

COVID-19 Survey Summary: September 4, 2020

The following is a summary of social, behavioral and economic survey research on COVID-19 released in the past week, as compiled for the Societal Experts Action Network ([SEAN](#)). Most surveys cited in this report are available in the [SEAN COVID-19 Survey Archive](#).

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More Americans say the worst of the coronavirus pandemic is behind us, and the climate for small businesses has improved markedly since May, though many see a long road ahead. Still, concerns remain high, views of the federal government’s response are largely negative and new results underscore the pandemic’s toll on mental health, the American workforce and essential health services worldwide.

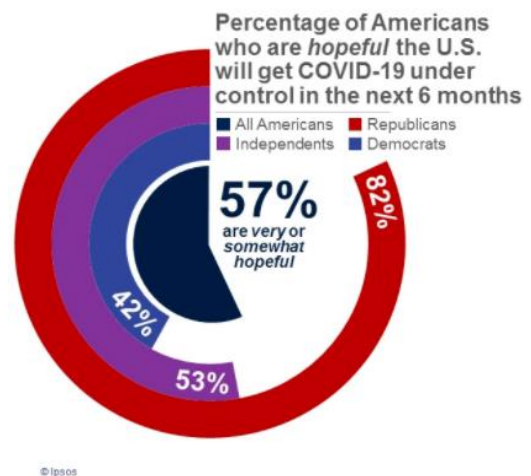
Contact and Concern

For the first time, a bare majority of Americans (51 percent) think the worst of the pandemic is behind us, up 11 percentage points since mid-August ([CNN 8/28-9/1](#)). Additionally, 57 percent are at least somewhat hopeful the United States will get the pandemic under control in the next six months; just 13 percent are not at all hopeful this will happen ([Axios-Ipsos 8/28-8/31](#)).

In another measure, among likely voters, there’s a three-way split on whether the situation is getting better (33 percent), getting worse (32 percent) or staying about the same (32 percent) ([Quinnipiac 8/28-8/31](#)).

Regardless, six in 10 overall remain worried about the coronavirus outbreak in their community ([CNN 8/28-9/1](#)). About eight in 10 are at least somewhat concerned about the outbreak more generally, while three-quarters are concerned about the possibility of getting sick, both essentially unchanged recently ([Axios-Ipsos 8/28-8/31](#)). Among likely voters, similarly, three-quarters are at least somewhat concerned that they or someone they know will get infected ([Quinnipiac 8/28-8/31](#)).

Nearly six in 10 adults (58 percent) personally know someone in the United States who has tested positive for the coronavirus. About a quarter have been tested themselves and two in 10



know someone who has died. All are essentially unchanged from last week ([Axios-Ipsos 8/28-8/31](#)).

Partisanship continues to color attitudes. Eighty-four percent of Republicans say the worst is behind us, while seven in 10 Democrats think the worst is yet to come. Sixty-four percent of Republican likely voters think the situation is getting better, while 56 percent of Democratic likely voters think it's getting worse. And 82 percent of all Republicans are hopeful the pandemic will be under control in the next six months, vs. 42 percent of Democrats ([CNN 8/28-9/1](#), [Quinnipiac 8/28-8/31](#), [Axios-Ipsos 8/28-8/31](#)).

Back to School

Nearly six in 10 parents with children younger than 18 say their child started school by late August, including 36 percent in virtual-only classes, 11 percent in in-person classes and 10 percent with a mix. Nearly half of these parents say the district has had to change its schooling plan since the school year started, and 22 percent report COVID-19 outbreaks or scares in their district ([Axios-Ipsos 8/28-8/31](#)).

Views about the safety of in-person schooling remain divided. Slim majorities (52 to 54 percent) of Americans think it is very or mostly unsafe to send students back to school in person this fall, regardless of grade level (preschool/kindergarten, grades 1-8, high school or college). Among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, two-thirds or more view a return to school as mostly or very safe, while more than three-quarters of Democrats and those who lean Democratic view it as largely unsafe.

