



**AMERICAN  
PERSPECTIVES  
SURVEY**

# **Fear, frustration, and faith: Americans respond to the coronavirus outbreak**

Findings from the March 2020 American Perspectives Survey

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A Project of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research

## **Concerns about COVID-19, stockpiling supplies, and a return to normal?**

The majority of Americans share deep personal concern about the coronavirus affecting themselves and their family. Seventy percent of Americans are somewhat or very worried about the possibility that they or someone in their immediate family might contract the virus. The March American Perspectives Survey examines the most recent public attitudes on the coronavirus and religious attitudes in the time of the coronavirus.

Democrats are more worried about contracting the virus than are Republicans (79 percent versus 63 percent), but the ideological gap is much wider. Only 58 percent of conservatives are worried that they or a family member will become infected, compared to 80 percent of liberals.

Americans express less concerns about their ability to pay their rent, mortgages, or other housing costs, although a substantial segment of the public says they are worried about this. Nearly half (48 percent) of Americans say they are somewhat or very worried about being able to cover their basic housing costs. More than half (53 percent) of the public say they are not that worried.

There are stark generational divisions. Young adults (age 18 to 29) are far more concerned about their housing costs than are older Americans. More than half (53 percent) of young adults and 59 percent of those age 30 to 49 say they are at least somewhat worried about being unable to pay their housing costs. In contrast, only 29 percent of seniors (age 65 or older) say the same.

Stories of Americans stockpiling toilet paper, medicine, and food have been in the news for weeks, which, in some instances, has required stores to start rationing supplies. Thirty-five percent of Americans report they have stockpiled extra supplies because of the coronavirus outbreak.

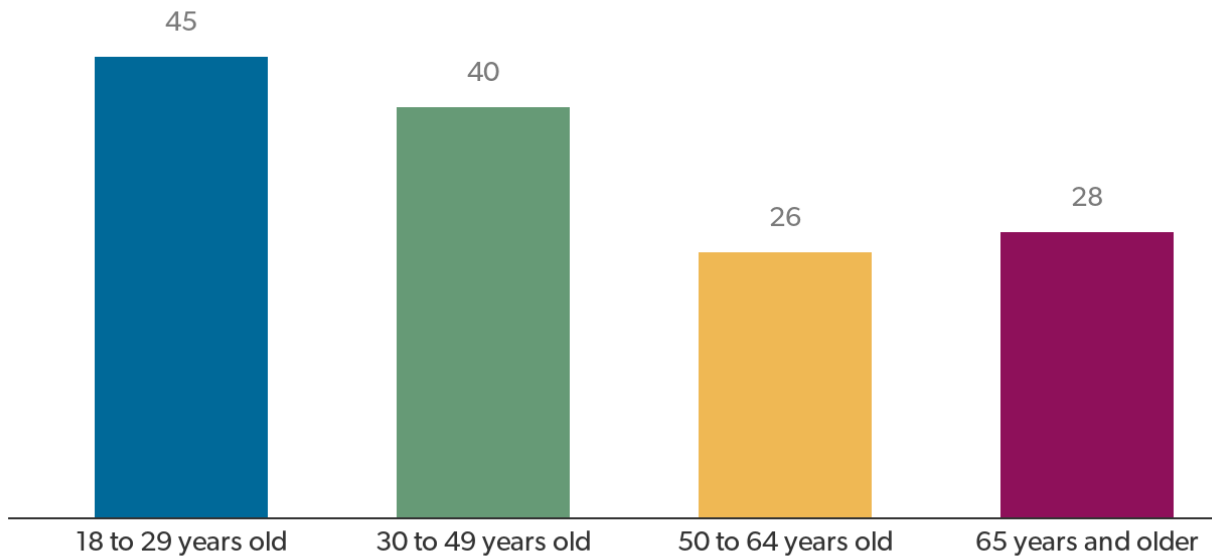
Americans who are more concerned about becoming infected are more likely to have stockpiled basic supplies. Fifty percent of Americans who say they are very worried about their family contracting the virus say they stockpiled basic household items, while only 21 percent of those who are not concerned reported taking this action.

