



2026 Competitiveness Poll:

A Companion to the MTF Competitiveness Index

Presented in conjunction with the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation

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**Massachusetts
Taxpayers Foundation**

The MTF Competitiveness Index

- MTF will soon release its third annual Massachusetts Competitiveness Index.
 - Ranks Massachusetts against other states on 27 competitiveness metrics.
 - A consistent finding is the tension between the Commonwealth's talent and the cost to live here.
- For competitiveness, while the data are critical, it is also true that perception can be reality.
- For the last 2 years, MTF has commissioned MPG to survey Massachusetts residents on how they think we compare to other states.



Massachusetts Competitiveness Index 2026



Survey Background

- Results are based on a survey of 999 Massachusetts residents age 18+.
- The survey was conducted online from June 24 – July 14, 2026.
- Results were weighted by race, age, gender, education, political party, and county to reflect known and estimated population parameters for Massachusetts residents.
- This poll was funded by the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation as a companion to its 2026 Competitiveness Index.

Key findings

- **Massachusetts remains a desirable, though expensive, place to live**, with most saying it is better than other states. Those in lower-income households or with less education are less likely to offer favorable reviews.
- **Massachusetts is seen as better on education, health care, public service, and the strength of our local services**, and worse on commute times and housing costs. Pessimism has grown as to the state of the country, while views of Massachusetts have stayed fairly stable.
- **Affordability is by far the biggest concern for Massachusetts residents**. It is the focus of residents' state and national policy priorities and comes up throughout the survey. Housing costs are the top affordability issue, both in open-ended comments and several other places in the survey.

Key findings

- **Many come to Massachusetts for school and then depart.** New analysis shows the completion of higher education programs is a major driver of Massachusetts outmigration. A slice of residents come for higher education and leave when it is complete.
- **Departing graduates cite different concerns.** Reasons for leaving among those completing their education are very different than those at other stages of life. Those not working on education are more likely to cite cost of living, taxes, and weather.
- **Balancing costs for residents and businesses.** To keep Massachusetts thriving, most see a need to focus on both affordability for everyday people and on keeping businesses thriving.

Massachusetts as a place to live

- Views of Massachusetts compared to other states are stable since 2025, with majorities seeing the state as above average.

Most continue to see Massachusetts as a better place to live than most states

% who say Massachusetts is better / worse than other states as a place to live

	2025	2026
One of the best	29%	26%
Above average	34%	37%
One of the Best + Above Average	63%	63%
Middle of the pack	23%	23%
Below average	8%	8%
One of the worst	4%	4%
Unsure	2%	2%

Massachusetts as a place to do business

- As in 2025, about half residents see Massachusetts as better than other states in terms of a place to do business, down from 2025.

Half say Massachusetts is a better place to do business, down slightly from 2025

% who say Massachusetts is better / worse than other states as a place to do business

	2025	2026
One of the best	19%	16%
Above average	40%	35%
One of the Best + Above Average	59%	51%
Middle of the pack	24%	28%
Below average	9%	9%
One of the worst	4%	5%
Unsure	5%	6%

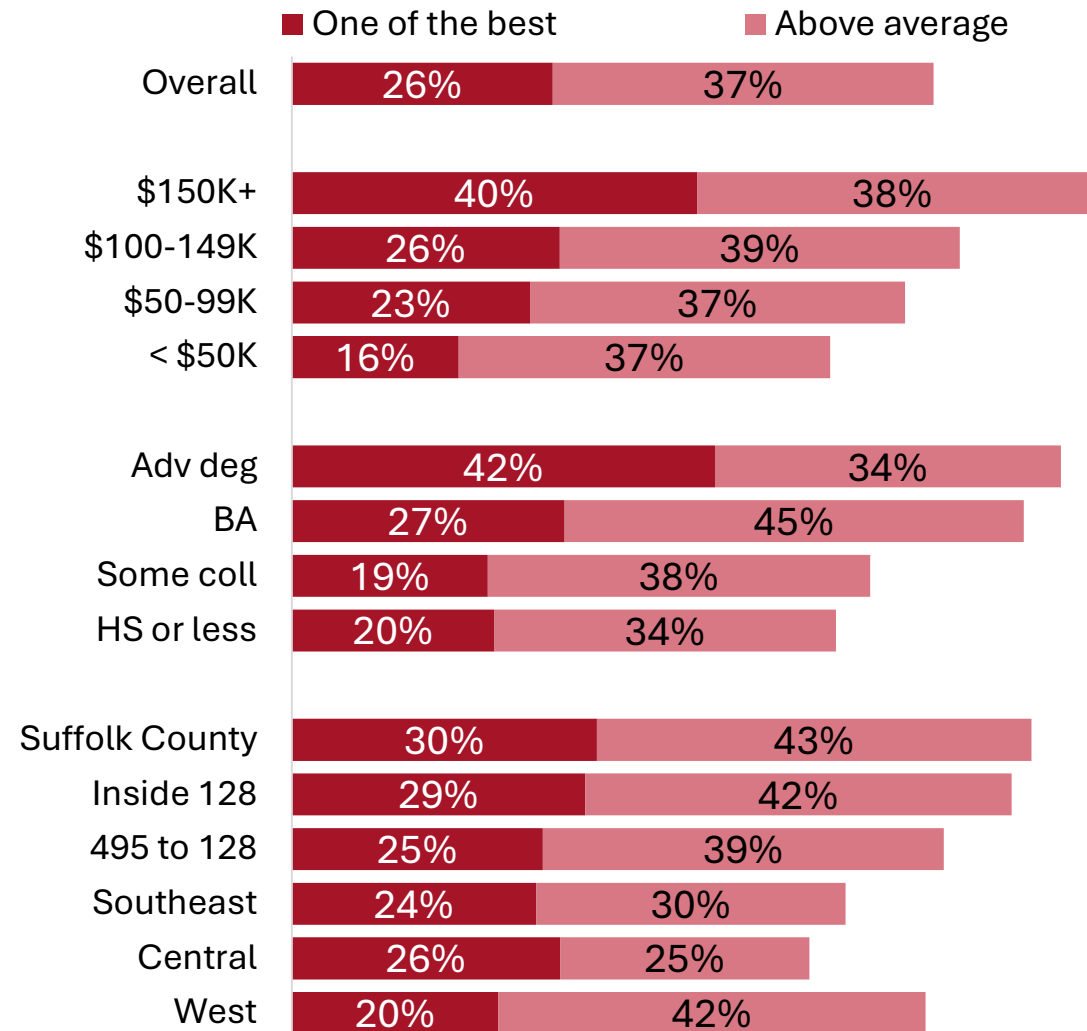
Who sees Massachusetts as better than elsewhere

