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Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats

About six-in-ten believe social distancing measures are helping a lot to slow the spread of coronavirus in the nation

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How we did this

Pew Research Center conducted this study to understand how Americans are continuing to respond to the coronavirus outbreak, their assessments of scientists and the role of scientific experts in policy. For most of the questions in this analysis, we surveyed 10,957 U.S. adults from April 29 to May 5, 2020. Questions about public confidence in scientists and medical scientists to act in the best interests of the public and questions about the ethical standards of medical doctors were asked in a survey of 10,139 U.S. adults from April 20 to 26, 2020.

Everyone who took part in either survey is a member of Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), an online survey panel that is recruited through national, random sampling of residential addresses. This way nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. The survey is weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education and other categories. Read more about the [ATP's methodology](#).

See here to read more about the [questions used for this report](#), along with responses, and its [methodology](#).

Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats

About six-in-ten believe social distancing measures are helping a lot to slow the spread of coronavirus in the nation

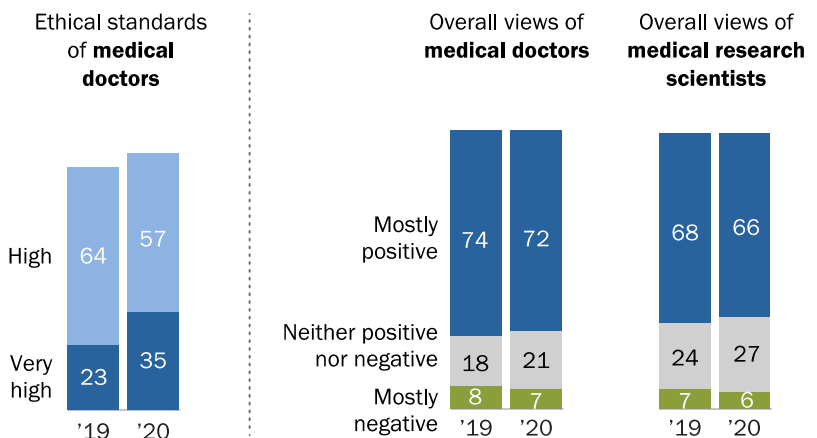
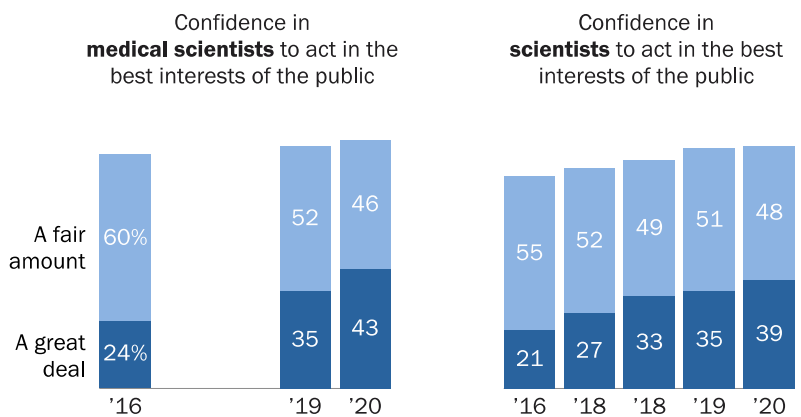
Americans' confidence in medical scientists has grown since the [coronavirus outbreak](#) first began to upend life in the United States, as have perceptions that medical doctors hold very high ethical standards. And in their own estimation, most U.S. adults think the outbreak raises the importance of scientific developments.

Scientists have played a prominent role in advising government leaders and informing the public about the course of the pandemic, with doctors such as Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx, among others, appearing at press conferences alongside President Donald Trump and other government officials.

But there are growing partisan divisions over the risk the novel coronavirus poses to [public health](#), as well as public confidence in the scientific and medical community and the role such experts are playing in public policy.

Americans express growing confidence in medical scientists since the COVID-19 outbreak

% of U.S. adults



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown. Source: Surveys conducted April 20-26 and April 29-May 5, 2020. "Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats"

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Still, most Americans believe social distancing measures are helping at least some to slow the spread of the coronavirus disease, known as COVID-19. People see a mix of reasons behind new cases of infection, including limited testing, people not following social distancing measures and the nature of the disease itself.

These are among the key findings from a new national survey by Pew Research Center, conducted April 29 to May 5 among 10,957 U.S. adults, and a new analysis of a national survey conducted April 20 to 26 among 10,139 U.S. adults, both using the Center's American Trends Panel.

Public confidence in medical scientists to act in the best interests of the public has gone up from 35% with a great deal of confidence before the outbreak to 43% in the Center's April survey. Similarly, there is a modest uptick in public confidence in scientists, from 35% in 2019 to 39% today. (A random half of survey respondents rated their confidence in one of the two groups.)

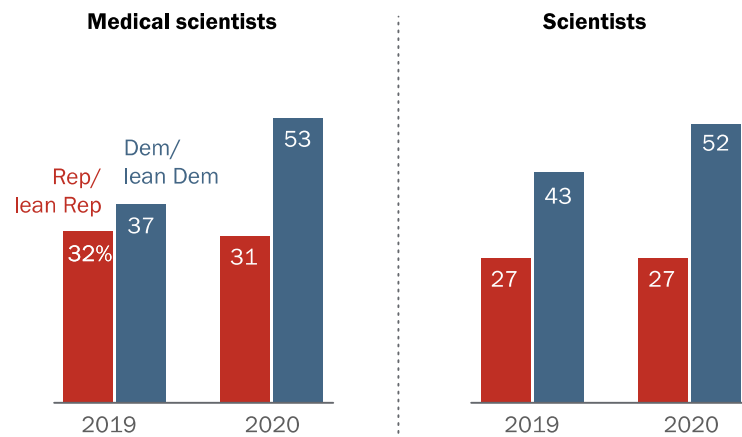
The rise in public confidence for scientific groups is in stark contrast with that for other groups and institutions. For example, confidence in the military has been stable over the same time period, and [that for journalists has declined](#).

But public confidence has turned upward with Democrats, not Republicans. Among Democrats and those leaning to the Democratic Party, 53% have a great deal of confidence in medical

scientists to act in the public interest, up from 37% in January 2019. But among Republicans and those who lean Republican, 31% express a great deal of confidence in medical scientists, roughly the same as in 2019 (32%). As a result, there is now a 22 percentage point difference between partisan groups when it comes to trust in medical scientists.

Growing partisan differences over trust in medical scientists and scientists since the COVID-19 outbreak

% of U.S. adults who have a great deal of confidence in each group to act in the best interests of the public



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 20-26, 2020.

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While a majority of U.S. adults (59%) believe social distancing measures are helping a lot to slow the spread of the coronavirus, Democrats are more likely to say this than Republicans (69% vs. 49%). And, when asked about possible reasons for the ongoing presence of new infections in the U.S., partisans diverge, particularly when it comes to the role of testing. Three-quarters of Democrats (75%) consider too little testing a major factor behind new disease cases in the U.S. compared with 37% of Republicans.

Most people believe that evidence from public health experts is influencing government policies related to the coronavirus at least a fair amount, but more think such evidence has a great deal of influence on their state's policies (43%) than on federal policy (26%).

As with views on government handling of the coronavirus, partisans see the intersection of public health and policy through a different lens. For example, about twice as many Republicans (38%) as Democrats (17%) think federal policies to control the spread of the coronavirus are influenced a great deal by evidence from public health experts.

In addition, the new survey finds Democrats remain more supportive than Republicans of scientists taking an active role in science-related policy matters. But the balance of opinion has shifted among both partisan groups when it comes to the public's role. A majority of U.S. adults now say that public opinion should *not* play an important role guiding science-related policy decisions "because these issues are too complex"; 55% hold this view in the new survey, up from 44% in 2019.

Most Americans believe social distancing measures are helping, but political groups have diverging perspectives on the ongoing outbreak

A majority of Americans believe social distancing measures in place across much of the country are helping reduce the spread of COVID-19 a lot, and there is widespread agreement that these measures are helping at least a little.

People attribute new cases of the coronavirus to a mix of factors. Majorities say that COVID-19's spreading more easily than other infectious diseases (68%), not enough testing available for coronavirus (58%) and not enough people following social distancing measures (57%) are major reasons the U.S. is seeing new cases of the coronavirus.

About half or more across gender, race and ethnicity, generation and educational groups believe social distancing measures are helping a lot to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. Those with a postgraduate degree are particularly likely to see social distancing measures as helping a lot compared with those who have a high school diploma or less education (74% vs. 55%). (For details, see [Appendix A.](#))

But there is a distinct partisan tint to how Americans see these measures and [the restrictions](#) designed to implement them around the country.

