

# National Poll on American Attitudes Toward U.S. Government Investments in Pandemic Preparedness

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**PAX**  
*sapiens*



PANDEMIC  
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NETWORK

# Executive Summary

Ahead of the third anniversary of the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, YouGov conducted a high-quality national poll of 2,000 Americans from Jan 4-19, 2023, on their perspectives on pandemic preparedness. Commissioned by [PAX sapiens](#) and [Pandemic Action Network](#), key findings from this poll include:

## **A strong majority of Americans believe the risk of pandemics is growing.**

- 61% of respondents said they either agree or strongly agree with the statement: “From COVID to mpox, RSV, and Ebola, we are now in an era of increasing risk due to deadly infectious disease outbreaks and pandemic threats that can land at our doorstep in a matter of days,” and only 20% disagree.
- Asked about preparedness for COVID, 45% said that they felt that the U.S. government was “very unprepared” for COVID-19, and an additional 24% felt that the government was “somewhat unprepared.” Only 4% felt that the government was “very prepared.”

## **A strong majority of Americans want to see the federal government invest more in pandemic preparedness both at home and abroad.**

- ***Spend more on pandemic preparedness, domestically and globally.***  
Strong majorities support investing in pandemic preparedness at the federal (66%) and state and local (63%) levels, while a plurality (46%) support investing in global preparedness. Of these, a majority (53%) support strengthening global preparedness to prevent deadly outbreaks from spreading to America. Almost all (88%) respondents agreed that pandemic investment by the federal government was important to them to at least some degree.
- ***Americans are willing to spend their taxpayer dollars to strengthen pandemic preparedness.***  
Americans would be willing to voluntarily and directly contribute as much as \$83.5 billion per year to bolster U.S. and global pandemic preparedness.
- ***Investments in pandemic preparedness should be additional to existing expenditures.***  
50% of respondents support increasing funding for pandemic preparedness rather than simply reallocating existing budgets.
  - 56% of respondents agree that pandemic preparedness is a matter of national security, and are willing to fund it through the national defense budget.

## **Americans’ heightened concerns about pandemic preparedness are driven by their personal experiences of loss due to COVID-19.**

- Respondents report a significant rate of negative experiences due to COVID-19. Nearly 4 in 10 (37%) report knowing someone who died due to COVID-19, and a similar percent report feeling separated from family and friends. More than a quarter, 28%, report worsening mental health, and 8% report increased drinking or substance use. 31% suffered economic loss, and 14% lost their job.
- When asked to pick the top three reasons why it might be important to strengthen pandemic preparedness, the overwhelming majority — 77.5% — chose saving lives as one of the top three reasons, and 63% of the sample picked it as the number one reason.

## **Most Americans don’t believe the U.S. government was sufficiently prepared for COVID-19, but they are under the impression that the government will take the necessary steps to be better prepared for the next pandemic.**

- 45% of respondents say the government was “very unprepared” for COVID-19, and an additional 24% think that the government was somewhat unprepared. Only 4% think that the government was very prepared.
- Many respondents believe that this has not improved significantly. When asked how prepared the U.S. is for the next pandemic, one-third of respondents said that the U.S. is only about as prepared for the next pandemic as we were for COVID-19.
  - However, about half of respondents presume that the U.S. has in fact improved our systems — 49% of respondents believe the U.S. is more prepared for the next pandemic than before COVID-19.

The following document details: [Poll findings and analysis, technical appendix on poll background and methodology, and complete poll instrument \(for reference\)](#)

Note: Full poll results and raw data available upon request. [Contact us.](#)

# DETAILED POLL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a lasting impact on Americans, with more than [103 million cases of COVID-19 reported and more than 1.12 million deaths \(at time of publishing\)](#) — [the highest loss of life of any country in the world](#). The National Institutes of Health reports that COVID was the third leading cause of death in 2020-21, accounting for [1 in 8 deaths](#). The pandemic has impacted all aspects of daily life for Americans from economic hardships to strained relationships and dramatic earning losses and struggles with mental health. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to have cost the federal government [\\$14 trillion](#) thus far and pandemic-induced economic and social impacts continue to be felt today. As COVID-19 has strained Americans, it also strained the public health systems — leaving a patchwork system of public health professionals across federal, state, and local levels under equipped to address the magnitude of this pandemic, let alone the next pandemic threat. COVID-19 struck as [government funding to prepare for pandemics declined over the prior two decades](#), despite repeated warnings from public health experts.

