

Sexual Assault: A New and Divided Era of Understanding

Ipsos/NPR study finds deep political and gender polarities when it comes to either believing the accused or believing the victim

Washington DC, October 31, 2018 — A new Ipsos study conducted with NPR investigates Americans' views on what constitutes sexual assault, as well as how viral awareness campaigns such as the #MeToo movement have impacted perceptions of both the victim and the accused. Partisanship is significant in discussions about false allegations and the treatment of victims in the face of viral awareness campaigns. Most notably, among the 43% of Americans that believe the #MeToo movement has gone too far, three quarters of Republicans (75%) agree, while only about a fifth of Democrats (21%) believe the same. When asked if allegations of sexual assault are less relevant both if they happened a long time ago (and were not reported at the time) and if they were committed by someone when they were young, just 32% and 18% of Americans, respectively, agree. However, as evidenced by the levels of divisiveness over Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation, Republicans are more than twice as likely as Democrats to believe that allegations are less relevant if they happened a long time ago and were not reported (54% vs. 21% of Democrats) and if they were committed by someone when they were young (28% vs. 12% of Democrats). Lastly, when asked if they would still vote for a political candidate who was accused of sexual assault, the majority of Republicans (60%) say they would consider still voting depending on the specific circumstances, while the majority of Democrats (64%) say they would not vote for the candidate.

Gender discrepancies, although generally less prominent than those among party lines, are also evident across these issues. First, men are more likely than women to believe that *those who are accused* of sexual assault should be given the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise (85% vs. 73% of women), while women are more likely than men to believe that *those who report being victims* should be given the benefit of the doubt (83% vs. 72% of men). Not only do men report finding it harder to tell what constitutes sexual assault (51% vs. 42% of women), they are also more likely to believe that false accusations against men are very common (60% vs. 51% of women). However, the study also shows that a majority of Americans (53%) are unfamiliar with the hashtag #HimToo, though men are slightly more inclined to say that it is about men being falsely accused of sexual assault (19% vs. 13% of women).

Despite these deep partisan and gender differences, the majority of Americans are in agreement that there are significant personal and professional costs for women who report being sexually assaulted (75%). However, more than two-thirds (69%) also agree that #MeToo has created an environment where those accused of assault or harassment will be held accountable for their actions. Most Americans also tend to agree that false accusations against men are very common (56%), though the number of men who worry that they will be unfairly accused of sexual assault and women who worry that a man they care about will be unfairly accused is lower (33% and 32%, respectively).

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1. In your own words, how would you define sexual assault?

[Open-ended question; verbatims provided separately]

2. Below is a list of statements. For each, please indicate whether you strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree.

Total agree

	Total (N=1,006)	Male (N=439)	Female (N=567)	Republicans (N=328)	Democrats (N=343)	Independent (N=224)
People accused of sexual assault should be given the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise.	79%	85	73	88	78	76
Those who report being the victims of sexual assault should be given the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise.	77%	72	83	67	85	79
The #MeToo movement has created an environment where those accused of assault or harassment will be held accountable for their actions.	69%	70	67	60	81	67
False accusations of sexual assault against men are very common.	56%	60	51	77	37	56
It can be hard sometimes to tell what is sexual assault and what is not.	46%	51	42	56	39	49
The #MeToo movement has gone too far.	43%	51	36	75	21	43
Allegations of sexual assault are less relevant if they happened a long time ago and were not reported at the time.	32%	40	24	54	21	25
Colleges are fair in the way they treat alleged victims of campus sexual assault.	23%	29	18	26	22	24
Colleges are fair in the way they treat those accused of campus sexual assault.	22%	26	18	21	23	25
Allegations of sexual assault are less relevant if they were committed by someone when they were young.	18%	22	14	28	12	17

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a. Those who report being the victims of sexual assault should be given the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise.