- Those with higher levels of income and education are far more likely to see Massachusetts as preferable to competitor states.
- Residents who live closer to Boston are much more likely to see Massachusetts favorably than are residents of other regions of the state.

Q: Overall, how would you rank Massachusetts as a place to live compared to other states?

Despite challenges, over 60% say Mass is a better place to live

% who say Massachusetts is ____ compared to other states



Competitiveness Scores

- Having multiple data points for each item can make comparisons across subgroups difficult.
- Subtracting the percentage of residents who think Massachusetts is below average from those who think we are above average creates a single “competitiveness score” for each item in the survey.

	Raw results	Total above, below average
One of the best	26%	63%
Above average	37%	
<i>Middle of the pack</i>	23%	
Below average	8%	12%
One of the worst	4%	
<i>Unsure</i>	2%	
COMPETITIVENESS SCORE (% above average minus % below average)		51

Competitiveness Scores: Quality of Life

- A positive score (shades of blue) indicates more residents think the state is above average than below.
- A negative score (shades of red) means more residents think the state is below average than above.

Item Description	Index Score
Quality of health care	69
Quality of K-12 educational system	60
Quality of local public services	50
Strength of our communities	49
Availability of childcare	26
Commute times	0
Availability of housing	-21
Overall affordability	-36

Why live in Massachusetts?

- Reasons to live in Massachusetts are heavily influenced by age and socioeconomic status.

Reasons to live in Massachusetts vary widely by age and household income

% who select each reason as one of their top 3 reasons to live in Mass.

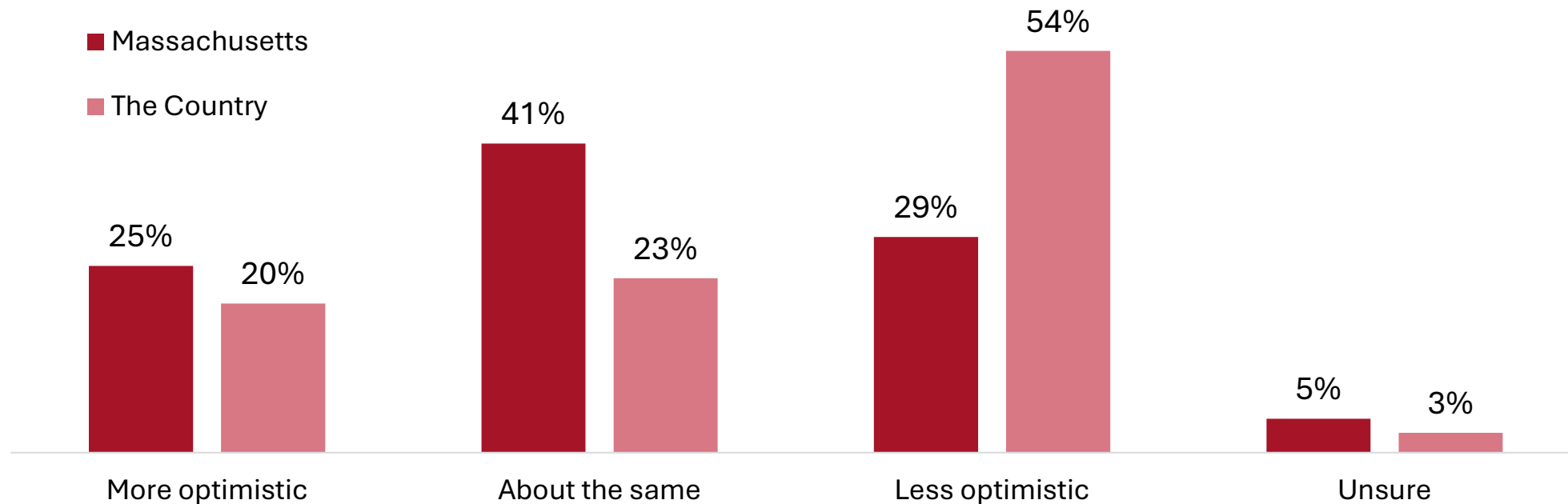
	Overall	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	< \$50K	\$50-99K	\$100-149K	\$150K+
I grew up here	51%	50%	49%	53%	54%	62%	57%	44%	36%
To be close to family	44%	36%	45%	45%	48%	50%	43%	46%	33%
Access to good health care	33%	25%	29%	29%	44%	33%	29%	31%	39%
I like the New England lifestyle	29%	26%	24%	29%	36%	27%	36%	29%	24%
Quality of life	27%	33%	26%	25%	24%	22%	30%	27%	30%
Job or career opportunities	23%	26%	30%	23%	14%	14%	22%	27%	34%
Quality of schools	22%	35%	23%	24%	12%	18%	21%	25%	25%
Political or cultural values	16%	13%	19%	15%	17%	11%	19%	18%	18%
I have a strong community here	16%	15%	16%	18%	14%	15%	14%	14%	21%
Access to BOS & other job centers	12%	16%	17%	11%	7%	14%	10%	12%	16%

Direction of Massachusetts / the country

- Pessimism is growing about the direction of the country, while views on the state's direction are more stable (though divided).