Notably, while younger adults express less concern about being personally affected by the outbreak, they are more likely than are older Americans to have stockpiled supplies. Close to half (45 percent) of young adults report having stockpiled basic household items, such as toilet paper, medicine, and food, while only 28 percent of seniors report having done this.

## Young People More Likely to Have Stockpiled Supplies Because of Coronavirus

Percentage who have stockpiled extra supplies such as food, toilet paper, or medicine, because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak . . .

**Yes, I have**    No, I have not



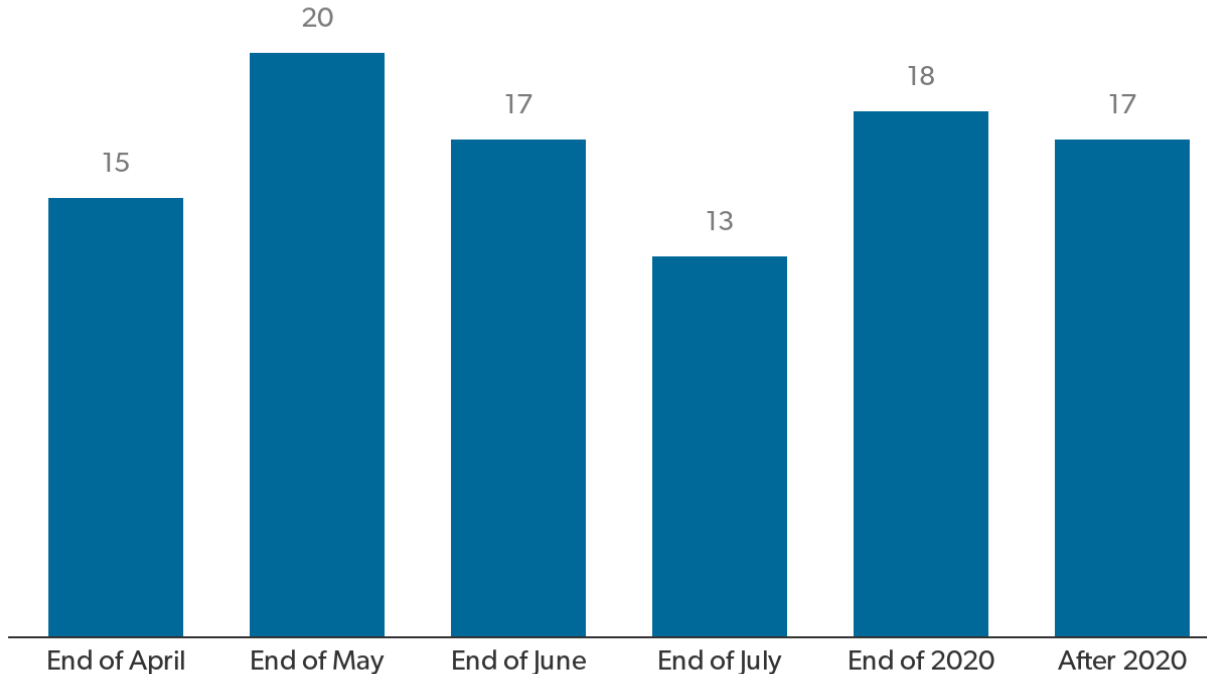
Survey of US adults [N=2,560] conducted March 26–30, 2020  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, March 2020.

Parents of children under the age of 18 living at home are more likely than the public as a whole is to have stockpiled household supplies. More than four in 10 (44 percent) parents say they have stockpiled basic household items.

There is little agreement among the public about when life in the US will return to normal. Only 15 percent of Americans think this will happen by the end of April, and 20 percent by the end of May. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) think it will take longer than that, including 17 percent that believe the country will not be back to normal by the end of the year.

## When Do Americans Think Life in the US Will Return to Normal?

Percentage who say life in the US will not return to normal until . . .



Survey of US adults [N=2,560] conducted March 26-30, 2020.  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, March 2020.

### The Federal Government, State Governments, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Trump: Who Has Responded Well?

As the number of coronavirus cases continues to rise, almost eight in 10 Americans (78 percent) prefer a strategy designed to take all necessary steps to ensure public safety rather than one that would allow businesses to open back up (22 percent).