	Total (N=1,006)	Male (N=439)	Female (N=567)	Republicans (N=328)	Democrats (N=343)	Independent (N=224)
Strongly agree	36%	30%	41%	28%	44%	35%
Somewhat agree	42	41	42	39	41	43
Somewhat disagree	12	16	8	19	8	9
Strongly disagree	6	8	4	10	3	8
Don't know	5	4	6	4	4	4
Agree (Net)	77%	72%	83%	67%	85%	79%
Disagree (Net)	18	25	12	29	11	17

b. People accused of sexual assault should be given the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	37%	40%	33%	52%	29%	34%
Somewhat agree	42	45	40	36	49	41
Somewhat disagree	12	8	15	5	14	12
Strongly disagree	4	4	4	4	4	2
Don't know	6	3	7	3	4	9
Agree (Net)	79%	85%	73%	88%	78%	76%
Disagree (Net)	16	12	20	9	18	15

c. It can be hard sometimes to tell what is sexual assault and what is not.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	12%	16%	8%	17%	9%	11%
Somewhat agree	35	35	34	39	30	38
Somewhat disagree	24	23	26	26	27	20
Strongly disagree	26	22	29	15	31	28
Don't know	4	4	3	2	3	4
Agree (Net)	46%	51%	42%	56%	39%	49%
Disagree (Net)	50	45	55	42	58	48

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d. False accusations of sexual assault against men are very common.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	19%	24%	13%	26%	12%	22%
Somewhat agree	37	36	38	51	25	34
Somewhat disagree	22	21	23	13	33	17
Strongly disagree	14	12	17	4	23	16
Don't know	8	7	9	7	7	11
Agree (Net)	56%	60%	51%	77%	37%	56%
Disagree (Net)	36	33	39	16	56	34

e. Allegations of sexual assault are less relevant if they happened a long time ago and were not reported at the time

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	10%	17%	5%	19%	5%	10%
Somewhat agree	21	24	19	35	16	15
Somewhat disagree	21	20	23	21	20	21
Strongly disagree	43	36	49	21	56	48
Don't know	4	4	4	4	2	6
Agree (Net)	32%	40%	24%	54%	21%	25%
Disagree (Net)	64	56	72	42	<i>77</i>	69

f. Allegations of sexual assault are less relevant if they were committed by someone when they were young

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	4%	6%	2%	3%	4%	4%
Somewhat agree	14	17	12	24	7	13
Somewhat disagree	27	27	26	33	24	23
Strongly disagree	50	44	55	33	61	53
Don't know	6	6	5	6	3	7
Agree (Net)	18%	22%	14%	28%	12%	17%
Disagree (Net)	77	71	82	66	86	76

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g. Colleges are fair in the way they treat those accused of campus sexual assault.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	6%	9%	3%	5%	7%	5%
Somewhat agree	16	17	15	16	16	20
Somewhat disagree	34	33	34	37	33	35
Strongly disagree	24	21	27	18	28	25
Don't know	20	20	21	24	16	15
Agree (Net)	22%	26%	18%	21%	23%	25%
Disagree (Net)	58	54	61	56	60	60

h. Colleges are fair in the way they treat alleged victims of campus sexual assault.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	6%	8%	3%	6%	6%	6%
Somewhat agree	18	21	15	20	16	18
Somewhat disagree	31	32	31	33	31	36
Strongly disagree	25	21	28	16	32	24
Don't know	21	18	23	25	16	16
Agree (Net)	23%	29%	18%	26%	22%	24%
Disagree (Net)	56	53	59	49	62	60

i. The #MeToo movement has gone too far

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	22%	28%	16%	46%	8%	20%
Somewhat agree	21	23	20	29	14	23
Somewhat disagree	17	18	17	11	21	22
Strongly disagree	24	18	30	4	43	22
Don't know	15	13	17	10	15	12
Agree (Net)	43%	51%	36%	75%	21%	43%
Disagree (Net)	42	36	47	14	64	45

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j. The #MeToo movement has created an environment where those accused of assault or harassment will be held accountable for their actions