Pessimism is growing about the direction of the country compared to last year, while Mass. is stable

% who say they are feel _____ about the direction of Massachusetts and the country since last year

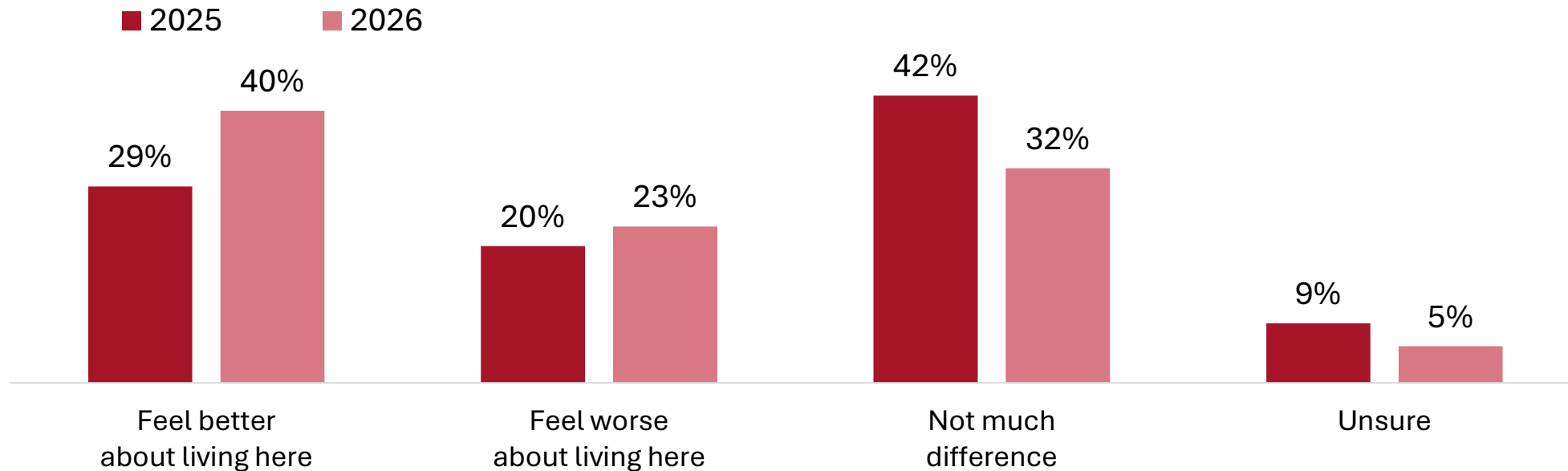


Feeling better / worse about Massachusetts

- Since 2025, more residents now say they feel better about living in Massachusetts than other states.

Compared to 2025, more now say they feel better about living in Massachusetts

% who say federal action makes them feel better / worse about living in Massachusetts compared to elsewhere

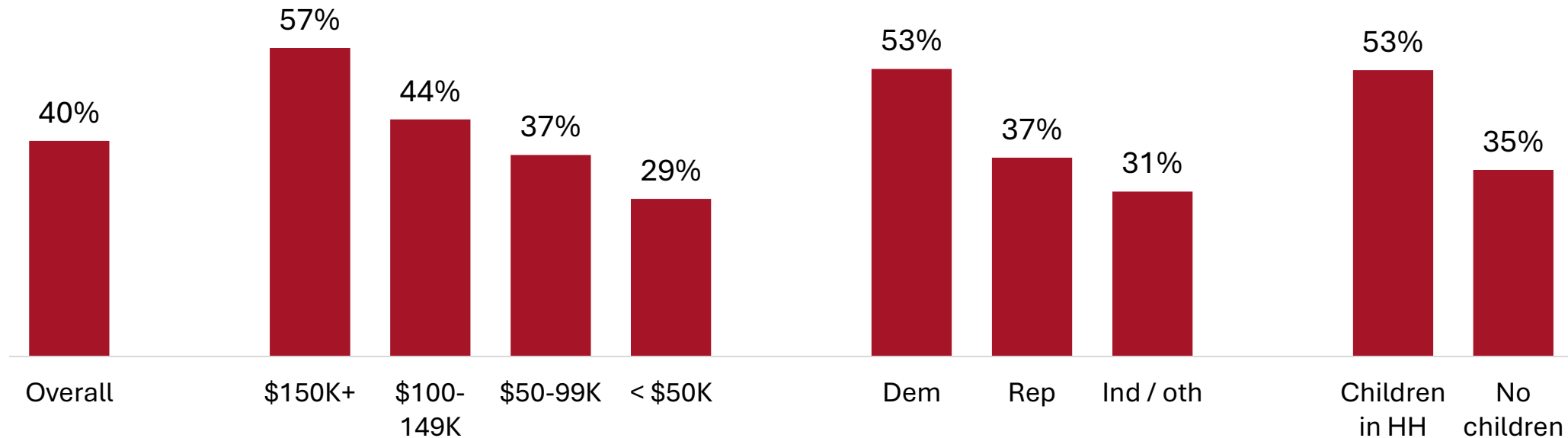


Who feels better about living in Massachusetts?

- Actions at the federal level have made higher income households, Democrats, and households with children more likely to feel better about living in Massachusetts.

Higher income people and Democrats are more likely to say they feel better about living in Massachusetts

% who say actions at the federal level have made them feel better about living in Massachusetts



Preferred national issue focus

- On top issues of affordability and economics, there is cross-partisan agreement on national priorities.
- There is much more partisan division over how important other national policy issues should be.

