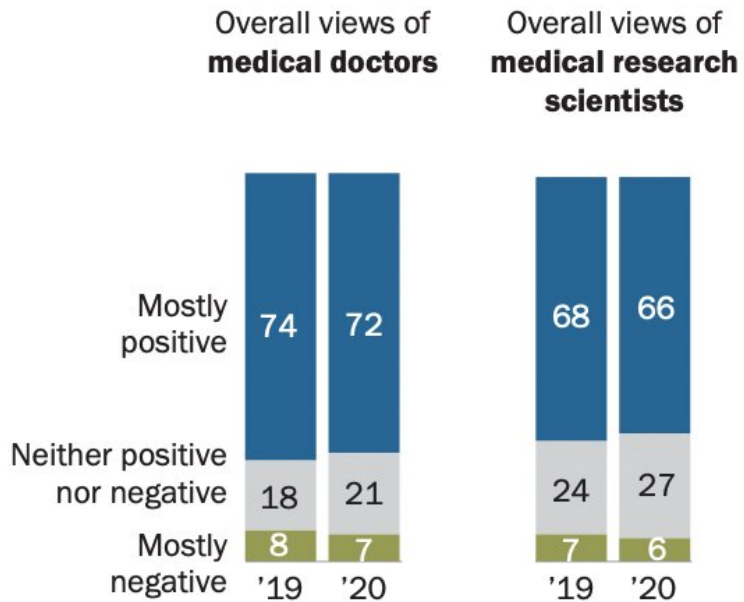
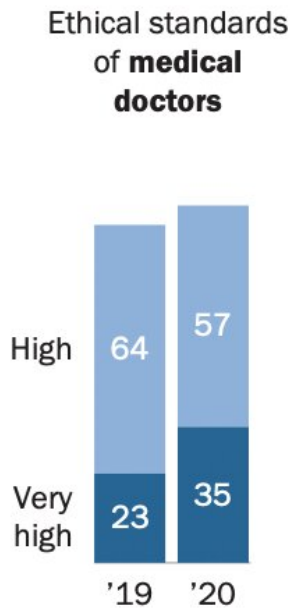
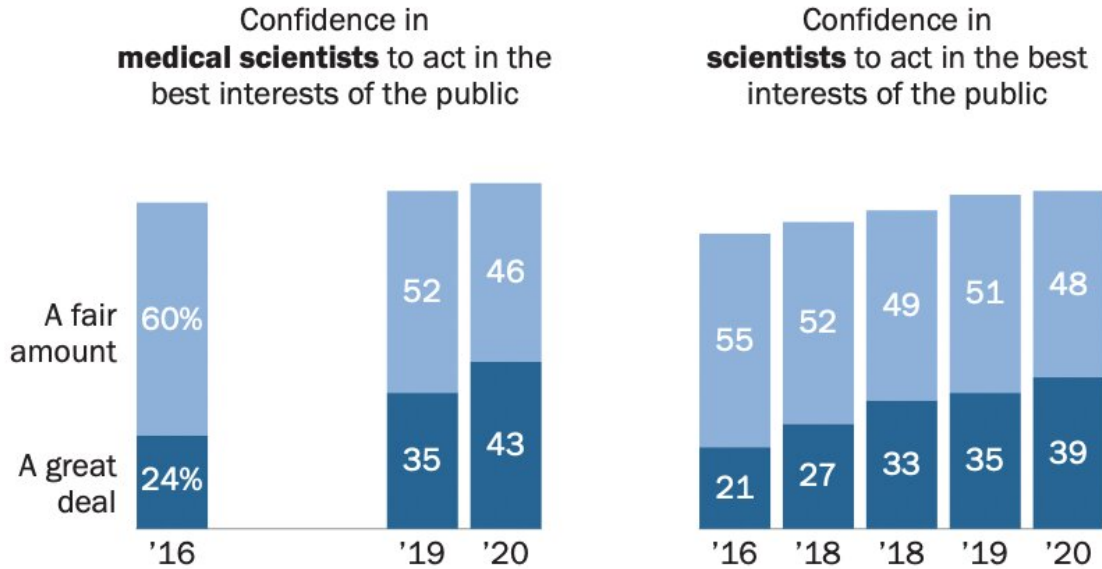


Trust in medical scientists has grown in the US, but mainly among Democrats

May 21 2020, by Cary Funk, Brian Kennedy and Courtney Johnson

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”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Credit: Pew Research Center

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, according to a new Pew Research Center report. But there are growing partisan divisions over the risk the 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.

The new report—based on two national surveys conducted April 29-May 5 among 10,957 U.S. adults and April 20-26 among 10,139 U.S. adults, both using the Center's American Trends Panel—finds that 43% of U.S. adults say they have a great deal of confidence in medical scientists to act in the best interests of the public, up from 35% who said the same before the outbreak. But public confidence has turned upward for 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.

A majority of U.S. adults (59%) believe social distancing measures are helping a lot to slow the spread of the coronavirus, though 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.

Other key findings include:

- 43% say their state government's policies to control the spread of the coronavirus have been influenced a great deal by evidence from [public health](#) experts, compared with 26% who say the same about federal government policies. About twice as many Republicans (38%) as Democrats (17%) think federal policies to control the spread of the coronavirus have been influenced a great deal by evidence from public health experts.
- Democrats in states with stay-at-home orders are particularly likely to say public health experts are influencing policy. 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, while about half as many Democrats (28%) living in states where restrictions were lifted by May 5 or were 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.
- Roughly half of Americans (49%) believe the share of people with coronavirus is higher in the U.S. than in most other nations, but Democrats are more likely to hold this view. Overall, 66% of Democrats think this, compared with 30% of Republicans. 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.

- 60% of U.S. adults say scientists should take an active role in science-related policy debates, but Democrats remain more likely than Republicans to hold this view (75% vs. 43%). 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.
- About three-quarters of U.S. adults (76%) say that, in thinking about the [coronavirus outbreak](#), they see scientific developments as more important. 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.

These are among the findings from the new report, which is based on two national surveys conducted on the Center's American Trends Panel. Questions about [public confidence](#) in scientists to act in the best interests of the public and questions about ethical standards of [medical doctors](#) were drawn from a survey of 10,139 U.S. adults conducted April 20-26, 2020. The margin of error for that full sample is plus or minus 1.5 percentage points. The rest of the data in the report is drawn from a survey of 10,957 adults conducted April 29 to May 5, 2020. The margin of error for that full sample is plus or minus 1.4 percentage points.

Provided by Pew Research Center

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