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	22%	19%	24%	15%	33%	14%
Somewhat agree	47	51	43	45	48	53
Somewhat disagree	15	15	15	20	9	16
Strongly disagree	5	6	4	9	2	5
Don't know	11	9	14	11	8	11
Agree (Net)	69%	70%	67%	60%	81%	67%
Disagree (Net)	20	21	19	30	11	22

3. Based on what you may know or feel, which of the following best describes the meaning behind #HimToo?

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
It is about men being falsely accused of sexual assault	15%	19%	13%	19%	18%	11%
It is about men who have experienced sexual assault	14	12	16	14	14	17
Both	14	15	13	13	15	14
Neither	4	5	3	6	3	2
I've never heard of #HimToo	53	49	56	49	50	56

4. Have you personally experienced sexual assault?

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Yes	29%	13%	43%	20%	33%	32%
No	67	86	50	76	65	65
Prefer not to respond	4	1	7	4	2	3

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5. Below is another short list of statements. For each, please indicate whether you strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree.

Total agree

	Total (N=1,006)	Male (N=439)	Female (N=567)	Republicans (N=328)	Democrats (N=343)	Independent (N=224)
There are significant personal and professional costs for women who report being sexually assaulted.	75%	70	79	64	87	75
If it happened to me, I would be more likely to report sexual assault now than I was a year ago.	63%	58	67	52	76	58
In the past year, my views on what constitutes sexual assault have become more clear.	51%	48	54	41	66	43
I worry I will be unfairly accused of sexual assault.	33%	33	-	35	33	30
I worry a man I care about will be unfairly accused of sexual assault.	32%	-	32	47	26	20
These days, reports of sexual assault are generally ignored.	30%	24	35	14	42	23

a. These days, reports of sexual assault are generally ignored.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	8%	8%	8%	4%	12%	6%
Somewhat agree	22	16	27	11	30	17
Somewhat disagree	35	36	34	36	33	40
Strongly disagree	29	35	23	43	21	29
Don't know	7	5	8	6	4	8
Agree (Net)	30%	24%	35%	14%	42%	23%
Disagree (Net)	64	71	57	79	54	69

b. There are significant personal and professional costs for women who report being sexually assaulted.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	32%	23%	40%	17%	45%	31%
Somewhat agree	43	47	40	47	41	44
Somewhat disagree	12	16	9	21	7	9
Strongly disagree	4	6	3	6	2	8
Don't know	8	8	9	9	5	8
Agree (Net)	75%	70%	79%	64%	87%	75%
Disagree (Net)	17	22	12	27	8	17

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c. In the past year, my views on what constitutes sexual assault have become more clear.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	17%	14%	19%	12%	23%	13%
Somewhat agree	35	34	35	29	42	31
Somewhat disagree	26	29	24	33	21	31
Strongly disagree	13	13	14	18	7	18
Don't know	9	10	8	8	6	8
Agree (Net)	51%	48%	54%	41%	66%	43%
Disagree (Net)	39	42	37	51	28	49

d. I worry I will be unfairly accused of sexual assault. *Asked only to males

	Total (N=439)	Male (M=439)	Female	Republicans (N=158)	Democrats (N=136)	Independent (N=111)
Strongly agree	13%	13%	-	12%	15%	9%
Somewhat agree	20	20	-	22	19	21
Somewhat disagree	23	23	-	29	19	20
Strongly disagree	40	40	-	32	43	46
Don't know	4	4	-	4	4	3
Agree (Net)	33%	33%	-	35%	33%	30%
Disagree (Net)	63	63	-	61	62	67

e. I worry a man I care about will be unfairly accused of sexual assault. *Asked only to females

	Total (N=567)	Male	Female (N=567)	Republicans (N=170)	Democrats (N=207)	Independent (N=113)
Strongly agree	9%	-	9%	14%	7%	8%
Somewhat agree	22	-	22	33	19	12
Somewhat disagree	20	-	20	21	18	25
Strongly disagree	41	-	41	25	48	51
Don't know	8	ı	8	6	9	4
Agree (Net)	32%	-	32%	47%	26%	20%
Disagree (Net)	61	-	61	46	66	76