Q: Which three national issues concern you the most on a day-to-day basis?

Unity across parties on cost concerns, divisions on other issues

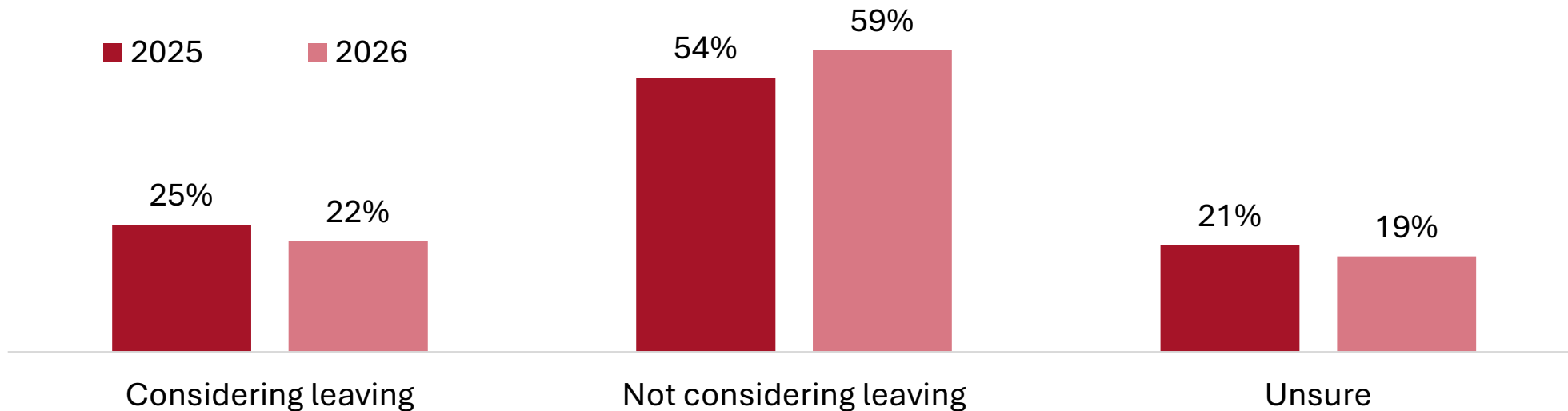
% who say each issue is one of the top 3 facing the country



Considering leaving Massachusetts

- Overall, the number of residents considering leaving Massachusetts has stayed fairly steady since 2025.

From 2025 to 2026, about the same number of residents are considering leaving Massachusetts
% who say they are considering leaving Massachusetts in the next 5 years

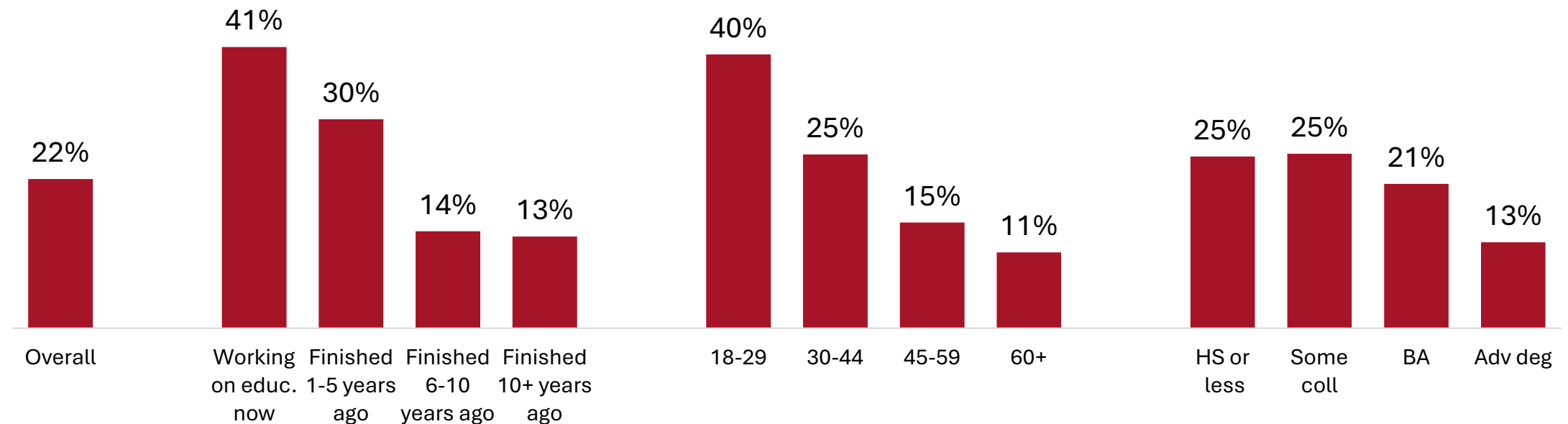


Wrapping up school and leaving

- One of the main reasons young people leave is they are finishing their education, continuing their education elsewhere, etc.

Education is a key reason people come to Massachusetts, and finishing it is a key reason people leave

% who say they are considering leaving Massachusetts in the next 5 years, by life stage



Who is in the group thinking of moving?

- Those considering moving out of Massachusetts are more likely to be young, working on education, and in households with lower income levels than are those planning to stay in Massachusetts.

Q: In the next five years, do you see yourself moving out of Massachusetts?

Movers more likely to be younger, lower income, students

% of movers, non-movers in each demographic group

	Movers	Non-movers
Working on educ	40%	14%
Not working on educ	57%	85%
Prefer not to say	3%	1%
18-29	39%	15%
30-44	29%	24%
45-59	17%	25%
60+	15%	36%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%
High school or less	37%	32%
Some college, no degree	28%	22%
College graduate (BA/BS)	24%	24%
Advanced degree	11%	22%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%
< \$50K	35%	25%
\$50-99K	27%	30%
\$100-149K	17%	20%
\$150K+	17%	21%
Prefer not to say	4%	4%

Why people are considering moving

- When considering relocation, cost of living is the most frequently cited issues, followed by taxes and weather.