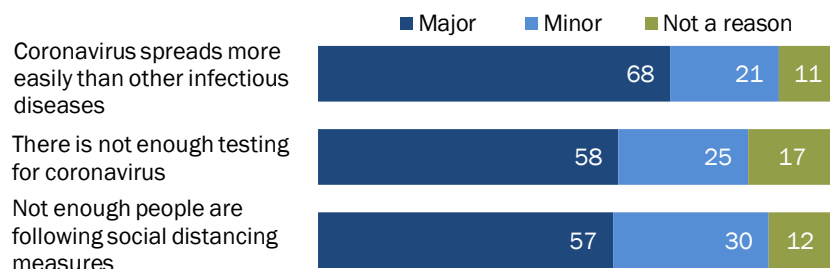
More Democrats (69%) than Republicans (49%) believe social distancing measures are helping reduce the spread of the coronavirus a lot, although strong majorities of both party groups say

About six-in-ten say social distancing measures are helping slow the spread of COVID-19 a lot

% of U.S. adults who say social distancing measures are helping ___ to slow the spread of coronavirus in the U.S.



% of U.S. adults who say each is a ___ reason why there are new cases of coronavirus in the U.S.



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

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social distancing is helping at least a little. (Just 14% of Republicans and 8% of Democrats say social distancing measures are helping not too much or not at all.)

Political groups also differ over the reasons behind continued coronavirus infections, particularly around the roles of testing and social distancing.

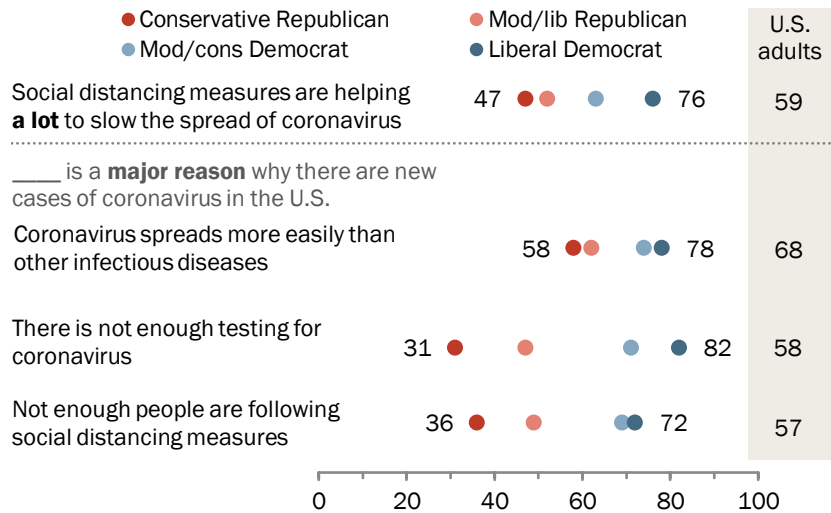
Most Democrats believe that not enough testing for COVID-19 constitutes a major reason behind new infections of the disease; 82% of liberal Democrats and 71% of moderate or conservative Democrats say this. By contrast, 31% of conservative Republicans and 47% of moderate or liberal Republicans believe a lack of testing is a major reason behind new infections.

About seven-in-ten Democrats believe a major reason for new cases of coronavirus is that not enough people are following social distancing measures. About half of moderate or liberal Republicans (49%) and 36% of conservative Republicans agree that this is a major reason behind new cases of coronavirus.

But majorities of both Democrats (76%) and Republicans (59%) see the disease itself as a factor, saying a major reason behind the ongoing spread of infection is that COVID-19 spreads more easily than other infectious diseases.

Wide partisan differences on the role of testing and spread of coronavirus

% of U.S. adults who say each of the following



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown. Republicans and Democrats include those who "lean" toward the parties.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

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Roughly half of Americans (49%) believe the share of people with the coronavirus is higher in the U.S. than in most other nations, 18% believe the U.S. share is lower and about three-in-ten (31%) think the U.S. experience is about the same as most other nations.

It's important to keep in mind that while such perceptions may be influenced by news and information about the spread of the disease, [global statistics](#) on the number of infections continue to change as new cases arise and classifications of infection are better identified.

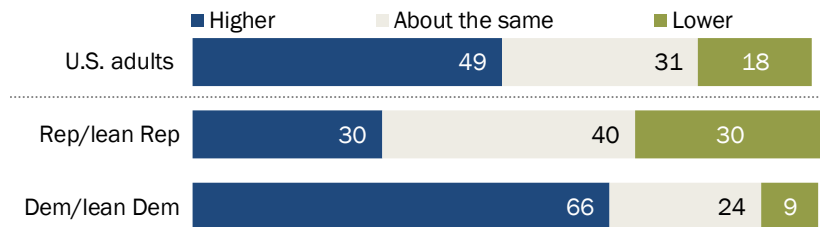
More Democrats (66%, including leaners) than Republicans (30%, including leaners) think the share of people with COVID-19 is higher in the U.S. than most other nations.

Education also tends to align with beliefs on this question among Democrats, but not Republicans. About seven-in-ten Democrats with a postgraduate degree (72%) say the share of coronavirus infections is higher in the U.S. than in other nations, compared with 61% of Democrats with a high school diploma or less. But among Republicans there is no difference in views on this issue across education levels. See [Appendix A](#) for details.

For Americans' views of how nations are handling the outbreak, see "[Americans Give Higher Ratings to South Korea and Germany Than U.S. for Dealing With Coronavirus.](#)"

About half believe U.S. has a higher share of coronavirus infections than other nations

% of U.S. adults who say that the share of people with coronavirus disease in the U.S. is ___ than most other nations



Note: Those who did not give a response are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

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Americans' views about the role of public health in policy are tied to partisanship

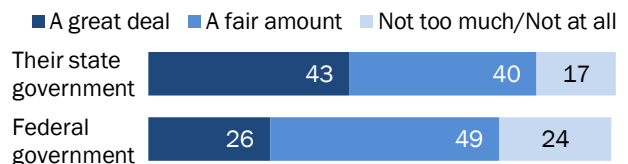
Public health officials have played a prominent role in news and information about the [spread of the coronavirus](#) and ways to limit its effects on the population's health. The Center survey asked people to gauge the degree to which evidence from such experts influenced government policy.

More than four-in-ten Americans (43%) say their state government's policies to control the spread of the coronavirus are influenced a great deal by evidence from public health experts, 40% say such evidence has a fair amount of influence and 17% say it has not too much or no influence on their state's policies.

In comparison, a smaller share of U.S. adults (26%) say the federal government's policies to control the spread of the coronavirus are influenced a great deal by public health experts' evidence. About one-quarter of Americans (24%) think such evidence does not influence the federal government's response too much or at all. (The survey asked a random half of respondents to gauge the role this evidence played either in federal policies and the other half to rate its role in their state government's policies.)

Overall, 43% in U.S. say evidence from public health experts has a great deal of influence on their state's policies

% of U.S. adults who say their state/federal government's policies to control the spread of coronavirus are influenced ___ by evidence from public health experts



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

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Democrats’ perception of state policies depends on where they live. A majority of Democrats (57%) living in states where stay-at-home orders or other restrictions were in place as of May 5 say evidence from public health experts has a great deal of influence on their state’s policies. In contrast, 28% of Democrats living in states where restrictions were lifted by May 5 or never in place say the same.

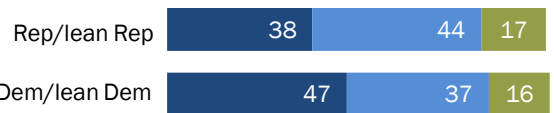
But Republicans’ views on this issue are similar regardless of their state’s stay-at-home orders; 38% say evidence from public health experts has a great deal of influence on their state’s policies to control COVID-19.

The same Center survey also found most Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (87%) say their greater concern is that states will lift restrictions too quickly, compared with 47% of Republicans and Republican leaners. People’s views about the need for more restrictions on public activity in their local area also depend on both partisanship and the level of restrictions in their state. (For more, see [“Americans remain concerned that states will lift restrictions too quickly, but partisan differences widen.”](#))

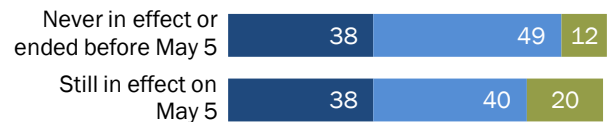
Democrats in states with stay-at-home orders are particularly likely to say health experts are influencing policy

% of U.S. adults who say their state government’s policies to control the spread of coronavirus are influenced ____ by evidence from public health experts

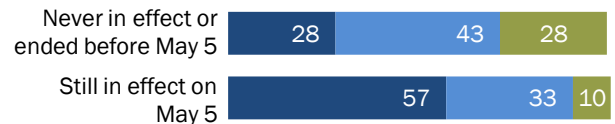
■ A great deal ■ A fair amount ■ Not too much/Not at all



Among Rep/lean Rep living in states where stay-at-home orders were ...