A majority of Democrats (93 percent) and Republicans (63 percent) prefer a course of action designed to maximize public safety even if that means keeping businesses shuttered longer and hurting the economy. More than one-third (37 percent) of Republicans say government should allow businesses to open back up even if it puts some people at risk.

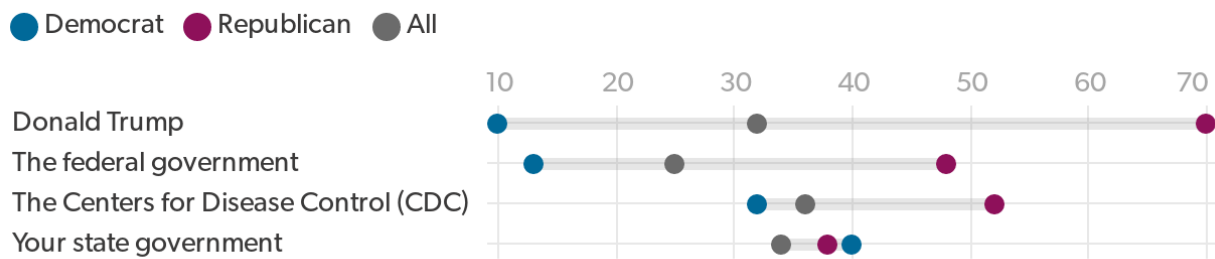
Americans give high marks to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and their state governments for handling the coronavirus outbreak. More than three-quarters of the public say the CDC (78 percent) and their state government (77 percent) are handling the response very or somewhat well. Fewer Americans provide positive assessments for the federal government overall or Donald Trump. Sixty percent of the public say the federal government has responded

well, and slightly more than half (52 percent) say the same about Donald Trump. A significant percentage (35 percent) say Trump is not handling it well at all.

Republicans more than Democrats give the federal government, the CDC, and Trump higher ratings for their response to the coronavirus outbreak. Seventy percent of Republicans, compared to 10 percent of Democrats, say the president is handling it very well. Close to half (48 percent) of Republicans and 13 percent of Democrats say the federal government has handled the response well. A small gap is evident in views of the CDC. More than half (52 percent) of Republicans and about one-third (32 percent) of Democrats say the agency has responded very well to the crisis. There are no significant differences in the views of state governments.

## Large Partisan Divisions in Views of How Government Has Responded to the Coronavirus Outbreak

Percentage who say the following has responded to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak very well . . .



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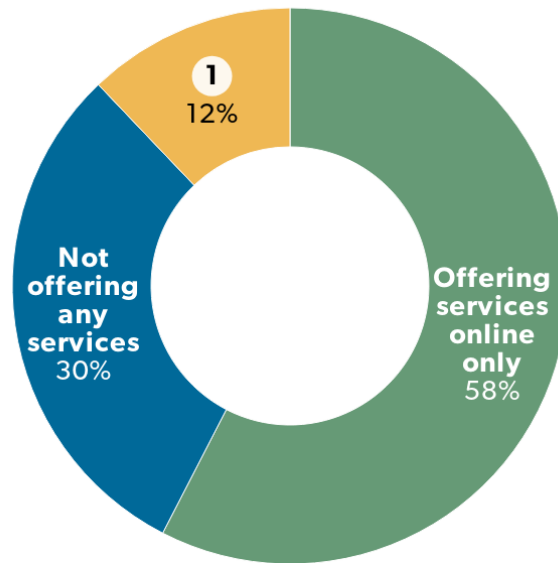
## Religious Participation During a Pandemic

Few Americans who belong to a church or other place of worship report that services are still being offered as usual. Only 12 percent of Americans who are members of a church, temple, synagogue, or mosque report that typical worship services are still being provided. Most (57 percent) report that worship services are being offered only online, while nearly one-third (30 percent) say that their place of worship is no longer offering any services.

Even though many places of worship are offering remote services, relatively few Americans report participating in them online. Less than one-third (28 percent) of Americans say they have participated in an online worship service or watched a sermon online.

# One in Ten Americans Say Their Church or Congregation is Offering Services as Usual

Percentage of church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other house of worship members who say their congregation or place of worship is . . .



