

New poll shows surge in anxiety among Americans over safety, COVID-19, health, gun violence and the election

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According to a new public opinion poll released today by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), 62% of Americans feel more anxious than they did at this time last year. That marks a sizable increase over

APA polls of the past three years, in which the number has ranged between 32% and 39%.

When asked what made them extremely or somewhat anxious, Americans said the top issues were: keeping themselves and their family safe (80%), COVID-19 (75%), their health (73%), gun violence (73%) and the upcoming presidential election (72%).

"It's not surprising that more Americans are anxious, given the circumstances we all find ourselves in this year," said APA President Jeffrey Geller, M.D., M.P.H. "It's normal to feel this way during times of stress and a lot of people will likely weather this storm without serious mental health consequences. However, given the huge jump in anxiety, coupled with the impact the pandemic is having on those who were already living with [mental illness](#) or [substance use disorders](#), the most important thing that we can do as a country is to invest in our mental health system."

Some Report Change in Levels of COVID-19 Anxiety Six Months Out

APA fielded a short poll on COVID-19's mental health impacts in March, and asked the same questions in September as part of this larger study. While the percentage of Americans indicating that COVID-19 has had a serious impact on their mental health stayed relatively flat (36% in March vs. 37% in September), more Americans said they'd been fighting with loved ones (12% in March vs. 17% in September) or consuming more substances or alcohol (8% in March versus 14% in September).

About half of those polled expressed some level of anxiety around the possibility of their loved ones contracting COVID-19, which was slightly lower than in March (56% in September versus 62% in March), while

the level of anxiety those polled expressed around getting the virus themselves stayed flat (47% were anxious about the possibility in September versus 48% in March).

Systemic Racism and Mental Health

At the end of a summer in which police killings of Black Americans, health disparities, protests and discussions of systemic racism captured the world's attention, 76% of those polled strongly or somewhat agreed that systemic racism impacts the mental health of Americans, especially people of color. Black Americans were more likely to strongly or somewhat agree with this statement (83%) than Latino or Hispanic Americans (78%), Asian Americans (77%) or white Americans (74%). Generational differences were less pronounced.

More than half (54%) of all respondents indicated that systemic racism strongly or somewhat impacts their own mental health. Black Americans were more likely to say so (68%) than Latino or Hispanic Americans (65%), Asian Americans (56%), or white Americans (51%). Of all those polled, 57% indicated that the state of law enforcement today strongly or somewhat impacted their mental health.

"This poll underscores that as the Black community continues to suffer disproportionately from COVID-19, the added effects of ongoing racism and racial trauma is taking a significant toll on both mental and physical health," Geller said. "The impact of structural inequities on the mental health of the Black community is far reaching, and each of us as psychiatrists has a vital role to play in tackling these issues. On a basic level, we must continue to strive to diversify the ranks of our profession and provide culturally responsive care to our patients."

2020 Election and Americans' Feelings

As Nov. 3 approaches, 57% of those polled said they were more anxious about the coming presidential election than prior contests. The number was higher among Democrats (71%) and Republicans (53%) than in Independents (35%).

More than 60% of the respondents indicated that the impact of politics on their daily lives was making them extremely or somewhat anxious, up from 51% in 2019. More than half (51%) of those polled indicated that having discussions about the election caused them to feel extremely or somewhat anxious.

"The contentious political discourse in this country over the past few years is reflected in these [poll results](#)," said APA CEO and Medical Director Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A. "The politics of the day and this election are causing a great amount of stress among Americans."

The poll also included questions on climate change and mental health, stigma, mental health in the workplace and telehealth. The full results are [available here](#). The new findings come from an APA-sponsored poll conducted Sept. 14-16, 2020, using an online omnibus study by ENGINE INSIGHTS among a demographically representative U.S. sample of 1,004 adults 18 years of age and older. The margin of error is +/-3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Past polling and methodology is available here: [March 2020](#), [April 2019](#), [May 2018](#), and [May 2017](#).

More information: American Psychological Association poll: www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Patients-Families/APA-Survey-October-2020.pdf

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

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