Among Dem/lean Dem living in states where stay-at-home orders were ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
 Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020
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Overall, 38% of Republicans say the federal government's policies are influenced a great deal by evidence from public health experts, compared with only 17% of Democrats.

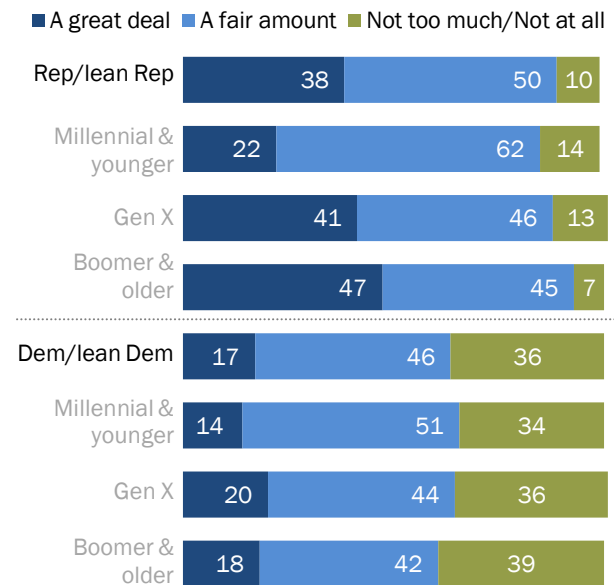
Democrats are at least three times as likely as Republicans to say public health experts do not influence the federal government's policies related to the coronavirus too much or at all (36% vs. 10%).

There are differences in perspective on this issue between younger and older Republicans. About half of Republicans in the Baby Boomer or older generations (47%) say the federal government's policies on the spread of the coronavirus are influenced a great deal by public health experts, while only 22% of younger Republicans in the [Millennial or Gen Z](#) generations say the same.

Among Democrats, younger and older generations hold roughly similar views on this issue.

Younger, older Republicans differ over influence of public health evidence on federal policies to control coronavirus

% of U.S. adults who say the federal government's policies to control the spread of coronavirus are influenced ___ by evidence from public health experts



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

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When it comes to policy about scientific issues, a majority of U.S adults (55%) say that public opinion should *not* play an important role “because these issues are too complex for the average person to understand,” while 43% think the public should help guide such decisions. The balance of opinion on this issue has shifted since 2019, when [a Center survey found](#) the majority (54%) said public opinion should play an important role in science policy decisions.

The shift in views about the public’s role in such matters from 2019 took place across educational and political party groups. However, Democrats shifted more on this issue (from 54% saying public opinion should play an important role in 2019 to 38% in 2020), while the Republican shift has been more modest (from 54% in 2019 to 48% in 2020).

At the same time, six-in-ten Americans say in the new survey that *scientists* should take an active role in public policy debates, while 39% of Americans say scientists should focus on establishing scientific facts and stay out of science-related policy debates. Opinion on this issue is unchanged from last year.

Slightly fewer than half of Americans (47%) think scientific experts are usually better at making policy decisions about scientific issues than other people, a similar share as last year (45%).

Political differences over the role and value of scientific experts remain, however. Democrats are far more likely than Republicans to think scientists should have an active role in policy debates

Support for public opinion’s role in science policy is down since 2019

% of U.S. adults who say public opinion ____ play an important role to guide policy decisions about scientific issues



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.
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Majority of Americans think scientists should take an active role in policy debates about scientific issues

% of U.S. adults who say scientists should ____ when it comes to public policy debates about scientific issues



% of U.S. adults who say that scientific experts are ____ at making good policy decisions about scientific issues than other people



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.
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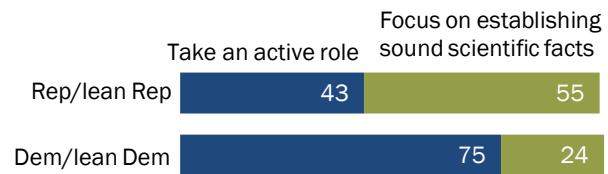
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(75% vs. 43%). Six-in-ten Democrats say scientific experts are usually better at making policy decisions about scientific issues than other people, compared with about a third of Republicans (34%). About two-thirds of Republicans (64%) think scientific experts are either worse or neither better nor worse at making science policy decisions.

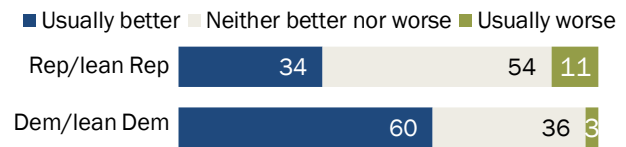
Education is also linked with views about the role of scientific experts in policy matters for Democrats, but not Republicans. Among Democrats, those with a postgraduate education are more likely to say that scientists should take an active role in policy (85% compared with 64% among Democrats with a high school diploma or less education). But among Republicans there are no more than modest differences by education on this issue. See [Appendix A](#) for details. A similar pattern occurred in a [2019 survey](#) between political party and people’s level of knowledge about science issues (based on an 11-item index of factual knowledge items) when it came to views of scientists’ judgments on policy issues.

More Democrats than Republicans think scientists should take an active role in science policy debates

% of U.S. adults who say scientists should ___ when it comes to public policy debates about scientific issues



% of U.S. adults who say that scientific experts are ___ at making good policy decisions about scientific issues than other people



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
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Americans' confidence in medical scientists is up since the coronavirus outbreak, but the rise is among Democrats, not Republicans

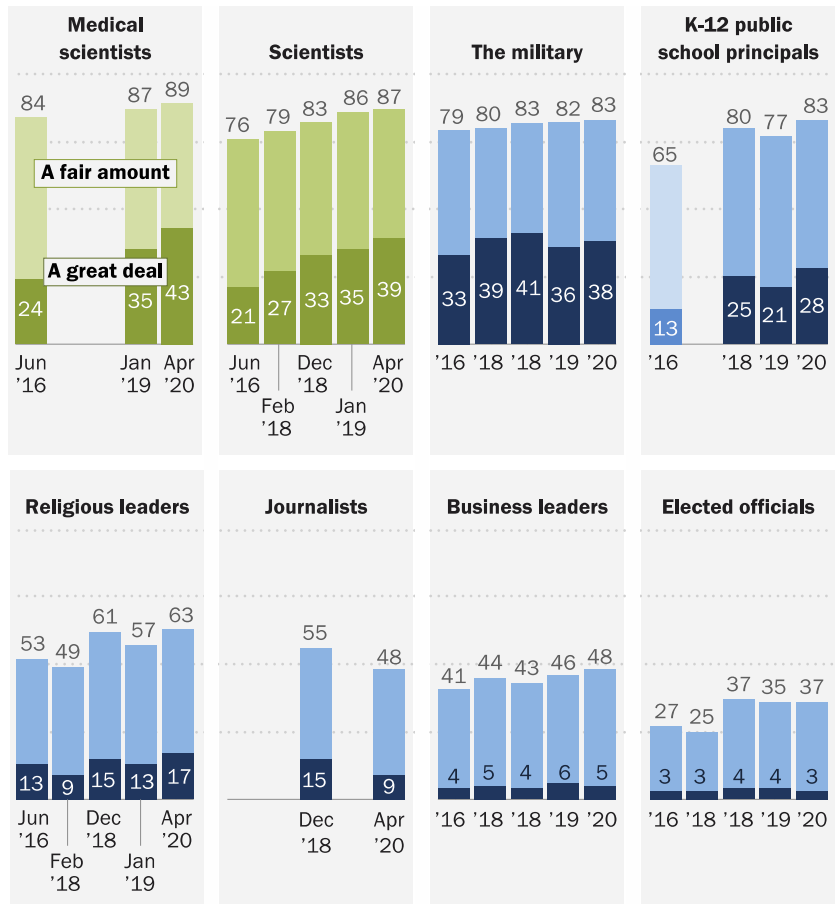
The Center survey finds 43% of U.S. adults express a great deal of confidence in medical scientists to act in the public interest, up 8 percentage points from 35% in 2019, prior to the outbreak. Similarly, the share with a great deal of confidence in scientists has ticked up to 39% in the new survey, from 35% in 2019.

Among eight institutions, the military receives the next highest level of public confidence (38% have a great deal of confidence in this group). Smaller shares of Americans express a great deal of confidence in other institutions [such as journalists](#) (9%) or elected officials (3%).

