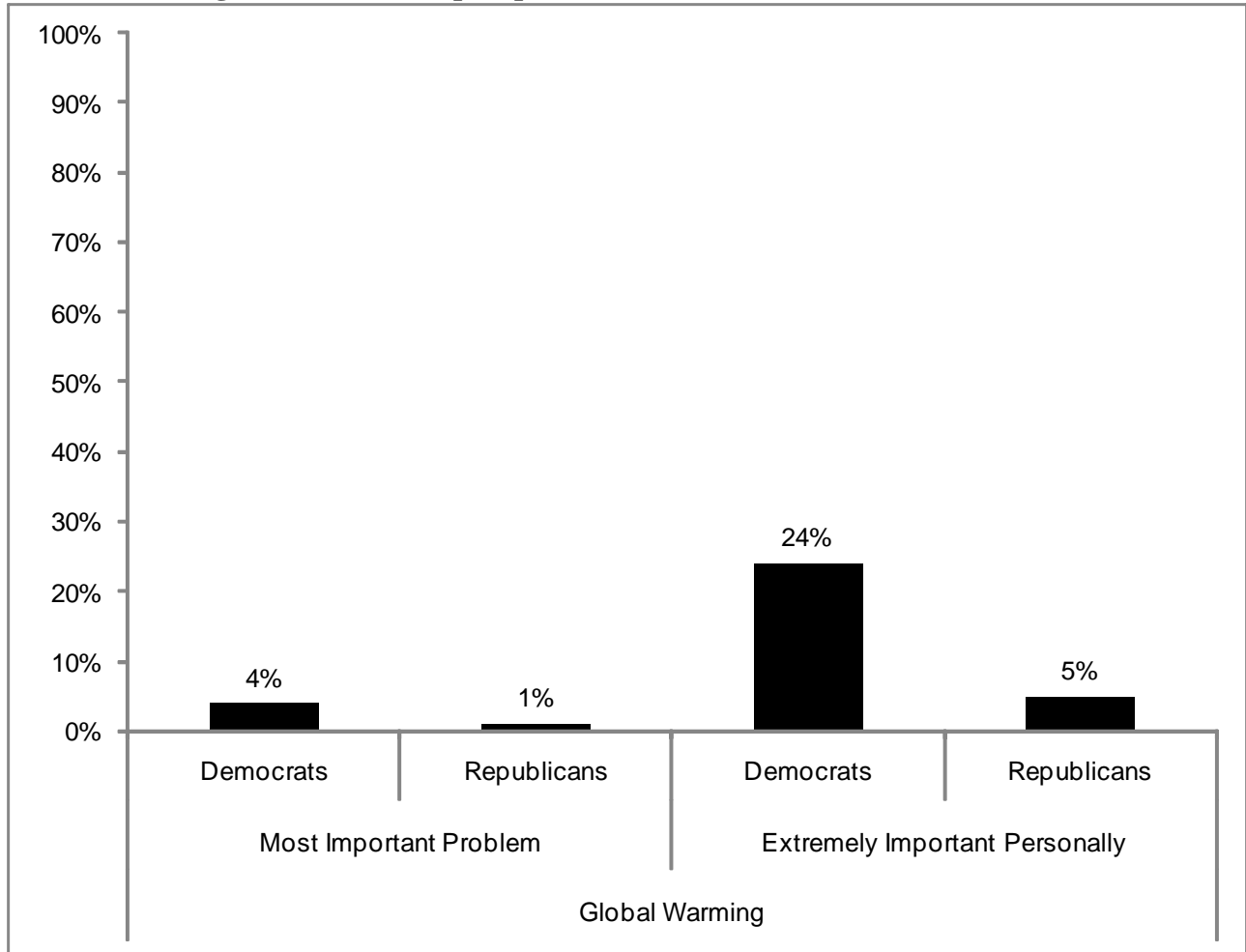
Some surprises, taxes and immigration concern in both parties and Republicans uninterested in global warming: One of the big surprises in 2008 is that nearly identical proportions of Minnesota Democrats and Republicans agree on the national and personal importance of taxes. Republicans put a bit more emphasis on immigration but there is not the large discrepancy with Democrats that might be assumed from the campaign debate. Even among Republicans, immigration receives far less attention than the economy receives as a national and personal concern. (In terms of personal importance, health care, education, and Iraq are all rated as more important issues than immigration.)