Cost of living is the most common reason residents consider moving out of Massachusetts

% who say each is a reason they are considering leaving Massachusetts

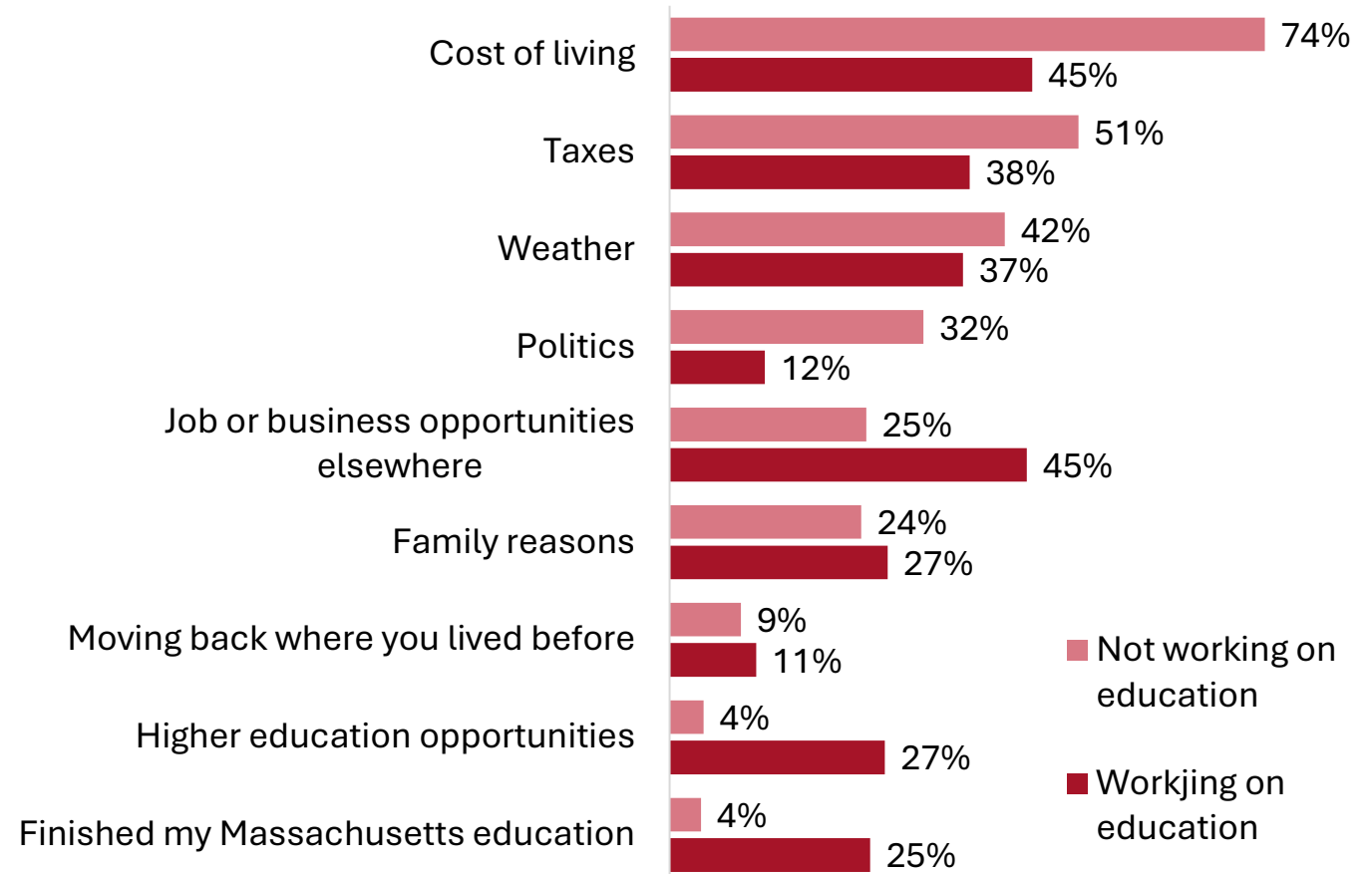
Reason considering leaving	Overall %
Cost of living	63%
Taxes	46%
Weather	40%
Job or business opportunities elsewhere	32%
Family reasons	25%
Politics	23%
Higher education opportunities	13%
Finished my Massachusetts education	12%
Moving back where you lived before	9%

Education and reasons for relocation

- Those working on more education cite cost of living, economic opportunity as main reasons for considering moving in the next 5 years.
- Cost of living is an important issue across the board.

Those working on education are far more likely to cite future opportunities as key reasons for moving