Confidence in medical scientists has risen among Democrats but not Republicans, leading to growing differences in trust between political groups since the coronavirus outbreak.

More Americans have a great deal of confidence in medical scientists now than before the outbreak

% of U.S. adults who say they have a great deal or fair amount of confidence in each of the following groups to act in the best interests of the public



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown. In 2016, the question asked about K-12 principals and superintendents.

Source: Survey conducted April 20-26, 2020.

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Just over half of Democrats and independents who lean to the Democratic Party (53%) in the April 20-26 survey report a great deal of confidence in medical scientists to act in the public interests, up from 37% in 2019. Among Republicans and Republican leaners, confidence in medical scientists has stayed roughly the same over this time period: 31% have a great deal of confidence as of April, as did 32% in 2019. As a result, there is a widening partisan divide in confidence in medical scientists from a modest 5 percentage points in 2019 to 22 points in the Center’s April survey.

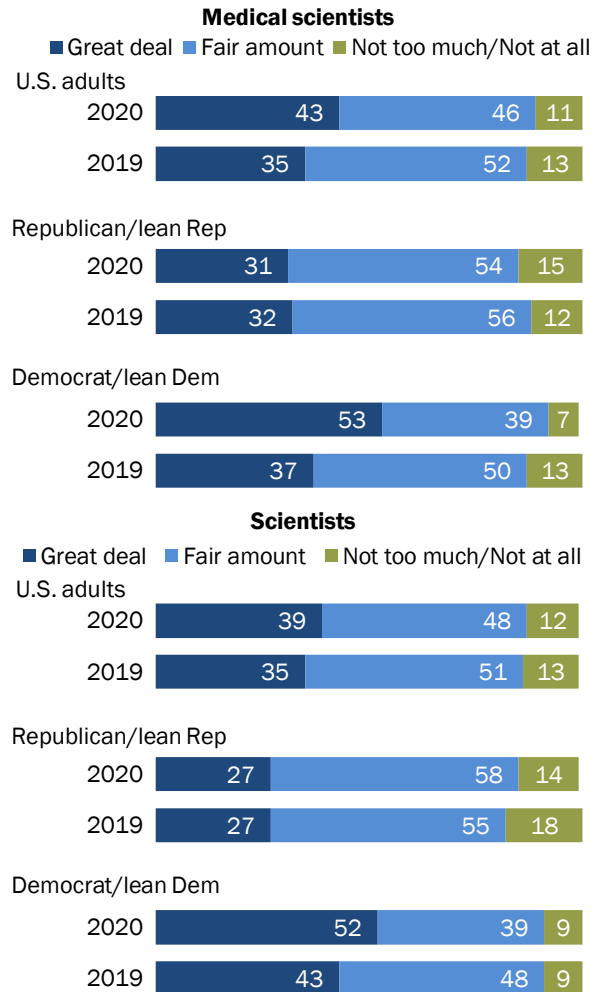
There is a similar shift of public trust in scientists. Among Democrats, 52% have a great deal of confidence in scientists to act in the public interest, up from 43% in 2019. By contrast, there has been no change in Republicans’ trust: 27% have a great deal of confidence in scientists, the same as in 2019. Thus, there is a growing partisan divide when it comes to confidence in scientists. (The survey asked a random half of respondents to rate their confidence in medical scientists and the other random half to rate their confidence in scientists.)

Americans with high levels of education are more likely to have strong confidence in medical scientists. There is a similar correlation between education and confidence in scientists.

However, the role of education in people’s level of confidence in scientists depends on political party. Seven-in-ten Democrats with a postgraduate degree (70%) have a great deal of confidence in scientists to act in the public interest, compared with 40% of those with a high school diploma or less education. Among Republicans, there is no such pattern; 27% of those with postgraduate

Partisan gaps in trust in scientists have grown over past year

% of U.S. adults who say they have a ___ (of) confidence in each of the following groups to act in the best interests of the public



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
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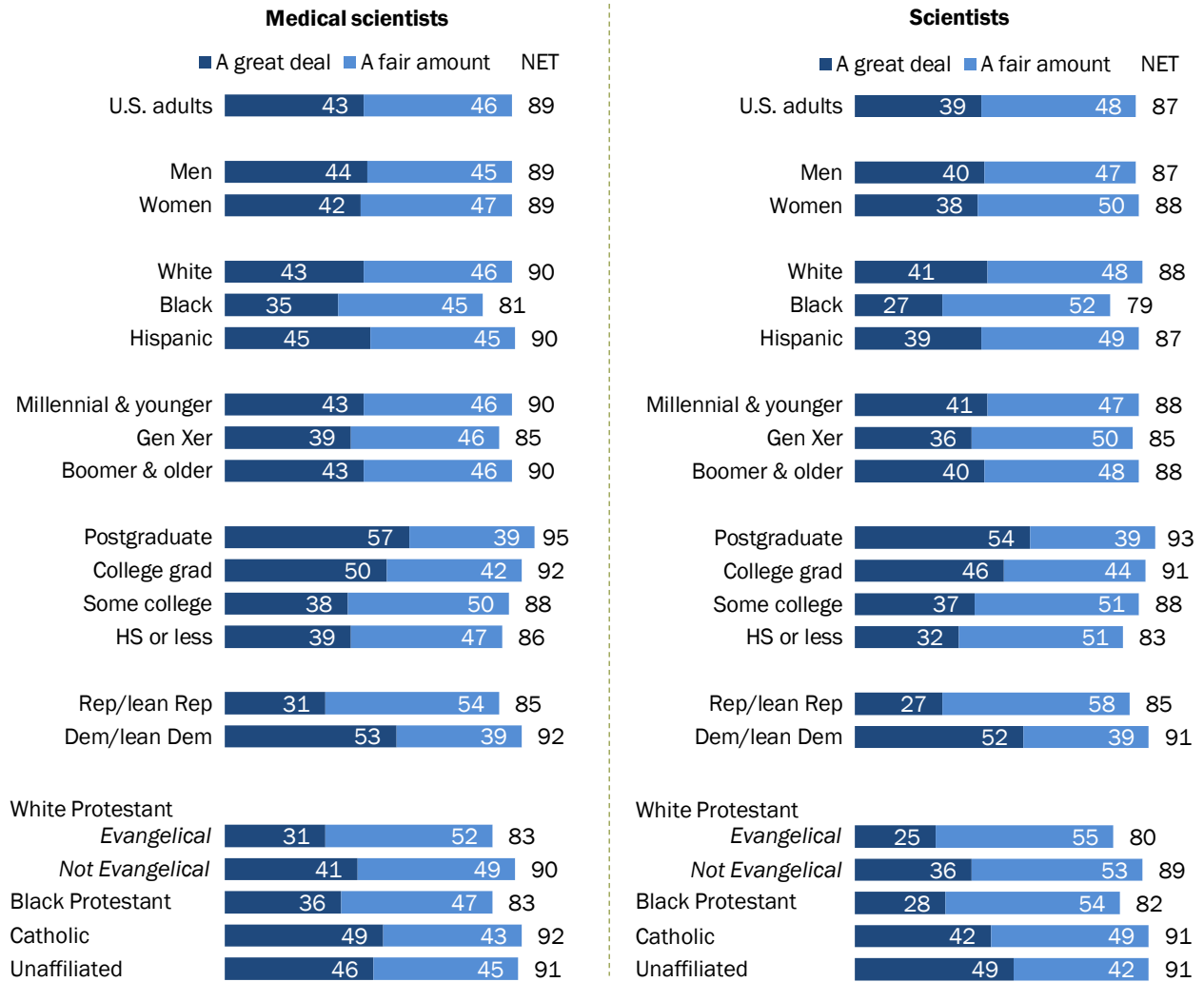
degree and the same share of those a high school diploma or less have a great deal of confidence in scientists (27%). See [Appendix A](#) for details.

A [2019 Center report](#) showed that people with higher levels of factual knowledge about science, based on an 11-item index, tend to express more confidence in scientists to act in the public interest. There, too, science knowledge was linked with Democrats' confidence in scientists but not Republicans' confidence.

On average, white evangelical Protestants are less likely than non-evangelical Protestants to have a great deal of trust in medical scientists (31% vs. 41%, respectively) and scientists (25% vs. 36%). These differences remain even after controlling for party identification and education.

Americans with more education have greater confidence in medical scientists to act in the public interest, as do Democrats

% of U.S. adults who say they have a great deal or fair amount of confidence in each of the following groups to act in the best interests of the public



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown. Whites and blacks include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted April 20-26, 2020.

“Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats”

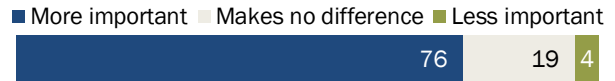
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A majority of Americans (76%) say they see scientific developments as more important since the coronavirus outbreak. Just 4% say they see such developments as less important, and another 19% say the outbreak has made no difference in the level of importance.

Partisan differences also emerge in these perspectives, with 84% of Democrats and 66% of Republicans saying they see developments in science as more important in light of the coronavirus outbreak. (See [Appendix A](#) for details.)

Most see scientific developments as more important post-outbreak

% of U.S. adults who say that, thinking about the coronavirus outbreak, they see developments in science as ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
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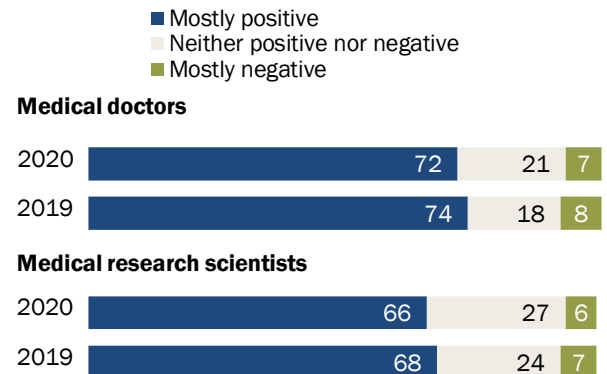
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White adults are more likely than black adults to have a positive overall view of medical doctors and medical research scientists

Overall, a majority of Americans say they have a mostly positive view of medical doctors (72%), and the same is true for medical research scientists (66%). Views of these scientists have not changed substantially since the question was last asked in January 2019, before the COVID-19 outbreak.

Majorities in U.S. have a positive view of medical doctors, research scientists

% of U.S. adults who say they have a _____ view of ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
 Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.
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Americans with a bachelor's or postgraduate degree (both 81%) are more likely than adults who attended some college (73%) or who have a high school diploma or less (63%) to have positive overall opinions of medical doctors. A similar education pattern exists for opinions of medical researchers.

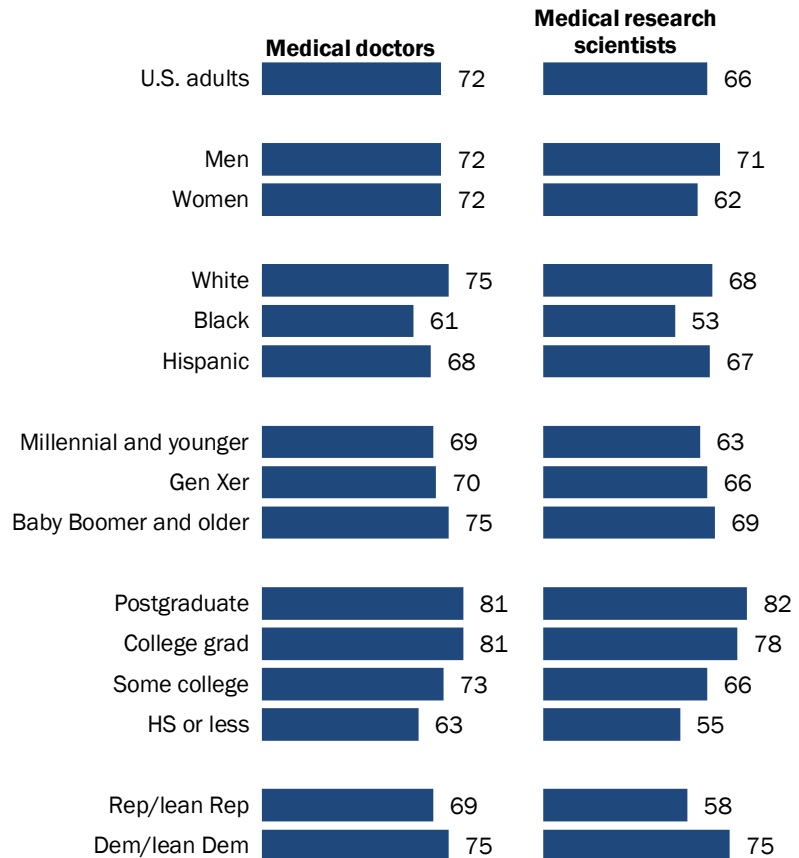
White adults (75%) are more likely than black adults (61%) to have a positive view of medical doctors. Black Americans also stand out for their lower ratings of medical research scientists: About half (53%) have a positive view, compared with majorities of white (68%) and Hispanic (67%) adults.¹

There are partisan differences in overall views of medical professionals. Democrats (75%) are more likely than Republicans (58%) to have mostly positive views of medical research scientists.

Democrats are also slightly more likely to say they have positive views of doctors (75%, vs. 69% of Republicans). In a 2019 Center survey, Republicans and Democrats were about equally likely to have positive views of doctors (77% and 73%, respectively).

Black adults less likely than whites to have a positive view of medical doctors

% of U.S. adults who say they have a *mostly positive* view of ...



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown. Whites and blacks include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

"Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats"

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¹ Differences between white and black adults in overall views of medical doctors and medical research scientists remain even when controlling for political party.

A growing share of Americans describe doctors' ethical standards as very high

Overall, 35% of U.S. adults say medical doctors have very high ethical standards, up from 23% in a [2019 Center survey](#).

Ratings of doctors' ethics are up across all demographic groups. See [Appendix A](#) for details.

While "very high" ratings are up significantly among both parties since 2019, Democrats (39%) are more likely than Republicans (31%) to rate doctors' ethical standards as very high.

In addition, people with a postgraduate education (40%) are more likely than those who attended some college or high school or less to rate doctors' ethical standards as very high (34% each).

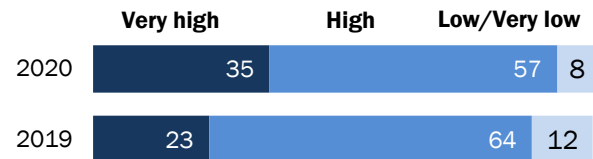
But Americans are more tepid when it comes to rating how well medical experts understand specific issues in the coronavirus crisis.

One-third of U.S. adults say medical health experts understand very well who is most at risk for serious illness from the coronavirus, and about half (52%) say they understand who is at risk fairly well. Another 15% say that medical health experts understand who is most at risk from COVID-19 not too or not at all well.

Assessments of public health experts are lower by comparison. Roughly one-quarter (23%) of U.S. adults say public health experts understand how to slow the spread of the coronavirus very well, half think public health experts understand this fairly well and another 26% say experts understand this not too or not at all well.

Growing share rate ethical standards of medical doctors as very high

% of U.S. adults who rate the ethical standards of medical doctors as ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 20-26, 2020.

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Public perceptions of expert understanding on COVID-19 are mixed

% of U.S. adults

Medical health experts understand ____ who is most at risk from coronavirus



Public health experts understand ____ how to slow the spread of coronavirus



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

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More Democrats than Republicans rate the understanding of experts in these areas highly. For example, 37% of Democrats (including leaners) and 29% of Republicans (including leaners) say medical health experts understand very well who is most at risk from the coronavirus disease. About three-in-ten Democrats (31%) say public health experts understand very well how to slow the spread of COVID-19, compared with about half as many Republicans (15%).

Acknowledgments

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pewresearch.org/science.

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Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access at home are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

Questions about public confidence in scientists and medical scientists to act in the best interests of the public and questions about the ethical standards of medical doctors is drawn from the panel wave conducted April 20-26, 2020, with 10,139 U.S. adults. More on the methodology of this wave is available [here](#).

Most data in this report is drawn from the panel wave conducted April 29 to May 5, 2020. A total of 10,957 panelists responded out of 13,459 who were sampled, for a response rate of 81%. This does not include 10 panelists who were removed from the data due to extremely high rates of refusal or straightlining. The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 4.5%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 1.6%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 10,957 respondents is plus or minus 1.4 percentage points.

American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

Recruitment dates	Mode	Invited	Joined	Active panelists remaining
Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014	Landline/ cell RDD	9,809	5,338	2,310
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	1,335
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	685
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS/web	9,396	8,778	6,411
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS/web	5,900	4,720	4,686
	Total	35,014	23,440	15,427

Note: Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel.

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This study featured a stratified random sample from the ATP. The sampling strata were defined by the following variables: age, race, ethnicity, education, country of birth (among Hispanics), internet status, party affiliation, voter registration and volunteerism.

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of which 9,942 agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample (ABS) of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. In each household, the adult with the next birthday was asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. For a random half-sample of invitations, households without internet access were instructed to return a postcard. These households were contacted by telephone and sent a tablet if they agreed to participate. A total of 9,396 were invited to join the panel, and 8,778 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. The same recruitment procedure was carried out on August 19, 2019, from which a total of 5,900 were invited to join the panel and 4,720 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. Of the 23,440 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 15,427 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey was conducted.