Muted Party Divide on Taxes and Immigration



Global warming does not register among Republicans as a national problem (just 1%) or as an extremely important issue to them personally (5%). By contrast, 24 percent of Democrats identify it as an extremely important issue to them personally, and 4 percent list it as the single most important problem facing the country.

Global Warming Fails to Warm up Republicans

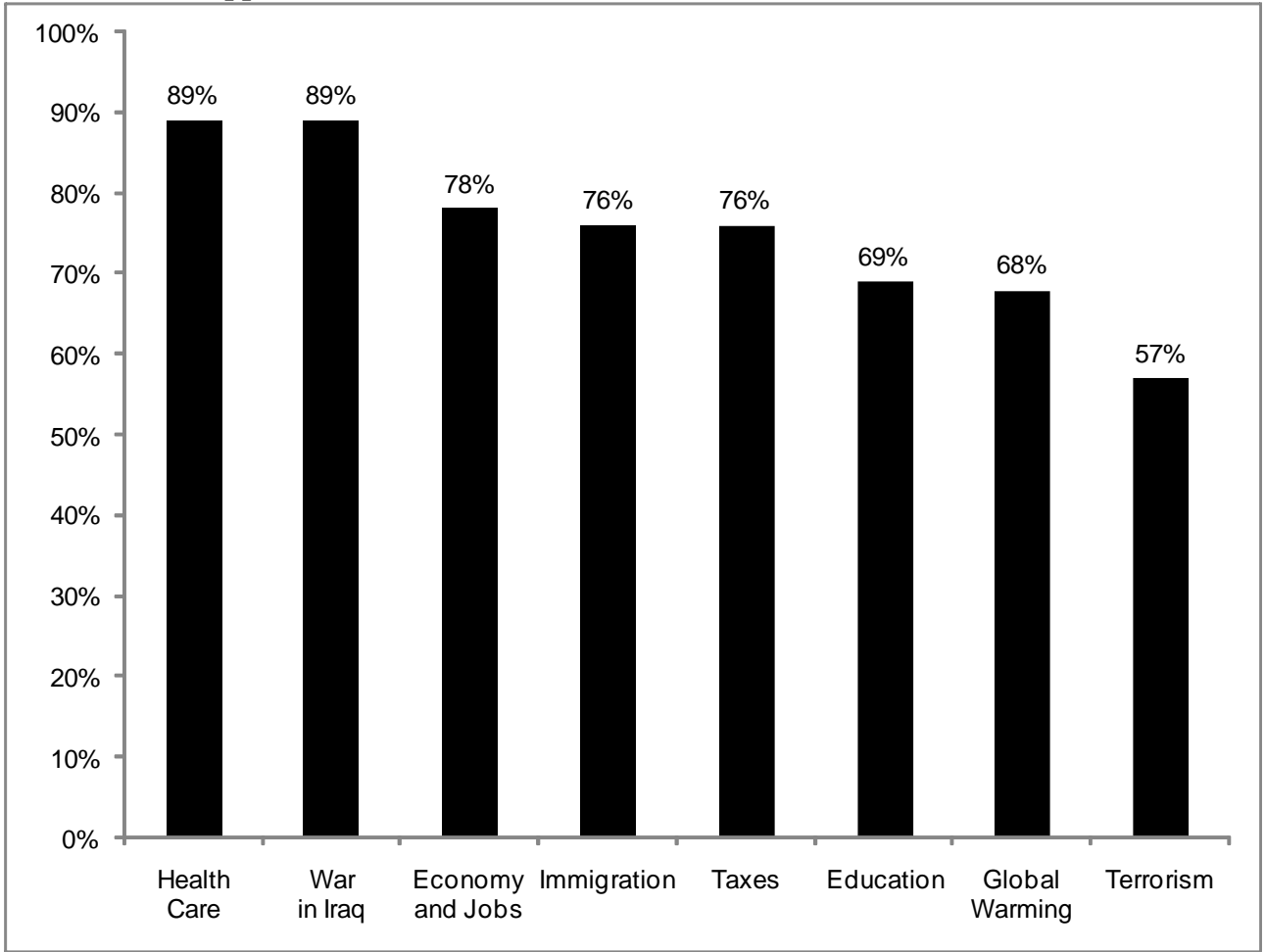


Discontent Over Government Performance.