% who say each is a reason they are considering leaving Massachusetts

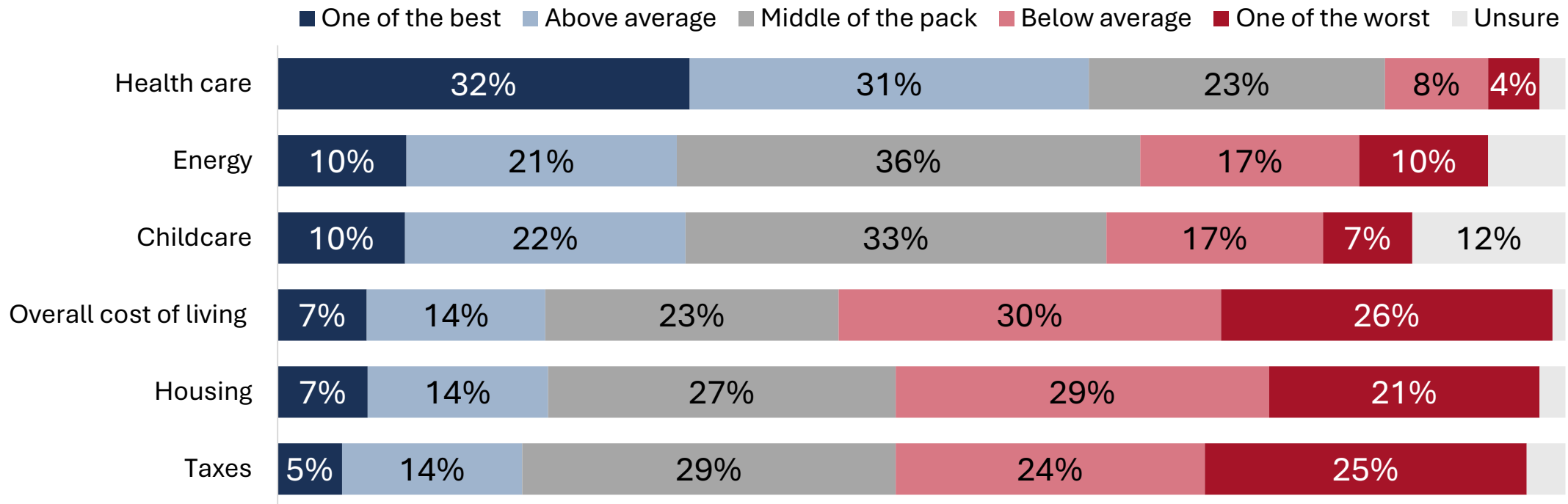


Digging into specifics on affordability

- Massachusetts is seen as more affordable when it comes to health care and either equal or less affordable on other items.

Residents say Massachusetts lags on taxes and housing, and is doing better on healthcare affordability

% who say Massachusetts is better / worse at each element of affordability



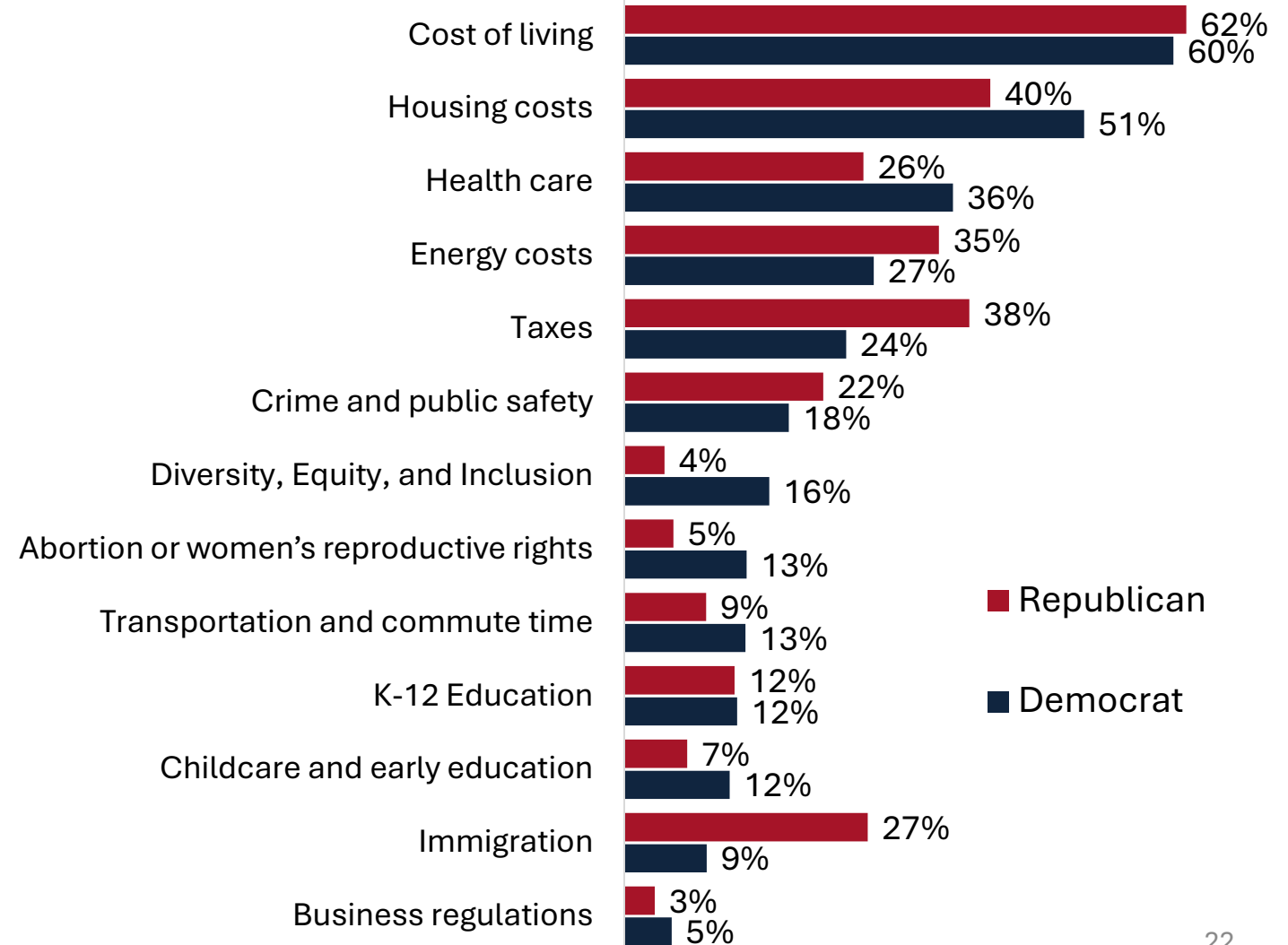
Preferred state issue focus, by party

- There is relatively less division over state issues than there are on national politics.
- Democrats and Republicans are united in seeing costs as the top set of issues facing the state.