The U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.² The American Trends Panel never uses breakout routers or chains that direct respondents to additional surveys.

Weighting

The ATP data was weighted in a multistep process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original selection probability. The next step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on the dimensions listed in the accompanying table.

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Gender	2018 American Community Survey
Age	
Education	
Race/Hispanic origin	
Country of birth among Hispanics	
Years lived in the United States among Hispanics	
Home internet access	
Region x Metropolitan status	2019 CPS March Supplement
Volunteerism	2017 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	Average of the three most recent Pew Research Center telephone surveys.

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total U.S. adult population.

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² AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. "[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling](#)."

Sampling errors and test of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey.

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

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Margins of error

	Unweighted Sample size	Margin of error in percentage points
U.S. adults	10,957	+/- 1.4
Men	4,909	+/- 2.2
Women	6,026	+/- 1.8
White	7,143	+/- 1.7
Black	890	+/- 4.6
Hispanic	2,173	+/- 3.8
Millennial & younger	2,866	+/- 2.7
Generation X	2,911	+/- 2.6
Boomer & older	5,112	+/- 2.1
Postgraduate	2,770	+/- 2.4
College grad	3,176	+/- 2.2
Some college	3,294	+/- 2.3
HS or less	1,692	+/- 3.0
Rep/lean Rep	4,437	+/- 2.1
Dem/lean Dem	6,182	+/- 2.0
Cons Republican	2,854	+/- 2.6
Mod/lib Republican	1,534	+/- 3.7
Mod/cons Democrat	2,946	+/- 2.8
Liberal Democrat	3,159	+/- 2.7

Note: The margins of error are reported at the 95% level of confidence and are calculated by taking into account the average design effect for each subgroup. Whites and blacks include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Republicans and Democrats include independents and others who "lean" toward the parties.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

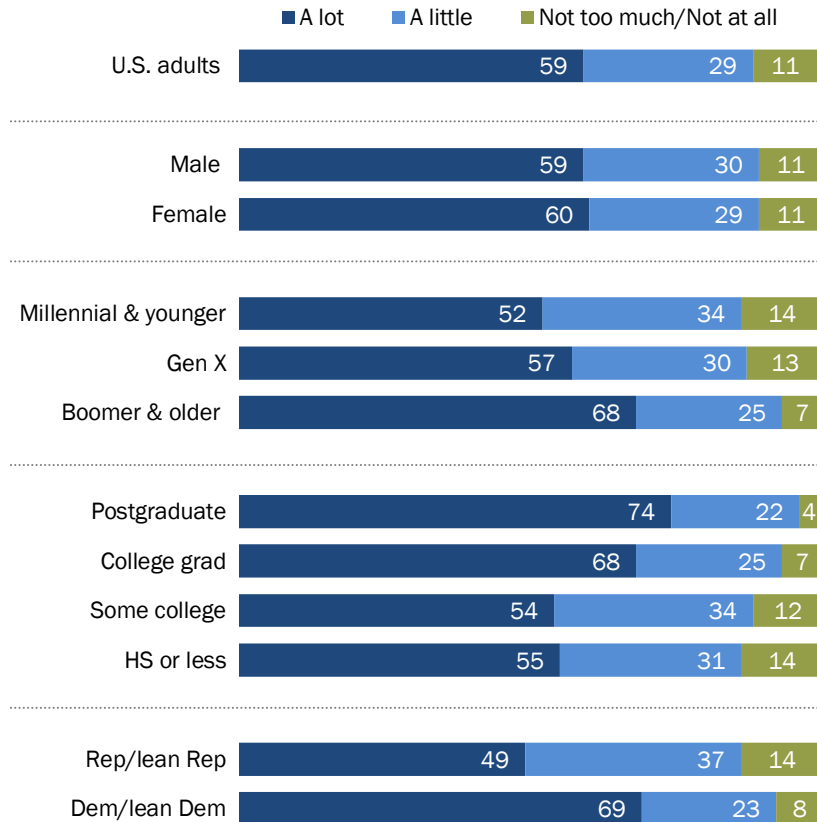
"Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats"

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Appendix A: Detailed charts and tables

Most Americans say social distancing measures are helping reduce spread of COVID-19 at least a little

% of U.S. adults who say social distancing measures are helping ___ to slow the spread of coronavirus in the U.S.



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

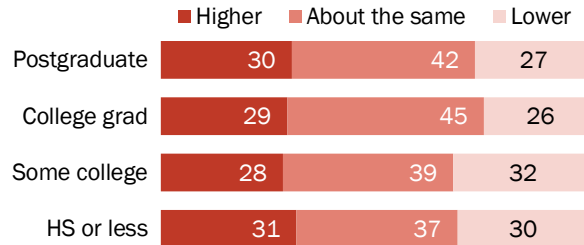
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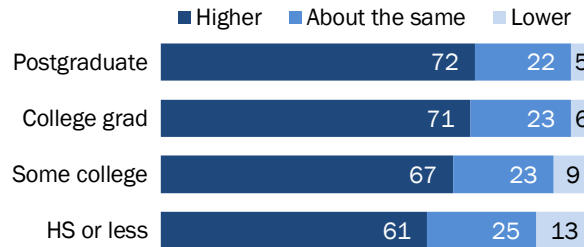
More-educated Democrats say U.S. has a higher rate of COVID-19 cases, relative to other nations

% of U.S. adults who say the share of people in the U.S. with coronavirus disease is ___ compared to most other nations

Among Republicans with the following education



Among Democrats with the following education



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Republicans and Democrats include independents and others who “lean” toward the parties.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

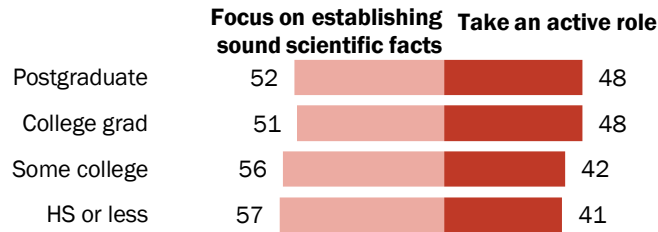
“Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats”

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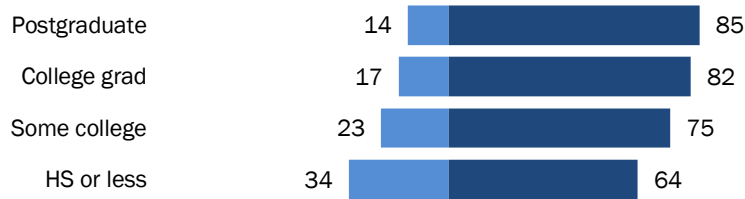
Education links with Democrats' views of scientists' role in policy debates

% of U.S. adults who say scientists should ____ when it comes to public policy debates about scientific issues ...

Among Republicans with ____ education



Among Democrats with ____ education



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Republicans and Democrats include independents and others who "lean" toward the parties.

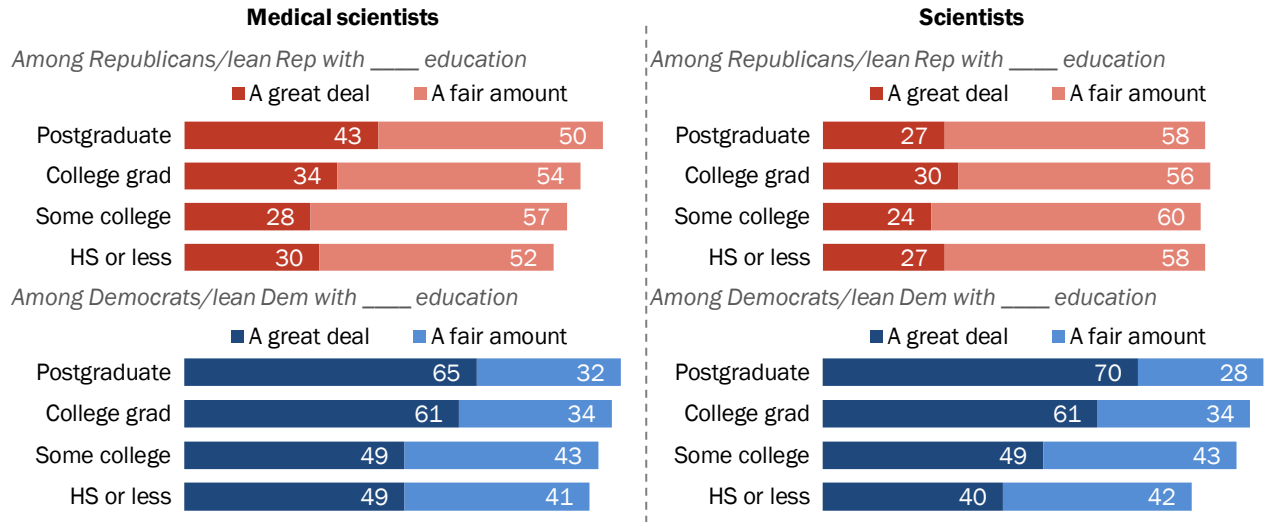
Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

"Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats"

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More-educated Democrats are more likely to have a great deal of confidence in scientists

% of U.S. adults who say they have ____ of confidence in the following groups to act in the best interests of the public



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 20-26, 2020.

"Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats"

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Rising confidence in medical scientists and scientists among Democrats, not Republicans

% of U.S. adults who have a *great deal* of confidence in each group to act in the best interests of the public

	Medical scientists			DIFF	Scientists		
	2019	2020			2019	2020	DIFF
U.S. adults	35	43	+8	35	39	+4	
Gender							
Men	34	44	+10	38	40	+2	
Women	35	42	+7	33	38	+5	
Race/ethnicity							
White	35	43	+8	38	41	+3	
Black	31	35	+4	29	27	-2	
Hispanic	37	45	+8	28	39	+11	
Generation							
Millennial & younger	34	45	+11	38	41	+3	
Gen X	34	39	+5	35	36	+1	
Baby Boomer & older	35	43	+8	33	40	+7	
Education							
Postgraduate	41	57	+16	45	54	+9	
College grad	40	50	+10	42	46	+4	
Some college	34	38	+4	36	37	+1	
HS or less	30	39	+9	29	32	+3	
Political party							
Rep/lean Rep	32	31	-1	27	27	0	
Dem/lean Dem	37	53	+16	43	52	+9	

Note: Significant changes in **bold**. Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown. Whites and blacks include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted April 20-26, 2020.

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More Americans rate medical doctors' ethical standards as 'very high' today

% of U.S. adults saying they would rate the ethical standards of medical doctors as *very high*

	March-April 2019	April 2020	DIFF
U.S. adults	23	35	+12
Gender			
Men	24	35	+11
Women	22	35	+13
Race/ethnicity			
White	22	34	+12
Black	25	35	+10
Hispanic	24	41	+17
Generation			
Millennial & younger	27	37	+10
Gen X	21	34	+13
Baby Boomer & older	20	34	+14
Education			
Postgraduate	27	40	+13
College grad	22	37	+15
Some college	22	34	+12
HS or less	22	34	+12
Party			
Rep/lean Rep	21	31	+10
Dem/lean Dem	25	39	+14

Note: Significant differences shown in **bold**. Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown.

Whites and blacks include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted April 20-26, 2020.

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Three-quarters in U.S. see greater importance of scientific developments

% of U.S. adults who say, thinking about the coronavirus outbreak, they see developments in science as ...

	More important	Less important	Makes no difference
U.S. adults	76	4	19
Gender			
Men	76	4	19
Women	75	5	19
Race/ethnicity			
White	76	3	20
Black	71	8	19
Hispanic	77	6	16
Generation			
Millennial & younger	74	6	19
Gen X	72	5	23
Baby Boomer & older	80	2	18
Education			
Postgraduate	84	2	15
College grad	81	2	16
Some college	76	4	20
HS or less	70	6	22
Party			
Rep/lean Rep	66	4	28
Dem/lean Dem	84	4	12

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Whites and blacks include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.
"Trust in Medical Scientists Has Grown in U.S., but Mainly Among Democrats"

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Survey question wording and topline

**2020 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL
WAVE 67 TOPLINE
APRIL 29-MAY 5, 2020
TOTAL N=10,957**

ASK ALL:

YRAHEAD Looking ahead, as far as you are concerned, do you think that a year from now, that is May 2021, will be better or worse than May 2020?

Apr. 29- May 5 2020	82	Better
	17	Worse
	1	No answer

TREND FOR COMPARISON:

Pew Research Center survey conducted by telephone: Looking ahead, as far as you are concerned, do you think that 2020 will be better or worse than 2019?

	<u>Better</u>	<u>(VOL.) Worse</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
Jan 8-13, 2020	55	34	11
Jan 9-14, 2019	47	43	10
Jan 10-15, 2018	61	29	11
Jan 4-9, 2017	49	42	9
Jan 7-14, 2016	56	30	14
Dec 3-7, 2014 (U)	49	42	9
Jan 15-19, 2014	56	35	9
Dec 5-9, 2012	55	36	9
Jan 11-16, 2012	57	29	14
Dec 1-5, 2010	55	31	14
Jan 6-10, 2010	67	26	8
Jan 7-11, 2009	52	37	11
December, 2007	50	34	16
December, 2006	57	28	15
December, 1999	66	19	15
December, 1998	59	25	16
December, 1994	59	28	13
<i>Gallup:</i> December, 1993	64	20	16
<i>Gallup:</i> December, 1992	61	11	28
<i>Gallup:</i> December, 1991	61	31	8
<i>Gallup:</i> December, 1990	48	42	10
<i>Gallup:</i> December, 1986	53	25	22
<i>Gallup:</i> December, 1985	64	20	17
<i>Gallup:</i> December, 1984	61	20	19
<i>Gallup:</i> December, 1982	50	32	18
<i>Gallup:</i> December, 1981	41	44	15

OTHER QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**RANDOMIZE POLICY1 AND POLICY2****ASK ALL:**

POLICY1 Which of these statements comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right? **[RANDOMIZE]**

April 29- May 5 <u>2020</u>		Jan 7-21 <u>2019</u>
60	Scientists should take an active role in public policy debates about scientific issues	60
39	Scientists should focus on establishing sound scientific facts and stay out of public policy debates	39
2	No answer	1

ASK ALL:

POLICY2 Which of these statements comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right? **[DO NOT RANDOMIZE]**

April 29- May 5 <u>2020</u>		Jan 7-21 <u>2019</u>
43	Public opinion should play an important role to guide policy decisions about scientific issues	54
55	Public opinion should NOT play an important role to guide policy decisions about scientific issues because these issues are too complex for the average person to understand	44
2	No answer	1

TREND FOR COMPARISON:

Pew Research Center survey conducted by telephone: Which of these statements best describes your views, even if neither is exactly right?

	Aug 15-25 <u>2014</u>
<i>(One) Public opinion should play an important role to guide policy decisions about scientific issues, [OR]</i>	60
<i>(Two) Public opinion should NOT play an important role to guide policy decisions about scientific issues because these issues are too complex for the average person to understand</i>	35
<i>Neither/Both (VOL.)</i>	2
<i>Don't know/Refused (VOL.)</i>	2

ASK ALL:

POLICY3

In general, would you say scientific experts are... **[DO NOT RANDOMIZE]**

April 29- May 5 <u>2020</u>		Jan 7-21 <u>2019</u>
47	Usually BETTER at making good policy decisions about scientific issues than other people	45
7	Usually WORSE at making good policy decisions about scientific issues than other people	7
45	NEITHER BETTER NOR WORSE at making good policy decisions about scientific issues than other people	48
1	No answer	1

OTHER QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**ASK FORM 1 [N=5,475]:**

RQ1_F1A

Medical research scientists conduct research to investigate human diseases, and test methods to prevent and treat them.In general, would you say your view of medical research scientists is...

Apr 29- May 5 <u>2020</u>		Jan 7-21 <u>2019</u>
66	Mostly positive	68
6	Mostly negative	7
27	Neither positive nor negative	24
1	No answer	1

ASK FORM 2 [N=5,482]:

PQ1_F2A

Medical doctors provide patients with diagnoses of disease and/or treatment recommendations to promote, maintain or restore a patient's health.In general, would you say your view of medical doctors is...

Apr 29- May 5 <u>2020</u>		Jan 7-21 <u>2019</u>
72	Mostly positive	74
7	Mostly negative	8
21	Neither positive nor negative	18
<1	No answer	<1

RANDOMIZE ORDER OF CLIN_TRIAL1 AND CLIN_TRIAL2; DISPLAY INTRO TEXT ONLY FOR FIRST ITEM**ASK ALL:**

Some medical research studies are called clinical trials in which volunteers participate in a study to help test the safety and effectiveness of new treatments, drugs or devices.

CLIN_TRIAL1 How important do you think it is to go through the process of conducting clinical trials, even if it will lengthen the time it takes to develop new treatments?