Republicans and, especially, Democrats disapprove of government performance on a range of domestic and foreign policy issues. Although both sets of party loyalists give government low grades, there are some notable disagreements.

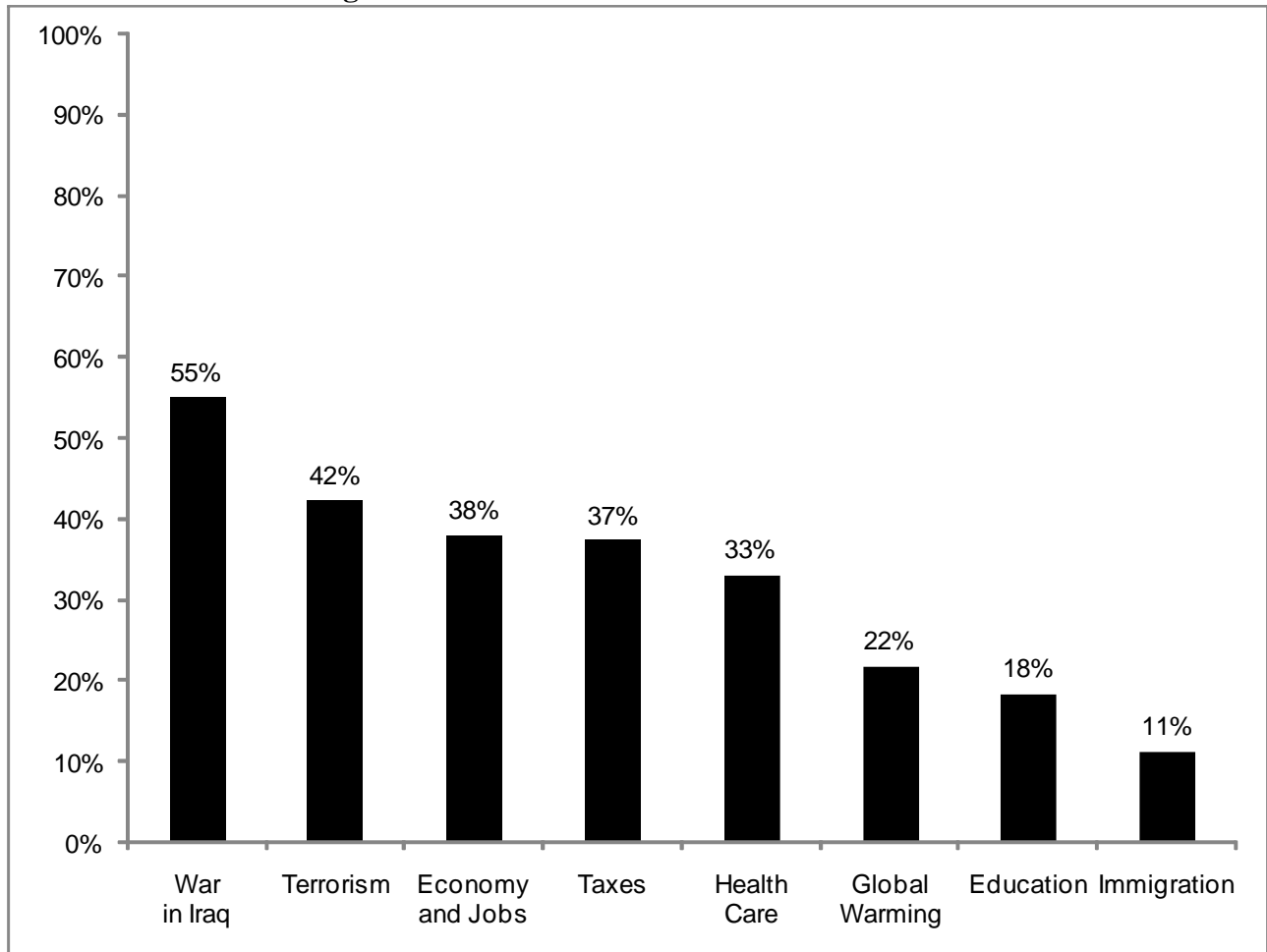
Democrats are extraordinarily disenchanted with government performance. Between 6 and 9 out of 10 Democrats disapprove of the federal government's handling of a range of issues from Iraq and terrorism to the economy, health care, education, taxes, and other issues.