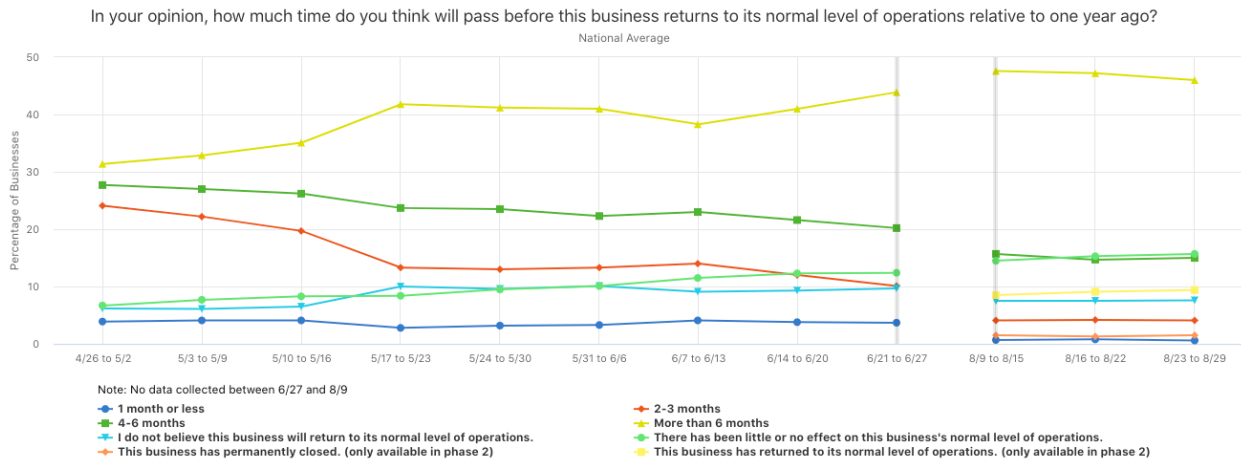
Women are more apt than men to oversee children's learning from home: Thirty-eight percent of women say they have taken on the responsibility for supervising online education for children in their household or expect to soon, vs. 26 percent of men ([Grinnell College 8/26-8/30](#)).

Small Business Climate

The share of small businesses reporting that the pandemic has had a large negative effect on their business has declined sharply from 51 percent in late April/early May to 33 percent now, with improvements across a variety of indicators. Among them:

- The number of small businesses reporting a decline in revenue in the past week has dropped by more than half, from 74 percent in late April/early May to 31 percent now.
- Fifteen percent say the number of hours worked by their employees declined in the past week, down from 51 percent. Eleven percent say the number of paid employees decreased in the past week, down from 28 percent.
- Twenty-eight percent have at least three months' cash on hand, up from 17 percent.

Still, nearly half (46 percent) think it'll take more than six months to return to normal operations, up from 31 percent in late April/early May, and just one in 10 says their business has already returned to normal ([U.S. Census Bureau 8/23-8/29](#)).



Impact on the Workforce

At the same time, a survey in late July/mid-August found rising worries among American workers:

- Twenty-seven percent were worried about being laid off, up from 15 percent last year to the most since 2013.
- An identical share – 27 percent – express worry that their hours will be cut back, also up from 15 percent last year to the most since 2011.
- Twenty-eight percent worry their wages will be reduced, up from 16 percent in 2019.
- Thirty percent worry their benefits will be reduced, up 7 points since 2019.
- Nearly half of workers (46 percent) express at least one of these four concerns.
- By double-digit margins, workers of color are more likely than white workers to say they're worried about each of these items ([Gallup 7/30-8/12](#)).

Satisfaction with safety conditions at work has declined during the pandemic. Sixty-five percent are completely satisfied with the physical safety conditions of their workplace, down 9 points from last year to the fewest since 2001. Declines are steepest among lower-income workers (down 17 points), those without a college degree (down 16 points) and men (down 14 points) ([Gallup 7/30-8/12](#)).

In terms of alternative work arrangements, there's been a 7-point rise since 2019 in the number who've ever telecommuted for work, from 42 to 49 percent. Among them, the average number of days doing so in a typical month has doubled, from 5.8 to 11.9.