1 Offering services as usual



Among members of churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, or other houses of worship.  
Survey of US adults [N=1,959] conducted March 26–30, 2020.  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, March 2020.

Patterns of online religious engagement vary significantly across religious traditions. More than half (53 percent) of white evangelical Protestants report that they attended a remote worship service or watched an online sermon. Considerably fewer black Protestants (36 percent), Catholics (34 percent), members of non-Christian religious traditions (25 percent), and white mainline Protestants (23 percent) report having participated in an online religious service.

There are few differences in online religious participation among Christians by age. Younger Christians are about as likely to have participated in an online service as older Christians. More than one-third of young Christians (36 percent) and Christian seniors (38 percent) say they have attended an online service or watched a sermon online.

Although some religious leaders are still holding in-person services for their congregants, most Americans, including a majority of religious Americans, say that places of worship should not be exempt from mandatory government shutdowns of businesses. Less than one in four (23 percent) Americans say churches and places of worship should be allowed to hold services even if the government has banned other large gatherings. More than three-quarters (76 percent) of the public say they should not be exempt.

There is significant agreement on this point across religious traditions. Fewer than one-third of white evangelical Protestants (28 percent), black Protestants (27 percent), Catholics (25 percent), and white mainline Protestants (19 percent) believe places of worship should not have to abide by government shutdown requirements. Notably, 34 percent of Americans who belong to non-Christian religious traditions say that religious organizations should be exempt from mandatory closings.

### **Prayer, Meditation, and Feelings About God**

More than half (51 percent) of Americans say they have prayed about the coronavirus in the past week. There are significant differences across traditions. Eighty-six percent of white evangelical Protestants report having prayed about COVID-19 in the past week. More than seven in ten black Protestants (71 percent), and a majority of white mainline Protestants (56 percent), and Catholics (56 percent) also say they prayed about the pandemic in the past week.

Fewer Americans report having engaged in meditation to cope with stress over the past week. Twenty-eight percent of Americans say they meditated in the past week to cope with feelings of stress. More than seven in 10 (72 percent) Americans say they have not done this.

Parents of children under the age of 18 living at home report significantly higher rates of meditation than the public overall does. More than one in three (36 percent) parents say they have meditated to cope with stress in the past week.

Interestingly, Americans are not any more likely to report engaging in meditative practices in response to the coronavirus pandemic than they were a few years earlier. A roughly equal number of Americans (30 percent) report having meditated as a way to cope with stress in the past week as did in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

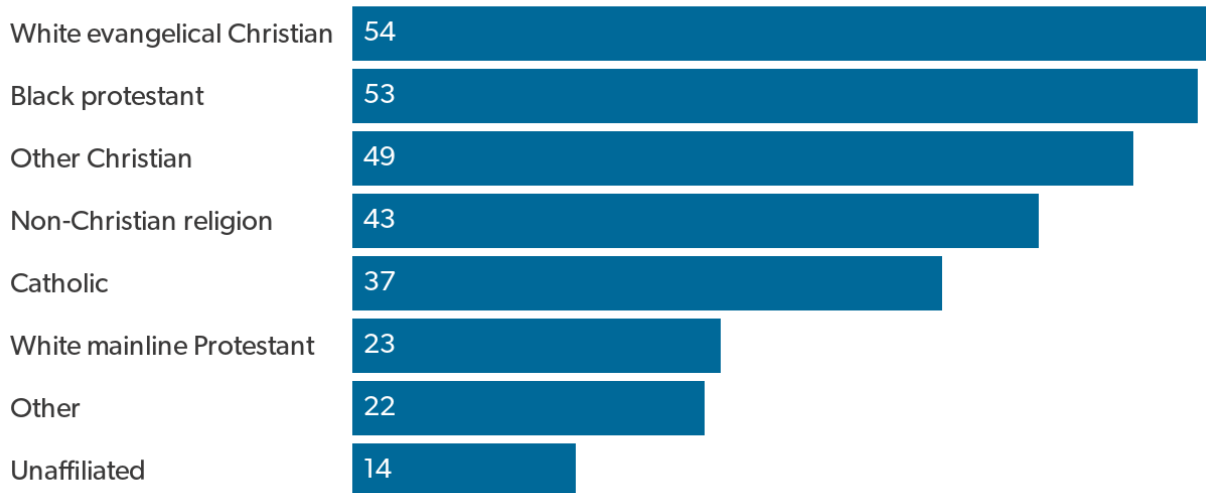
Americans have responded in various ways to the anxiety and uncertainty the coronavirus outbreak has provoked. Among Americans who believe in God, 37 percent — including nearly half of Hispanic (45 percent) and black (47 percent) believers — say the coronavirus outbreak has made them feel closer to God, while only four percent say it has made them feel less close. Roughly six in 10 (59 percent) Americans who believe in God say the coronavirus outbreak has not had any effect.