Q: Which of these are your top three that you think policymakers in Massachusetts should prioritize? Select up to three.

Cost concerns are a bipartisan issue, many others show division

% who say each issue is one of the top 3 facing the state



■ Republican

■ Democrat

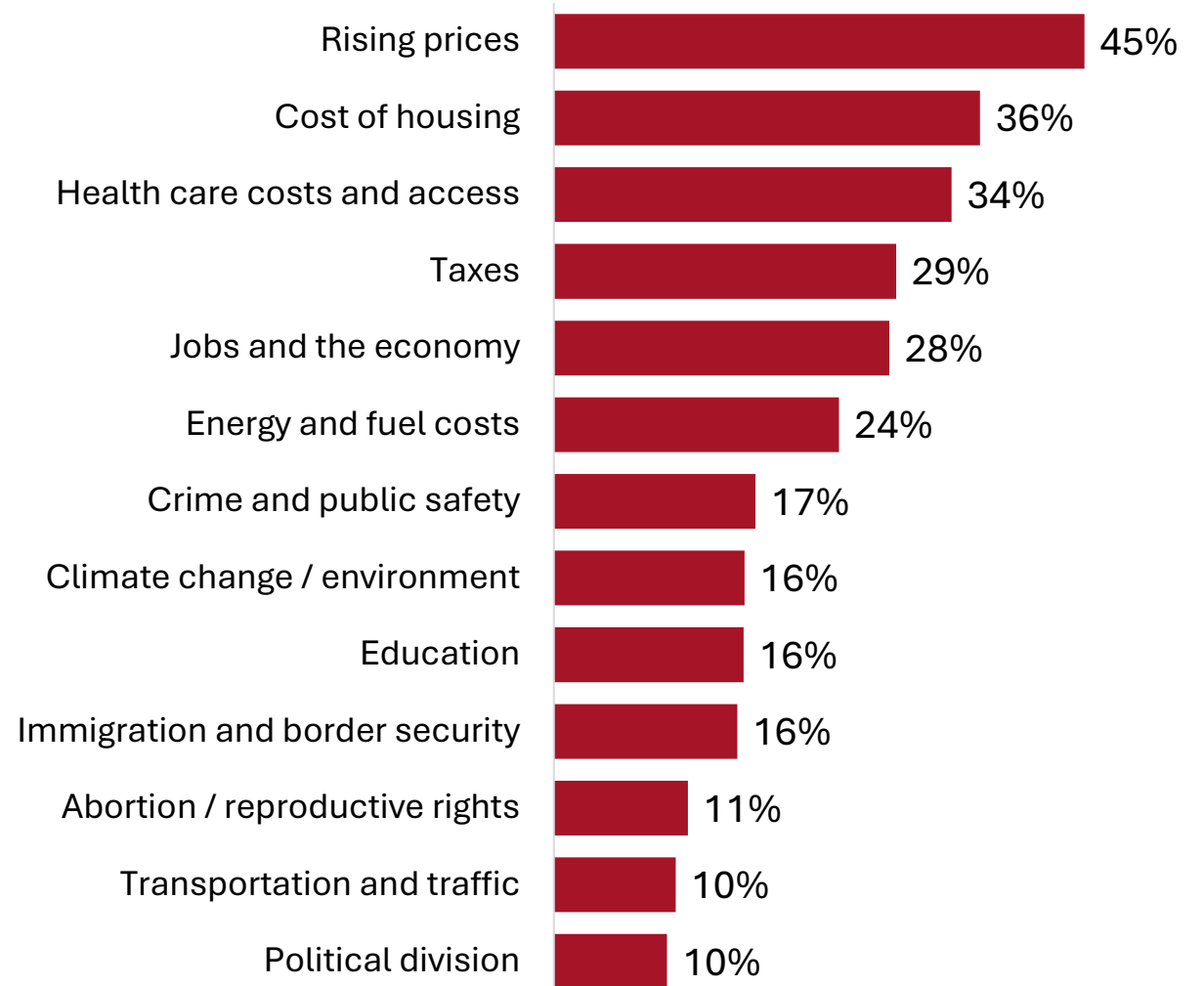
Top issues for state election choices

- Consistent with responses related to state policy priorities and other questions in the survey, respondents highlighted cost issues as top reasons for supporting candidates in the next election.

Q: Which three state issues are most important to you in deciding which candidates to support for elections here in Massachusetts? Select up to three.