Apr 29-	
May 5	
<u>2020</u>	
64	Very important
31	Somewhat important
4	Not too important
1	Not at all important
1	No answer

ASK ALL:

CLIN_TRIAL2 Which of these comes closer to your views about allowing more people access to experimental drugs for treatment of a serious illness or disease BEFORE clinical trials have shown the drugs to be safe and effective? **[RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS]**

Apr 29-	
May 5	
<u>2020</u>	
59	The benefits outweigh the risks
40	The risks outweigh the benefits
2	No answer

OTHER QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**ASK FORM 1: [N=5,475]**

COVID_SCI1F1 As far as you know, how much are the federal government's policies to control the spread of coronavirus influenced by evidence from public health experts?

Apr 29-	
May 5	
<u>2020</u>	
26	A great deal
49	A fair amount
20	Not too much
4	Not at all
1	No answer

ASK FORM 2: [N=5,482]

COVID_SCI2F2 As far as you know, how much are your state government's policies to control the spread of coronavirus influenced by evidence from public health experts?

Apr 29- May 5 <u>2020</u>	
43	A great deal
40	A fair amount
13	Not too much
4	Not at all
1	No answer

ASK ALL:

COVID_SCI3 Thinking about what you have heard or read, how well do... **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

	<u>Very well</u>	Fairly <u>well</u>	Not too <u>well</u>	Not at all <u>well</u>	No <u>answer</u>
a. Public health experts understand how to slow the spread of coronavirus Apr 29-May 5, 2020	23	50	21	5	<1
b. Medical science experts understand who is most at risk of serious illness from coronavirus Apr 29-May 5, 2020	33	52	12	3	<1

ASK ALL:

COVID_SCI4 How much do you think social distancing measures are helping to slow the spread of coronavirus in the U.S.?

Apr 29- May 5 <u>2020</u>	
59	Helping a lot
29	Helping a little
8	Not helping too much
3	Not helping at all
<1	No answer

ASK ALL:

COVID_SCI5 Do you think each of the following is or is not a reason why there are new cases of coronavirus in the U.S.? **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

	<u>Yes, this is a major reason</u>	<u>Yes, this is a minor reason</u>	<u>No, this is NOT a reason</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a. There is not enough testing for coronavirus Apr 29-May 5, 2020	58	25	17	<1
b. Not enough people are following social distancing measures Apr 29-May 5, 2020	57	30	12	<1
c. Coronavirus spreads more easily than other infectious diseases Apr 29-May 5, 2020	68	21	11	1

OTHER QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**ASK ALL:**

COVID_USRATE Taking into account the size of the U.S. population, do you think the share of people with coronavirus disease is... **[RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2 WITH OPTION 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Apr 29- May 5 <u>2020</u>	
49	Higher in the U.S. than most other nations
18	Lower in the U.S. than most other nations
31	About the same as most other nations
1	No answer

OTHER QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

COVID_SCI6 Thinking about the year ahead, that is in the NEXT 12 MONTHS, do you think the following will or will not happen? **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

	Definitely will happen	Probably will happen	Probably will NOT happen	Definitely will NOT happen	No answer
a. There will be a vaccine to prevent the coronavirus disease Apr 29-May 5, 2020	16	57	23	3	1
b. There will be a medication or drug that is shown to be an effective treatment or cure for coronavirus disease Apr 29-May 5, 2020	20	63	15	2	1
c. There will be another outbreak of coronavirus disease after the first outbreak dies down Apr 29-May 5, 2020	24	59	15	2	1
d. The focus on coronavirus will delay progress on medical treatments for other serious diseases and conditions Apr 29-May 5, 2020	17	52	27	3	1

ASK ALL:

COVID_SCI6E If a vaccine to prevent COVID-19 were available today, would you...

Apr 29-
May 5
2020

42	Definitely get the vaccine
30	Probably get the vaccine
16	Probably NOT get the vaccine
11	Definitely NOT get the vaccine
1	No answer

OTHER QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

COVID_SCI9 Thinking about the coronavirus outbreak, does this make you see developments in science as...

Apr 29-
May 5
2020

76	MORE important for society
4	LESS important for society
19	Makes NO DIFFERENCE either way
1	No answer

OTHER QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

**2020 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL
WAVE 66 FINAL TOPLINE
APRIL 20-26, 2020
N=10,139**

See "[Americans' Views of the News Media During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#)" for more questions from this survey.

ASK ALL:

ETHICS1

Generally speaking, how would you rate the ethical standards of each of the following groups?
[RANDOMIZE ITEMS, SPLIT OVER TWO SCREENS; RANDOMLY DISPLAY ANSWER CHOICES 1-4 OR 4-1]

	<u>Very high ethical standards</u>	<u>High ethical standards</u>	<u>Low ethical standards</u>	<u>Very low ethical standards</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a. Elected officials					
Apr 20-26, 2020	3	24	54	17	1
Mar 18-Apr 1, 2019	3	23	54	20	1
NO ITEM b					
c. Journalists					
Apr 20-26, 2020	6	37	38	19	1
Mar 18-Apr 1, 2019	6	38	38	16	1
d. Medical doctors					
Apr 20-26, 2020	35	57	6	1	*
Mar 18-Apr 1, 2019	23	64	11	2	1
e. Religious leaders					
Apr 20-26, 2020	13	53	24	8	1
Mar 18-Apr 1, 2019	10	54	27	7	1
f. Lawyers					
Apr 20-26, 2020	5	39	43	11	1
Mar 18-Apr 1, 2019	5	38	43	12	1
g. Police officers					
Apr 20-26, 2020	12	60	22	5	1
Mar 18-Apr 1, 2019	11	59	24	5	1

ASK ALL:

CONF How much confidence, if any, do you have in each of the following to act in the best interests of the public? **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

	<u>A great deal of confidence</u>	<u>A fair amount of confidence</u>	<u>Not too much confidence</u>	<u>No confidence at all</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a. Elected officials					
Apr 20-26, 2020	3	33	49	14	1
Jan 7-21, 2019	4	32	50	14	*
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	4	33	48	15	*
Jan 29-Feb 13, 2018	3	22	52	23	*
May 10-June 6, 2016	3	24	54	19	1
b. Journalists					
Apr 20-26, 2020	9	39	33	19	*
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	15	41	28	16	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
<i>The news media</i>					
Jan 7-21, 2019	9	38	34	19	*
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	10	38	33	19	*
Jan 29-Feb 13, 2018	8	32	35	25	*
May 10-June 6, 2016	5	33	40	21	1
c. The military					
Apr 20-26, 2020	38	45	13	4	*
Jan 7-21, 2019	36	46	14	4	*
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	41	41	12	4	1
Jan 29-Feb 13, 2018	39	41	15	4	*
May 10-June 6, 2016	33	46	15	5	1
d. Religious leaders					
Apr 20-26, 2020	17	46	26	11	1
Jan 7-21, 2019	13	44	30	12	*
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	15	47	27	11	1
Jan 29-Feb 13, 2018	9	40	34	16	1
May 10-June 6, 2016	13	39	32	14	1
e. Business leaders					
Apr 20-26, 2020	5	43	41	11	1
Jan 7-21, 2019	6	40	43	11	*
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	4	39	43	14	*
Jan 29-Feb 13, 2018	5	40	42	13	*
May 10-June 6, 2016	4	37	44	14	1
ASK FORM 1 ONLY: [N=5,047]					
f. Medical scientists					
Apr 20-26, 2020	43	46	9	2	*
Jan 7-21, 2019	35	52	11	2	*
May 10-June 6, 2016	24	60	12	3	1
ASK FORM 2 ONLY: [N=5,092]					
g. Scientists					
Apr 20-26, 2020	39	48	10	2	1
Jan 7-21, 2019	35	51	11	2	*
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	33	49	14	3	*
Jan 29-Feb 13, 2018	27	52	17	5	*
May 10-June 6, 2016	21	55	18	4	1

CONF CONTINUED ...**ASK FORM 1 ONLY: [N=5,047]**

h. College and university professors

	<u>A great deal of confidence</u>	<u>A fair amount of confidence</u>	<u>Not too much confidence</u>	<u>No confidence at all</u>	<u>No answer</u>
Apr 20-26, 2020	16	52	22	9	*
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	18	50	22	10	*

ASK FORM 2 ONLY: [N=5,092]

i. Public school principals for grades K-12

Apr 20-26, 2020	28	55	14	3	*
Jan 7-21, 2019	21	56	18	4	1
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	25	55	16	4	*

TREND FOR COMPARISON:*Public school principals and superintendents for grades K-12*

Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	22	55	17	5	1
May 10-June 6, 2016	13	53	27	7	1

j. Police officers

Apr 20-26, 2020	24	54	17	4	*
Nov 27-Dec 10, 2018	30	48	16	5	*