

How do different generations view the COVID-19 crisis?



May 20, 2020

Both the health and economic effects of the Covid-19 crisis have been shown to vary across age groups. This raises questions about how individuals of different ages view the current crisis, as well as what responsibilities they think young adults have in the collective effort to curb the spread of the virus.

Between April 29 and May 13, 2020, the Berkeley Institute for Young Americans partnered with YouGov to poll 2,270 Americans across the country about their views of the COVID-19 crisis.

Of those currently working, young adults report being somewhat more worried than older adults about losing their jobs or losing work. For example, only 28% of working 18-to-29-year-olds and 29% of working 30-to-39-year-olds report that they are “not at all worried” about losing work in the coming two months. For 40-to-54-year-olds who are currently working, 36% report being not at all worried. Among working 55-to-74-year-olds, 56% are not at all worried about losing work in the coming months.

How worried are you that you will lose your job or lose work hours in the next two months?

	All Adults	Age				
		18-29	30-39	40-54	55-74	75+
Not at all worried	37.4%	28.4%	29.1%	35.5%	56.1%	86.3%
A little worried	23.6	26.0	29.4	19.1	20.2	8.2
Somewhat worried	23.2	28.9	24.8	23.1	15.5	3.9
Very worried	15.8	16.7	16.8	22.3	8.2	1.5

*Excludes respondents who indicated they are not currently working. Note that 83% of adults 75+ report that they are not currently working and are not included.

Overall, a majority of Americans report being either “somewhat worried” or “very worried” about the spread of COVID-19 in the United States, regardless of age group. The share that expresses being “very worried” is somewhat larger among older cohorts than within the 18-to-29 cohort.

How worried are you about the spread of the coronavirus / COVID-19 in the United States?

	All Adults	Age				
		18-29	30-39	40-54	55-74	75+
Not at all worried	11.3%	9.9%	12.3%	16.0%	10.4%	8.4%
A little worried	24.8	26.4	21.7	21.1	27.0	27.6
Somewhat worried	27.5	32.2	30.1	25.7	21.5	25.7
Very worried	36.4	31.5	36.0	37.3	41.1	38.2

However, the level of worry about the spread of COVID-19 varies by political party, with self-identified Democrats expressing more worry than self-identified Republicans (and Independents falling in between).

How worried are you about the spread of the coronavirus / COVID-19 in the United States?

		All Adults	Age				
			18-29	30-39	40-54	55-74	75+
Democrats	Somewhat worried	28.5%	30.3%	32.0%	29.4%	23.0%	26.5%
	Very worried	54.5	48.3	49.8	51.0	66.6	59.6
Republicans	Somewhat worried	22.1	22.5	23.2	20.6	18.3	24.5
	Very worried	19.2	14.0	26.9	23.4	15.1	18.2
Independents	Somewhat worried	29.0	37.2	29.1	24.2	22.8	27.0
	Very worried	32.4	25.2	28.8	35.8	36.5	42.0

Larger differences across the age groups emerge when respondents are asked specifically about what responsibilities younger generations have in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. First, the survey asked respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement, “Younger generations have an obligation to help protect older generations by socially distancing.” Overall, a majority (54%) strongly agree with the statement, but the percentage that strongly agrees varies by age group. Nearly two-thirds of adults aged 55 and older strongly agree, compared to only 41% of 18-to-29-year-olds, 50% of 30-to-39-year-olds, and 57% of 40-to-54-year-olds.

Younger generations have an obligation to help protect older generations by socially distancing.

		All Adults	Age				
			18-29	30-39	40-54	55-74	75+
Strongly agree		53.8%	40.5%	49.6%	57.2%	65.0%	64.0%
Somewhat agree		21.8	26.6	21.9	18.9	18.9	20.1
Neither agree nor disagree		16.9	23.1	18.2	16.7	11.0	12.5
Somewhat disagree		3.3	5.7	3.5	2.6	1.9	1.6
Strongly disagree		4.2	4.2	6.8	4.6	3.2	1.8

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to agree that “Younger generations have an obligation to help protect older generations by socially distancing.” Yet even within political parties, agreement is stronger among older respondents than younger respondents. Among Democratic respondents, 86% of 55-to-74-year-olds strongly agree that younger generations have a responsibility to socially distance, compared to only 52% of 18-to-29-year-olds. Among Republicans, 48% of 55-to-74-year-olds strongly agree, compared to only 26% of 18-to-29-year-olds.

Younger generations have an obligation to help protect older generations by socially distancing.

		All Adults	Age				
			18-29	30-39	40-54	55-74	75+
Democrats	Strongly agree	68.6%	51.5%	60.7%	71.2%	85.8%	82.4%
	Somewhat agree	17.5	26.7	18.2	14.8	10.7	13.1
Republicans	Strongly agree	43.6	25.9	49.7	44.8	47.7	48.3
	Somewhat agree	29.3	35.2	26.3	23.9	32.2	28.1
Independents	Strongly agree	53.8	44.4	47.9	57.1	65.0	62.1
	Somewhat agree	18.9	21.7	23.4	15.8	14.2	18.2

When asked whether strict shelter-in-place orders ask too much of younger generations, the majority of respondents say “no”: 38% strongly disagree, and another 17% somewhat disagree. Disagreement is somewhat stronger among older cohorts; for example, 46% in the 55-to-74 age group strongly disagree,

compared to 34% in the 18-to-29 age group. While there is again considerable variation in disagreement by respondent party identification, within parties, older Americans tend to express stronger disagreement than younger Americans.

Strict shelter-in-place orders ask too much of younger generations.

	All Adults	Age				
		18-29	30-39	40-54	55-74	75+
Strongly agree	10.3%	7.0%	15.6%	10.2%	10.9%	8.6%
Somewhat agree	13.0	15.6	12.8	14.6	11.5	9.4
Neither agree nor disagree	21.1	25.7	22.2	23.8	13.3	18.6
Somewhat disagree	17.2	18.1	15.8	12.5	18.1	21.5
Strongly disagree	38.3	33.6	33.6	38.9	46.3	42.0

About the survey

YouGov has a proprietary opt-in survey panel of 1.8 million U.S. residents who have agreed to participate in web surveys. YouGov recruits its panel using Web advertisements, permission-based email campaigns, partner sponsored solicitations, telephone-to-Web recruitment sampling, and mail-to-Web recruitment. Primarily, YouGov targets respondents based on keyword searches, such as a Google search. They target difficult to recruit respondents by soliciting panelists in telephone and mail surveys. YouGov does not pay participants to join the YouGov panel, but they do receive incentives through a loyalty program to take individual surveys.

For this survey, YouGov interviewed 2448 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 2270 to produce the final dataset. For the total unweighted sample, the sampling error is approximately ± 2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The estimates shown in this report are weighted, however, and the results that are based on subgroups of this population are subject to larger margins of sampling error. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file). The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.

About the Berkeley Institute for Young Americans

The Berkeley Institute for Young Americans is a research center at the Goldman School of Public Policy at UC Berkeley. The Institute seeks to better understand the diverse challenges that young Americans face, with the goal of leading a fact-based, nonpartisan discussion about how best to invest in future generations. The Institute aims to develop research-driven policy proposals to equip policymakers, advocates, and young leaders with the solutions needed to ensure the long-term security and success of the next generation.

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