**As the nation and the world marks the third anniversary of the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, and with so many lives and livelihoods affected by COVID-19, now is the time to reflect on the U.S. federal government response and take the steps necessary to prevent another deadly and costly pandemic like COVID-19 from happening again.**

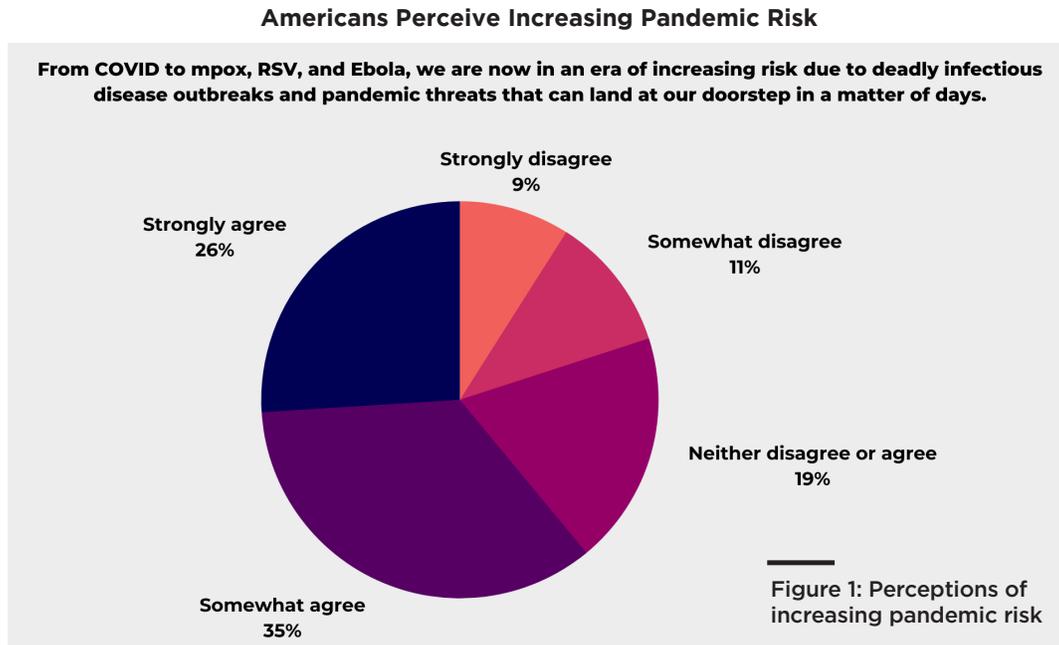
In January 2023, PAX *sapiens* and Pandemic Action Network commissioned a national poll by YouGov to determine how COVID-19 has affected Americans' views about the risk of future pandemics and the need for federal funding to support improved pandemic preparedness.<sup>1</sup> The results of this poll show that COVID-19 has been an experience of significant hardship for many, that Americans are carrying the impact of COVID-19 with them, and their experiences during the COVID crisis are shaping their concern about future pandemics. They are aware that the risk of pandemics is growing, and they want the federal government to invest in pandemic preparedness both at home and abroad. Most Americans polled were willing, if they could, to pay directly and voluntarily for more effective systems for pandemic preparedness and response, and most Americans polled were willing to see U.S. defense spending directed in part to pandemic preparedness. Americans polled also believe that the U.S. was not prepared for COVID-19 but they are under the impression that the U.S. government will take the steps to be better prepared for the next pandemic, even as Congress has failed to act on recent budget proposals to increase funding for pandemic preparedness.

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<sup>1</sup> See Technical Appendix for the background and detailed survey field dates.

