

# Politics key to Americans' views on COVID-19, poll shows

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(HealthDay)—The new coronavirus holds no political views. The

pathogen's only aim is to infect, spread and thrive.

But in what is surely no surprise in a deeply divided America, it turns out that your [political views](#) play a large role in your attitude towards COVID-19 prevention efforts.

Republicans tend to be much less worried than Democrats about the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore less likely to take steps to ward off infection, according to a new *HealthDay/Harris Poll* survey.

Twice as many Republicans believe the U.S. reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic is overblown, 52% versus 26% of Democrats, the survey shows.

Republicans are also more likely than Democrats to be optimistic that COVID-19 will be under control by early 2021 (66% versus 48%).

Perhaps as a result, about seven in 10 Republicans said they accept certain risks when it comes to COVID-19 so they can go on with life as they choose, compared with about four out of 10 Democrats.

Additionally, eight out of 10 Democrats (82%) said they "always" wear a mask when they go out, compared with 66% of Republicans.

Similarly, twice as many Republicans think that restrictions on gatherings due to COVID-19 should be lifted across the country, 55% versus 26% of Democrats.

"American attitudes around COVID-19 have been deeply swayed by their political leaning," said Robyn Bell Dickson, managing director of The Harris Poll. "While perhaps not at all surprising to see a [political divide](#) in these results, the magnitude of difference between Republicans and Democrats was not only unexpected, but also alarming as a united

front can only help us all to move in the right direction."

Douglas Kriner, a professor of government at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., said he's not surprised by the poll results, even though "the response to COVID-19 is not intrinsically a partisan or ideological issue."

American opinion simply is reflecting the chasm that's opened up between America's political leadership, Kriner said.

"The partisan split in opinion on so many questions related to COVID-19 is unsurprising given the intense elite polarization on the issue, fueled in large part by the Trump administration itself," Kriner said. "Many Americans routinely view political and policy questions—even those with objective answers, such as whether unemployment is rising or falling—through partisan-tinted lenses."

Americans have a chance at the end of the current brutal campaign season to come together and combat COVID-19 as a united front, but Kriner is not optimistic that will occur.

"The splits observed in this and other polling are driven primarily by the partisan divide in elite rhetoric," Kriner said. "If [political leaders](#) could come to an agreement after the election to actively depoliticize the issue, we might be able to move toward a national consensus on how to combat the virus—but this is very far from a good bet."

Lynn Bufka, senior director of practice transformation and quality for the American Psychological Association, agreed that "when leaders appeal to what's good for the larger group, the community, that can make a difference."

She said, "Hopefully, changes in how leadership respond to this will help

to depoliticize as we continue to move forward with this, because we will continue to have COVID among us until there's a vaccine. Politicizing it has not resulted in reducing rates of infection."

And, Bufka added, "I'm sure Democrats want to go on with life as they choose as much as Republicans do. It's a matter of knowing what are the risks versus what are the benefits of different kinds of things. I think that's part of the challenge that everybody's wrestling with, and trying to frame these dilemmas in the least political way possible, but to really underscore the benefits of certain decisions for the larger society."

The online poll of 2,021 U.S. adults was conducted by The Harris Poll between Oct. 8 and 12.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [COVID-19](#).

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