A quarter of workers overall say they have worked entirely from home in recent weeks, while 51 percent have worked entirely from a location outside their home; the rest report a mix. Women and college graduates are more likely than men and non-graduates to have worked entirely from home ([Gallup 7/30-8/12](#)).

Health Impacts

The number of Americans with symptoms of depression more than tripled early in the pandemic. Based on a standard nine-item scale, 28 percent of Americans had symptoms of depression in the first half of April, up sharply from 9 percent in 2017-2018 data from the [National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey](#), using the same scale. The rise included 9-point increases in the prevalence of symptoms of mild and moderate depression (to 25 and 15 percent, respectively), a 6-point increase in the prevalence of moderately severe symptoms (to 8 percent) and a 4-point increase in severe depression symptoms (to 5 percent). Those with lower incomes, less savings and greater exposure to COVID-19 stressors (e.g., job loss or someone close to them dying from the virus) were particularly likely to report symptoms of depression ([Ettman et al. 2020](#)).

(See our [July 31 summary](#) for additional results documenting a sharp rise in the prevalence of mental health symptoms during the pandemic.)

Another study indicates that increased mental distress may be adversely impacting health care utilization. Using mid-June data from the U.S. Census Bureau's [Household Pulse Survey](#), the research finds that individuals who experienced symptoms of anxiety and depression were more likely to delay medical care and say they had not received needed non-coronavirus-related care, even controlling for demographic differences. Of the four symptoms tested, those who reported feeling nervous, anxious or on edge in the past seven days were the most apt to have skipped medical care, suggesting that anxiety in particular may be exacerbating medical care avoidance during the pandemic ([Ganson et al. 2020](#)).

Government Response

Most Americans (63 percent in one survey, 55 percent in another, 57 percent of likely voters in a third) disapprove of President Donald Trump's handling of the coronavirus outbreak, with the first two essentially unchanged recently ([ABC/Ipsos 8/28-8/29](#), [CNN 8/28-9/1](#), [Quinnipiac 8/28-8/31](#)). Asked another way, 52 percent do not think Trump is doing enough to contain the virus ([Grinnell College 8/26-8/30](#)).

About two-thirds have little to no trust that Trump (69 percent) or the federal government (66 percent) will provide them with accurate

Is the federal government making the country's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic better or worse?

Axios/Ipsos survey of 1,100 U.S. adults, Aug. 28-31, 2020



Data: Axios/Ipsos survey of 1,100 U.S. adults, Aug. 28-31, 2020; Chart: Danielle Alberti/Axios

information about the coronavirus, and six in 10 think the federal government is making the country's recovery from the pandemic worse – including 80 percent of Democrats, 68 percent of independents and a quarter of Republicans ([Axios-Ipsos 8/28-8/31](#)).

Fifty-five percent of likely voters think Trump is hurting rather than helping efforts to slow the spread of the virus, and by a 16-point margin, more think Biden would do a better job handling the response, 56 vs. 40 percent ([Quinnipiac 8/28-8/31](#)). Among all adults, Joe Biden leads Trump by 60 to 38 percent in preference to handle the coronavirus ([ABC/Ipsos 9/2-9/3](#)).

State Results

In Virginia, views of the government's response to the pandemic have soured compared with their levels in May. Fifty-eight percent now say the federal government's response has not gone far enough, up from 46 percent. Half think the measures taken by the state government have been appropriate, but that's down from 62 percent. In one result that's essentially unchanged, 49 percent are more concerned that the federal government will spend too little to boost the economy, and as a result the recession will be prolonged, while 38 percent are more worried it will spend too much and increase the deficit.

Forty-two percent say they or someone they know have contracted the virus, up from 31 percent in May. More than four in 10 say they or someone in their household has lost income, 22 percent have struggled to pay their bills and two in 10 say they or someone in their household has been laid off because of the outbreak. Eighty-four percent say they always wear a mask when indoors in a public space. Two-thirds think it'll be next year (42 percent) or longer (25 percent) until the virus is sufficiently contained for a return to normal. In May, fewer than half thought it would take that long ([Roanoke 8/9-8/22](#)).