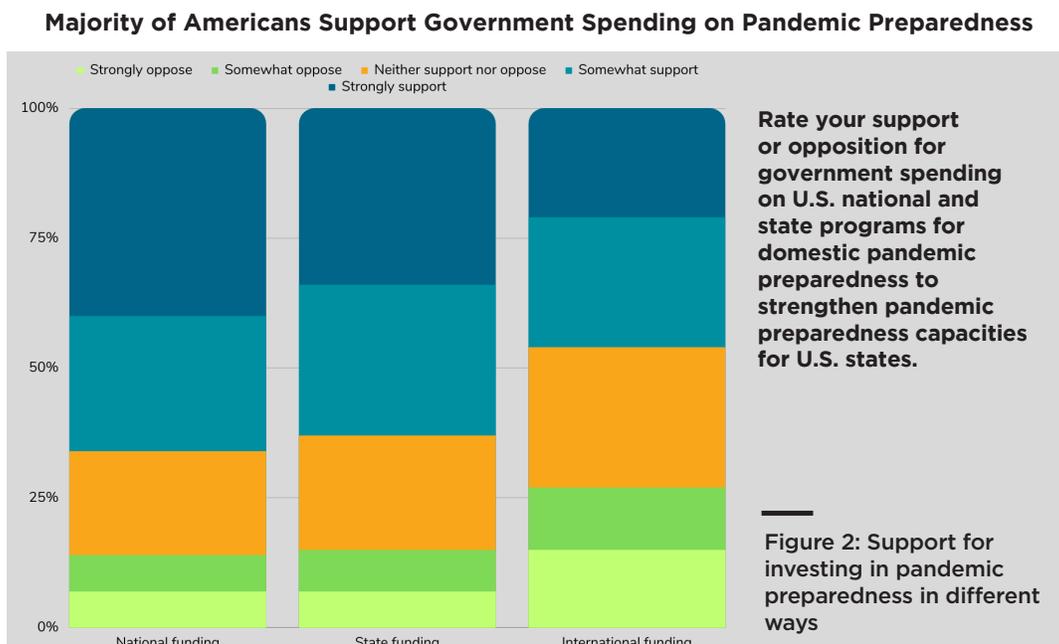
## A strong majority of Americans believe the risk of pandemics is growing.

Participants in the poll were asked how much they agreed with the statement that “From COVID to mpox, RSV, and Ebola, we are now in an era of increasing risk due to deadly infectious disease outbreaks and pandemic threats that can land at our doorstep in a matter of days.” 61% of respondents said that they either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, and only 20% said that they disagreed.<sup>2</sup>



## A strong majority of Americans want to see the federal government invest more in pandemic preparedness at home and abroad.

Respondents in the poll consistently, across different questions and ways of asking, wanted the federal government to invest more in pandemic preparedness. Strong majorities support investing in pandemic preparedness at the federal (66%) and state and local (63%) levels, while a plurality (46%) support investing in global preparedness. Of these, a majority (53%) support strengthening global preparedness to prevent deadly outbreaks from spreading to the U.S.



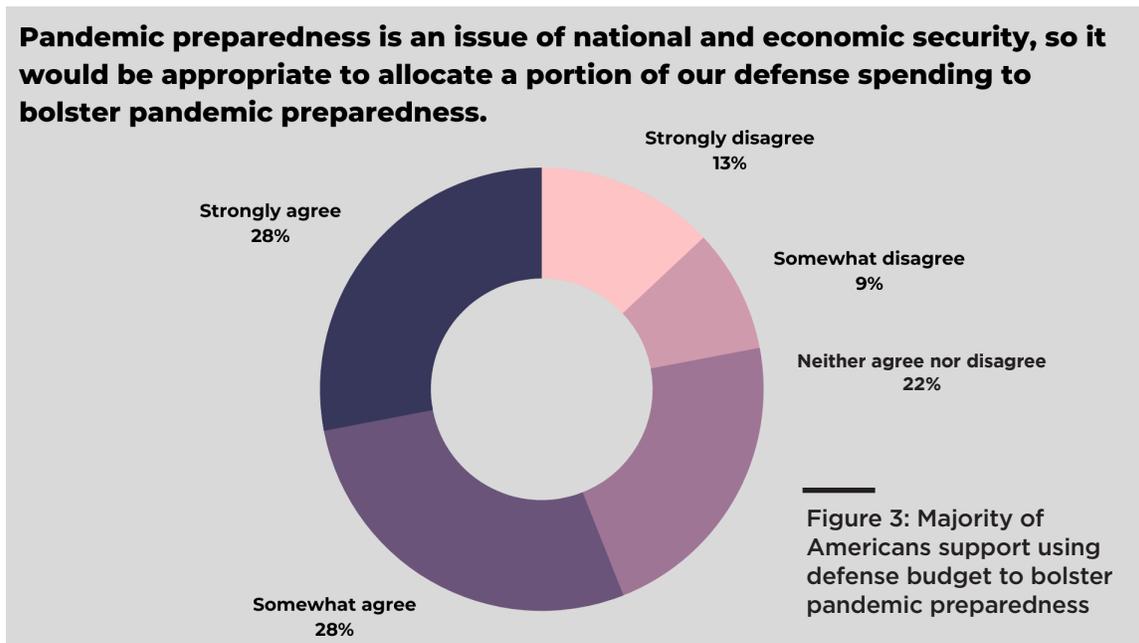
<sup>2</sup> Reported percentages are weighted percentages — see Technical Appendix for details.