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f. If it happened to me, I would be more likely to report sexual assault now than I was a year ago.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Strongly agree	33%	28%	37%	23%	45%	27%
Somewhat agree	30	30	30	30	31	31
Somewhat disagree	15	16	13	19	11	15
Strongly disagree	11	10	11	16	5	14
Don't know	12	16	9	13	8	13
Agree (Net)	63%	58%	67%	52%	76%	58%
Disagree (Net)	25	26	24	34	17	29

6. If a political candidate you were planning to vote for was accused of sexual assault, would you...

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Definitely still vote for them	3%	5%	1%	6%	2%	2%
Probably still vote for them	3	4	2	6	3	1
Consider still voting for them, but it would depend on the specific circumstances	40	45	35	60	24	45
Probably not vote for them	20	19	20	11	29	16
Definitely not vote for them	23	18	28	7	34	26
Don't know	11	8	14	10	8	10
Would vote (net)	6%	9%	4%	12%	5%	3%
Wouldn't vote (net)	43	37	48	19	64	42

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7. If an actor, author, or other celebrity whose work you enjoy was accused of sexual assault, would you...

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Definitely still support their work	3%	4%	2%	4%	2%	3%
Probably still support their work	7	10	5	10	7	7
Consider still supporting their work						
but it would depend on the specific	43	48	39	52	38	46
circumstances						
Probably not support their work	18	15	22	14	24	15
Definitely not support their work	15	12	19	9	20	15
Don't know	13	12	14	10	9	14

8. How do you get most of your news? Select up to three.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Television	61%	57%	65%	60%	65%	61%
Online/internet	61	62	61	59	64	64
Social media (Twitter, Facebook)	34	31	36	28	38	32
Print newspapers/magazines	24	26	23	23	28	24
Radio	23	24	21	28	19	20
Mobile News apps	16	14	18	12	20	14
None of the above	3	3	2	2	3	1

9. Of the choices listed below, which is your main source of television news? Select up one.

	Total	Male	Female	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
FOX News	21%	24%	19%	41%	8%	21%
CNN	15	17	12	6	22	16
ABC	13	11	16	12	15	12
CBS	11	7	14	9	13	7
NBC	10	8	12	7	13	11
MSNBC	6	7	4	1	11	5
Public Television	5	5	5	2	7	4
Other	6	6	6	6	3	9
None of the above	13	14	13	15	8	15

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About the Study

These are findings from an Ipsos poll conducted October 23-24, 2018 on behalf of NPR. For the survey, a sample of 1,006 adults 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii were interviewed online in English. The sample includes 439 males, 567 females, 343 Democrats, 328 Republicans, and 224 Independents.

The sample for this study was randomly drawn from Ipsos' online panel (see link below for more info on "Access Panels and Recruitment"), partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling (see link below for more info on the Ipsos "Ampario Overview" sample method) and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing a sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. Population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2016 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, and education.

Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents. Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following (n=1,006, DEFF=1.5, adjusted Confidence Interval=+/-5.0 percentage points).

This study also has a credibility interval of 5.3 percentage points for men, 4.7 percentage points for women, 6.0 percentage points for Democrats, 6.2 percentage points for Republicans and 7.5 percentage points for Independents.

For more information about conducting research intended for public release or Ipsos' online polling methodology, please visit our Public Opinion Polling and Communication page where you can download our brochure, see our public release protocol, or contact us.

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With offices in 88 countries, Ipsos delivers insightful expertise across five research specializations: brand, advertising and media; customer loyalty; marketing; public affairs research; and survey management.

Ipsos researchers assess market potential and interpret market trends. They develop and build brands. They help clients build long-term relationships with their customers. They test advertising and study audience responses to various media and they measure public opinion around the globe.

Ipsos has been listed on the Paris Stock Exchange since 1999 and generated global revenues of €1,780.5 million in 2017.

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At Ipsos we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands and society.

We make our changing world easier and faster to navigate and inspire clients to make smarter decisions.

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