In California, one in five residents know someone who has died from the coronavirus, including 29 percent of Latinos and 28 percent of Black people, compared with 10 percent of whites. In general, seven in 10 overall agree with a statement that California should impose stricter shelter-in-place rules to curb the spread. Eighty-five percent say they would support stricter shelter-in-place rules if it prevented more deaths, 80 percent if it meant businesses would be able to reopen sooner and 72 percent if it meant schools could open sooner. Almost all Californians (92 percent) agree that they understand the current COVID-19 rules and orders in the state ([CHCF 8/21-8/26](#)).

In Pennsylvania, 62 percent of registered voters say Gov. Tom Wolf has done a very good (34 percent) or somewhat good (28 percent) job handling the outbreak. Fewer, 45 percent say Trump has done a good job handling the outbreak ([Monmouth 8/28-8/31](#)). This contrasts with a poll included in [last week's summary](#), conducted earlier in the month among likely voters, in which 42 percent said Wolf has done an excellent or good job and 38 percent said the same of Trump ([Muhlenberg/Morning Call 8/11-8/17](#)).

In New Hampshire, three-quarters approve of Gov. Chris Sununu's handling of the coronavirus situation, essentially unchanged in the past two months, albeit lower than in April and May. Nine in 10 Republicans, 81 percent of independents and 62 percent of Democrats approve ([UNH 8/28-9/1](#)).

In coronavirus-related results from election polls in Arizona, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Florida and Pennsylvania:

- No more than a quarter of registered voters in Arizona, North Carolina and Wisconsin think the coronavirus situation is completely or mostly under control. Four in 10 or more say it's not under control at all ([Fox News 8/29-9/1](#)).
- In Florida, 45 percent of likely voters approve of Gov. Ron DeSantis's handling of the coronavirus response, while 49 percent disapprove. It's similar for Trump, 46-51 percent.
- Wolf, in Pennsylvania, does better; 55 percent of likely voters approve of his handling of the coronavirus response. Fewer, 43 percent, approve of Trump's response ([Quinnipiac 8/28-9/1](#)).
- Registered voters trust Biden over Trump to do a better job on the coronavirus by an 18-point margin in Arizona (52-34 percent), 17 points in Wisconsin (51-34 percent) and 9 points in North Carolina (48-39 percent) ([Fox News 8/29-9/1](#)). Likely voters think Biden would do a better job by 54-41 percent in Pennsylvania; it's a close 50-45 percent in Florida ([Quinnipiac 8/28-9/1](#)).

Also in North Carolina, 44 percent of registered voters say the measures taken by the state government to slow the spread of the virus have been appropriate; 27 percent think they've gone too far and 26 percent say they have not gone far enough. Residents divide on being more concerned that North Carolina is lifting restrictions too quickly (43 percent) or more concerned that restrictions are not being lifted quickly enough (38 percent). Sixty-five percent think Gov. Roy Cooper has done a good job handling the outbreak, while 31 percent think he's done a bad job. Views of President Trump are more divided; 46 percent think he's done a good job, 51 percent a bad job ([Monmouth 8/29-9/1](#)).

Multinational Survey of Health Ministries

From May to July, the World Health Organization sent surveys to ministry of health officials in 159 countries (excluding the Americas, to be surveyed later) to assess the impact of the pandemic on essential health services. Among the 105 countries that responded:

- Nine in 10 reported at least some disruption in essential health services, with low- and middle-income countries reporting greater disruptions than higher-income countries.
- Three-quarters reported reduced outpatient care because of decreased demand, and two-thirds reported care reductions because of cancellation of elective services. Disruptions were reported because of staff redeployment to provide COVID-19 relief (49 percent), decreased access due to lockdowns (48 percent) and insufficient personal protective equipment (44 percent).