Democratic Disapproval of Federal Government Performance



Partisans are sharply polarized in their evaluations of government performance. President George W. Bush's control of the White House appears to be triggering strong Democratic criticism and consistent (though not uniform) Republican approval. The gaps between Republican and Democratic approval of the federal government's handling of a range of domestic and foreign policy issues is staggering, reaching 55 points on Iraq, 42 points on terrorism, 38 points on the economy, and 37 points on taxes. Partisanship, rather than objective evaluation, appears to be driving perceptions of government performance.

Polarization in Evaluating Government Performance

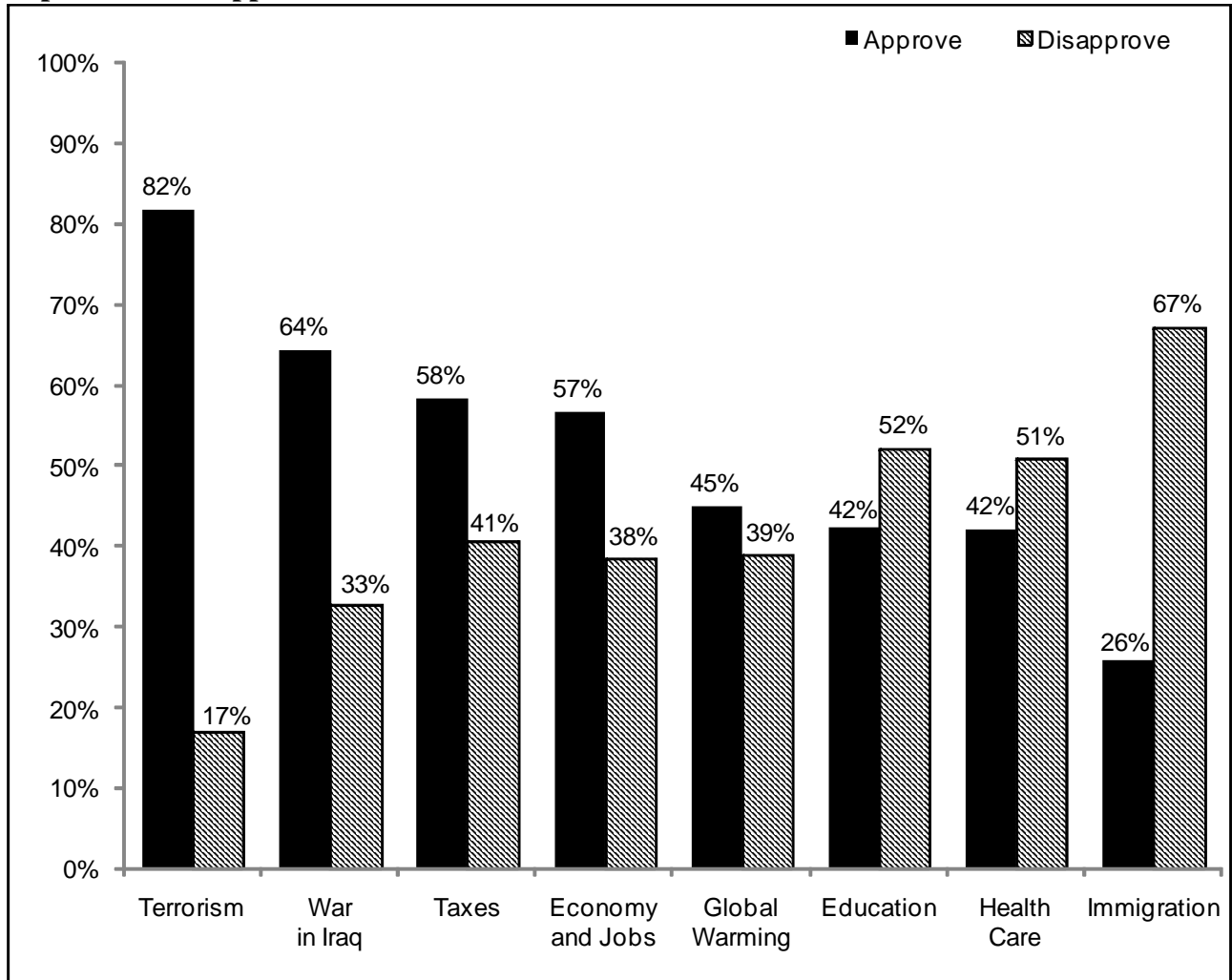


This graph shows the percentage point difference between Democratic and Republican approval of the federal government's handling of the specific issue. More positive numbers mean greater approval among Republicans.

Despite the sharp differences in how Democrats and Republicans size up government performance, there are a few interesting wrinkles. Four out of 10 Democrats approve of the government's handling of terrorism.

Sizeable numbers of Republicans are going AWOL. Majorities disapprove of the federal government's handling of immigration (67%), education (52%), and health care (51%).

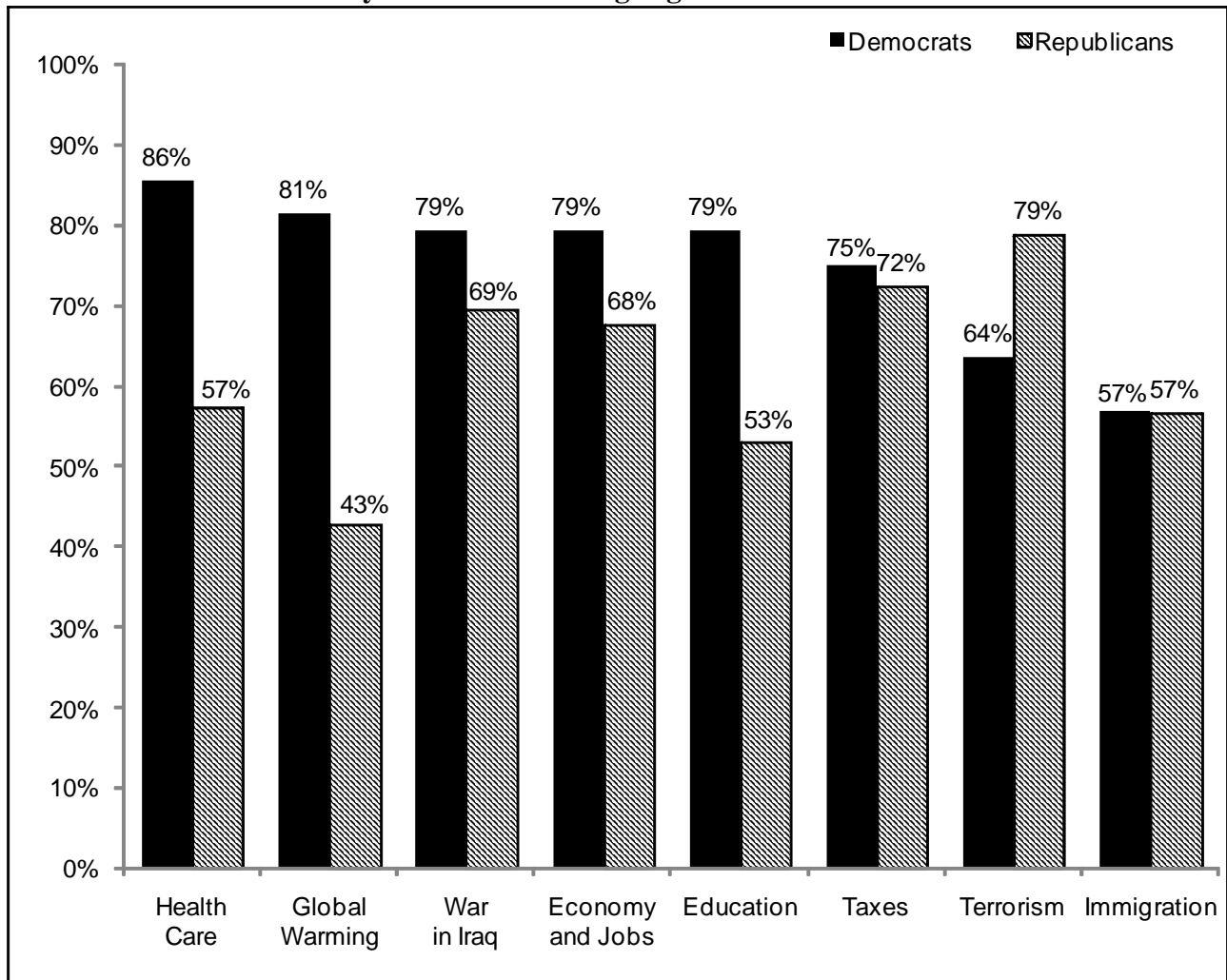
Republicans Disapprove of the Federal Government Performance