There are important differences across religious traditions. More than half of white evangelical Protestants (54 percent) and black Protestants (53 percent) say that the outbreak has made them

feel closer to God. Only 37 percent of Catholics and 23 percent of white mainline Protestants say the same.

## Most White Evangelical Protestants Report Feeling Closer to God Because of the Coronavirus Outbreak

Percentage who say the coronavirus outbreak has made them feel closer to God . . .



Asked of those who believe in God and never have doubts or sometimes have doubts. There are only 89 respondents who identify as a non-Christian religion. Results should be interpreted with caution. Survey of US adults [N=1,959] conducted March 26–30, 2020. Source: American Perspectives Survey, March 2020.

Americans largely reject the notion that the coronavirus is an act of God. One-quarter (25 percent) of the public say they believe the coronavirus outbreak is an act of God. Three-quarters (75 percent) of Americans disagree.

There is some variation in views across religious traditions. More than four in 10 (42 percent) black Protestants and one-third (33 percent) of white evangelical Protestants say the coronavirus outbreak is an act of God. Catholics (25 percent) and white mainline Protestants (20 percent) are less likely to agree.

## Feeling Lonely and Reaching Out to Friends and Family

At a time when Americans are having to reduce in-person social contact, feelings of loneliness and isolation are common. More than half (53 percent) of Americans report having felt lonely or isolated at least once in the past seven days. More than one-third of the public report feeling this way at least a few times over the past week.

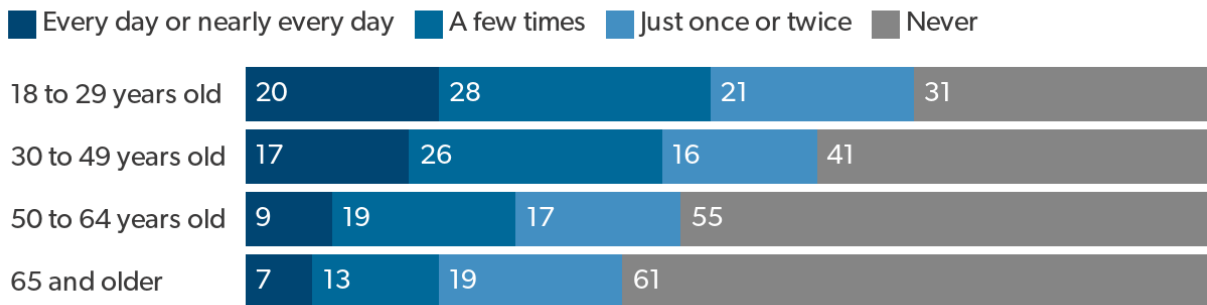
Younger Americans report much more frequent feelings of loneliness and isolation. Nearly half (48 percent) of young adults (age 18 to 29) say they have felt lonely or isolated at least a few times in the past week. Only 20 percent of seniors (age 65 or older) report having felt lonely or isolated this often.



The imposed social isolation may be encouraging Americans to reach out to friends and relatives they do not normally talk to. Nearly half (47 percent) of Americans say that in the past seven days they have talked to a friend or relative whom they have not talked to in a while.

## Young People More Likely to Feel Lonely and Socially Isolated

Percentage who say in the last seven days they have felt lonely or isolated . . .



Survey of US adults [N=2,560] conducted March 26–30, 2020.  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, March 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, “2014 Religious Landscape Study (RLS-II) American Trends Panel Wave 6 Topline August 11–September 3, 2014,” <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/04/Religion-in-Everyday-Life-topline.pdf>.