- The most frequently disrupted services included immunization outreach (70 percent), noncommunicable disease diagnosis and treatment (69 percent), family planning and contraception (68 percent), treatment for mental health disorders and facility-based immunization services (both 61 percent), prenatal care (56 percent) and cancer diagnosis and treatment (55 percent).
- Emergency services were the least apt to be disrupted by the pandemic, although 15 percent of countries reported disruptions across all four emergency and critical care services assessed (24-hour emergency room services, inpatient critical care services, urgent blood transfusions and emergency surgery).
- Commonly implemented strategies for overcoming service disruptions included triaging to identify priorities (76 percent), telemedicine to replace in-person consultations (63 percent) and novel adjustments to the supply chain or dispensing of medication (54 percent) ([WHO](#)).

Additional International Results

In Australia, a longitudinal survey finds that with lockdown restrictions lifting in much of the country, fewer are following social distancing guidelines. Fifty-six percent always or mostly avoided public places in the past week, down sharply from 87 percent in April; 72 percent always or mostly avoided crowded places, down from 94 percent; and 87 percent always or mostly kept 1.5 meters away from others, down from 96 percent. In a new question, 39 percent say they always or mostly wear masks indoors and 37 percent say the same of wearing masks outdoors. One in five has personally been tested for COVID-19.

After improving between April and May, measures of psychological distress, life satisfaction, anxiety and loneliness have worsened. For example, 63 percent of Australians report feeling anxious and worried due to COVID-19, up from 57 percent in May; and 41 percent say they felt lonely at least once in the past week, up from 36 percent. Loneliness increased in particular in those parts of the country that went back into lockdown.

Compared with pre-pandemic February, a third of Australians are working fewer hours (47 percent are working the same number of hours and 21 percent are working more). Women's working hours fell 2.2 hours per week more than men's, and the largest decline occurred among those aged 65 to 74 years old. Since May, the employment rate and number of hours worked have rebounded some, but perceived job security has worsened and household incomes have not increased ([Australian National University 8/10-8/24](#)).

In Russia, where all schools opened for in-person instruction Sept. 1, 93 percent of those with students in their family say they feel positively about the decision to return to normal face-to-face learning. In an open-ended question, the most commonly cited reasons include that the teacher in the class will explain the material better than parents (34 percent), children should interact with teachers and peers at school (29 percent) and schools give more knowledge than distance learning (27 percent). When asked what measures they have heard their child's school will be taking to protect against the coronavirus, a quarter mentioned that teachers and students

will wear masks, 14 percent indicated that the school would be sanitized and 12 percent said students would remain in one classroom, with teachers rather than students moving from class to class. Nearly half (47 percent) had not heard of their child’s school taking any measures ([FOM 8/21-8/23](#)).

In Northern Ireland, surveys conducted from mid-April to mid-July found a decline in worries about the impact of the coronavirus – 67 percent were at least somewhat worried about the effect the virus was having on their life in June and July, vs. 77 percent in April and May. The number who reported self-isolating and avoiding contact with older or more vulnerable people in the past seven days also declined over time. However, fewer than one in 10 thought life would return to normal in the next three months, while 36 percent said it will take more than a year.

Eighty-seven percent said they expect the economic situation in Northern Ireland to get worse in the next year, including six in 10 who expect it to get a lot worse. The outlook for personal finances was less dire; 32 percent expected their household financial situation to get worse, 13 percent thought it would improve and 55 percent expected it to stay the same.

Compared with data from 2018 and 2019, average ratings of life satisfaction have declined while anxiety has increased. But in a bright spot, most report the pandemic has enhanced a sense of community – 88 percent said they thought people were doing more to help others since the outbreak began and 82 percent agreed that if they needed help, other local community members would support them during the outbreak.

Almost all said they had received enough information on how to protect themselves from the coronavirus, were aware of official government guidance on how to reduce the spread and supported the “Stay at Home” measures put in place by the government ([NISRA 4/21-7/23](#)).

Additional U.S. and international poll results are available at the [COVID-19 Survey Archive](#).

Summary for SEAN by [Langer Research Associates](#).