Cost issues top list of most important electoral issues in 2026

% who say each issue is one of the top 3 issues for 2026 election

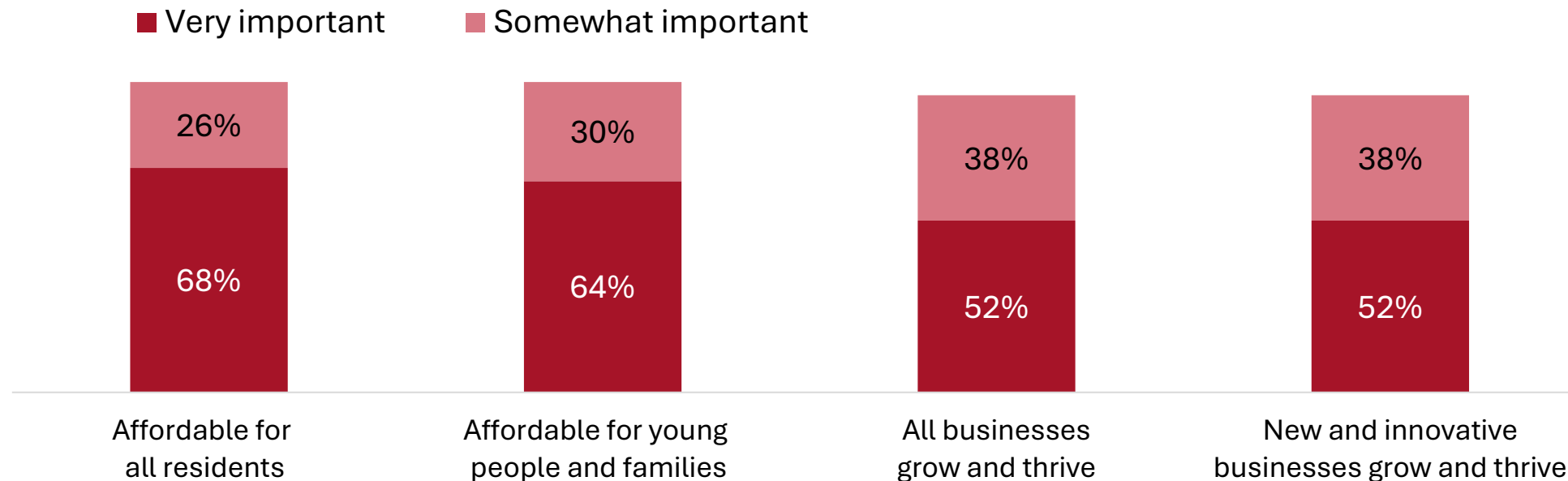


What does keeping Massachusetts thriving mean?

- Residents see various elements of competitiveness as essential to keep Massachusetts thriving, with a focus on affordability for residents.

Ensuring life is affordable for all residents, young people/families is seen as most important

% who say each are very / somewhat important to keep Massachusetts thriving

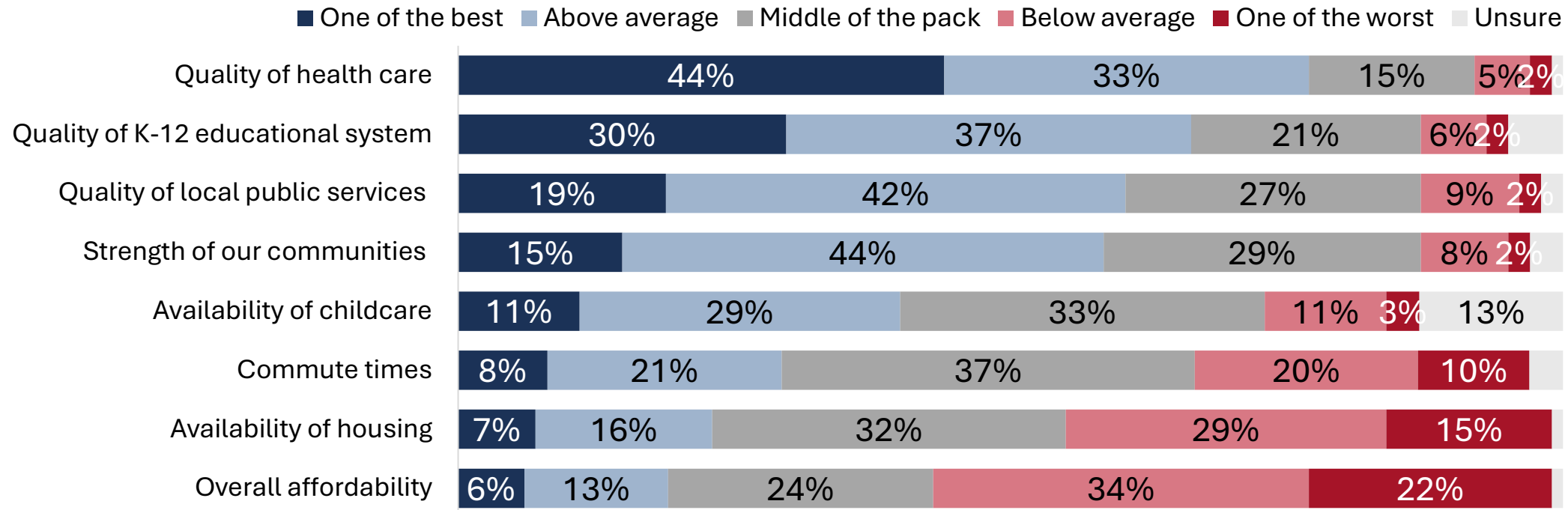


Where Massachusetts is seen as better / worse

- Massachusetts is seen as a leader on education and health care, and trails far behind on commute times, housing costs, and overall affordability.

Education, health care, services, communities seen as relative areas of strength for Massachusetts

% who say Massachusetts is better / worse at each element of quality of life



Biggest affordability challenges – open ends

- When asked on an open-ended basis about affordability, residents name a familiar set of challenges.



Housing energy, taxes, food all cited as top cost concerns

% who say each issue is one of the top 3 facing the country

Housing costs	38%
Cost of living	31%
Energy costs	21%
Taxes	17%
Food costs	19%
Health care	8%
Limited income / budget	4%
Transportation	3%
Blame state government	3%
Employment	2%
Childcare	2%
Education	2%
Immigration	1%
Blame federal government	1%
Other	4%
None	5%

Affordability ... in their own words

The economy especially in housing, everything is so expensive this day and the pay is not enough

I retired on a very, very meager income and I'm finding that the cost of groceries is very prohibitive. I can't tell you the last time I could afford to buy meat.

Cost of daily living.....food/ gas/ heating costs

Housing costs, rent is out of control.

Rent is wildly unaffordable for the condition, the housing cycle does not help.

It is not affordable to live here.

Health care costs worry me the most. I receive benefits through dual Medicare / Masshealth (Commonwealth Care Association) and I am fighting the changes in coverage. I need it to continue to cover mental health.



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