

Families resilient in face of COVID-19, American Family Survey says

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Credit: Nate Edwards

In the tumult of 2020 America—the pandemic, the protests, the presidential election—BYU political scientists have spotted some good news.

On average, American families have shown strength despite the year's challenges, according to results from the annual American Family Survey.

A [collaborative effort](#) between the BYU Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy and Deseret News, the survey seeks to create "a snapshot in time of the status of the American [family](#)," in the words of the report. Now in its sixth year, the survey circulated in July 2020 to a nationally representative sample and included questions about marriage, parenting and politics.

Of the 3,000 respondents, more than half (56%) reported that they appreciate their spouse more because of the pandemic. This year, 80% of parents said that parenting is very important to their sense of identity, compared to 71% in 2018.

"COVID doesn't seem to have affected [family life](#) on average as much as you might think," said BYU professor Jeremy Pope, who co-led the study with colleague Christopher Karpowitz. "Families are not uniformly hurting—in fact, overall people have shown themselves to be fairly resilient."

While many of the findings about families were positive and showed continuity from past years, Pope was also quick to emphasize that those aggregate numbers don't represent the experience of every family.

"When you have multiple stressors on your life, such as economic or relationship distress," Pope explained, "you become much more likely to have experienced trouble from coronavirus."

For example, compared to those enjoying financial stability, those facing an [economic crisis](#) were twice as likely to agree with the statement, "The [coronavirus](#) pandemic has increased stress in my marriage."

Declining marriage rates may also heighten the challenges COVID-19 presents to households. The number of single adults has risen from 30% to 37% in recent years, and many single adults reported struggling with loneliness in pandemic conditions.

The survey unearthed a number of other significant patterns in public opinion and responses to 2020 events, including measures of surprising political unity, along with some sharp divisiveness.

- Shifting roles and relationships in families:
- More people are living with extended family this year (25% in 2020 compared to 20% in 2019).
- Men are adjusting to their new work/life balances during the pandemic, with 40% saying that they are struggling with new household roles.
- Although men believe they are dividing household tasks evenly with their partners, women overall think differently, many saying it's closer to a 65-35 split with women doing more.

Political positions on COVID-19:

- When it comes to COVID-relief policies, Republicans and Democrats are largely in agreement: 72% of Republicans and 77% of Democrats believe government relief checks were helpful.
- Both Republicans and Democrats favor help for small businesses, while neither wants government help for big business.

Attitudes towards race:

- Americans are now more likely to see their race as an important part of their identity (37% in 2020 compared to 29% in 2018).
- While more than half of all respondents agreed that Black

families "face obstacles that white families don't face," Pope noted that there is a "canyon-wide" difference in partisan views on this issue: Democrats agree with the statement 80% of the time, but Republicans concur just 25% of the time.

Political views about family and religion:

- This year, 73% of couples reported talking about political and social issues together, compared to 61% in 2015.
- Only 22% of Americans believe that most people can afford the cost of raising a child, down from 30% in 2015. However, Republicans and Democrats differ in how they prioritize economic problems for families, with 71% of Democrats but only 32% of Republicans saying that [economic problems](#) are among the top three issues families face.
- Republicans and Democrats also disagree about the importance of declining religious faith and church attendance, with 44% of Republicans compared to just 5% of Democrats naming this as a top-three issue.

More information: American Family Survey:
media.deseret.com/media/misc/p...955019268.1593550122

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