Democrats and Republicans Disagree over Which Party to Trust

Polarized evaluations of party performance: Democrats and Republicans sharply disagree about which party would better handle the pressing domestic and foreign policy issues facing the country. Six to 8 out of 10 Democrats believe their party rather than the GOP would do a better job handling the issues. Republican preferences for their party also range up to 8 out of 10 of their faithful.

Partisans Believe Own Party Better at Handling Big Issues



This graph shows the percentage of partisans who think their own party is better at handling each issue.

Democrats are remarkably unified in distrusting the Republican Party to handle issues better. Trust in Republican performance ranges from a mere 2 percent on health care to 10 percent on terrorism.

Republicans are a bit more ambivalent. In 5 out of 8 issues, Republican confidence in the Democratic Party is in double digits. Republican doubts about their party are particularly pronounced on global warming, education, and health care where a fifth to a quarter believe that the Democrat Party would handle the issue better and another quarter or so did not choose either major party.

About the Survey

The survey is collaboration between Minnesota Public Radio and the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. The survey was analyzed by the Center. The research team was Lawrence R. Jacobs (director) and Joanne M. Miller (Department of Political Science). Melanie Burns was the team's research and data analyst.

The survey was fielded by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut, which has extensive national and state experience conducting non-partisan surveys on politics and government policy. CSRA called a sample of telephone exchanges that was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within the State of Minnesota. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. The sample was designed to represent different regions of the state in proportion to the number of adults living in each region. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

The results have been weighted to reflect the number of adults in a household and the number of telephone lines reaching the household as well as the demographic characteristics of Minnesota based on region, sex, age, education, and race.

917 residents of Minnesota were interviewed by telephone between January 20 and January 27, 2008; 317 identified themselves as Republican and 478 identified themselves as Democratic. The margin of error for the full sample of Minnesota residents (917) is 3.2 percentage points, 5.5 points for the sub-sample of Republicans, and 4.5. points for the sub-sample of Democrats. In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among Minnesota residents will differ by no more than 3.2 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all likely voters in the state. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.