General support for increased spending on pandemic preparedness is also reflected in personal support for pandemic preparedness willingness to invest. Participants were asked what they would contribute personally, on an annual basis, to fund “a reliable and effective national and global system to help detect, prevent, and rapidly respond to outbreaks to help stop them from spreading and becoming deadly and costly pandemics.” The mean and median answers to this question were \$580 and \$25.<sup>3</sup> In other words, if these findings generalized to the 144 million taxpayers in the U.S., Americans would be willing to voluntarily and directly contribute between \$3.6 and \$83.5 billion per year to pandemic preparedness.

Similarly, when presented with the existing costs of COVID-19 and pandemic prevention, and asked directly about whether they would support an increase in federal spending in line with what the Biden administration has requested (rather than simply a prioritization of pandemic preparedness without necessarily increasing spending), 50% of respondents said they would support this with an additional 26% reporting they would neither support nor oppose the idea. When asked whether they agreed that pandemic preparedness was an issue of national security, and if they would support using existing defense spending to address pandemic preparedness, 56% agreed and 22% neither agreed nor disagreed.

All in all, respondents consistently agreed with the idea that pandemic preparedness should be a priority for government investment. No matter how the question was asked, or what specific type of funding or source of funding was considered, participants wanted to see the government prioritize funding for pandemic preparedness.

#### Majority of Americans Support Using Defense Budget to Bolster Pandemic Preparedness

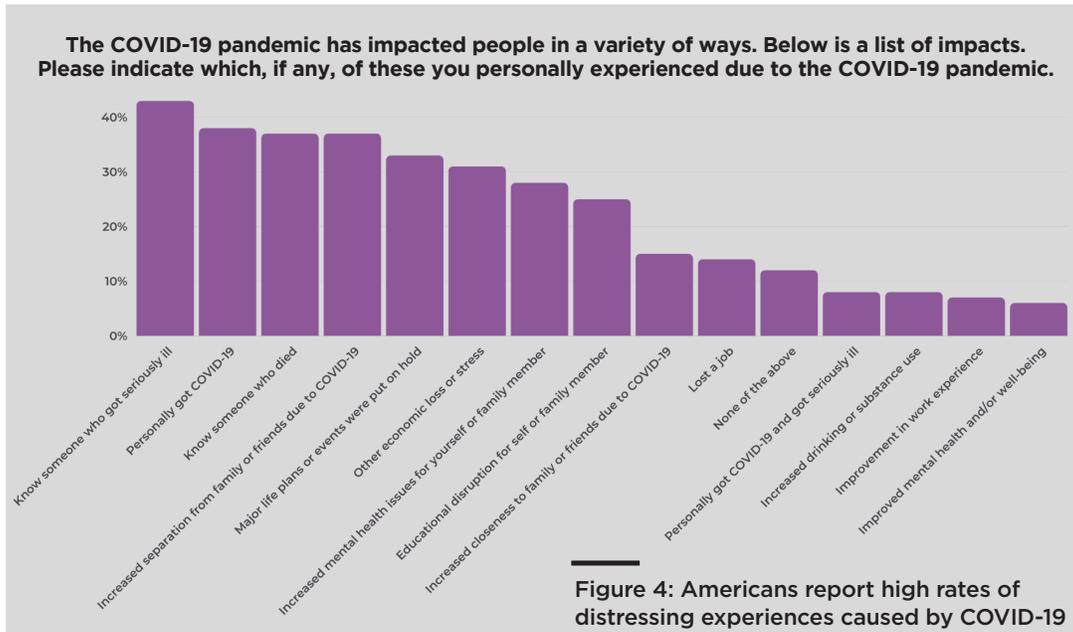


#### Americans’ heightened concerns about pandemic preparedness are driven by their personal experiences of loss due to COVID-19.

Participants in this poll report a significant rate of negative experiences due to COVID-19. Almost 4 in 10 — 37% — report knowing someone who died due to COVID-19, and a similar percent report feeling separated from family and friends. More than a quarter, (28%), report worsening mental health, and 8% report increased drinking or substance use. 31% suffered economic loss, and 14% lost their job.

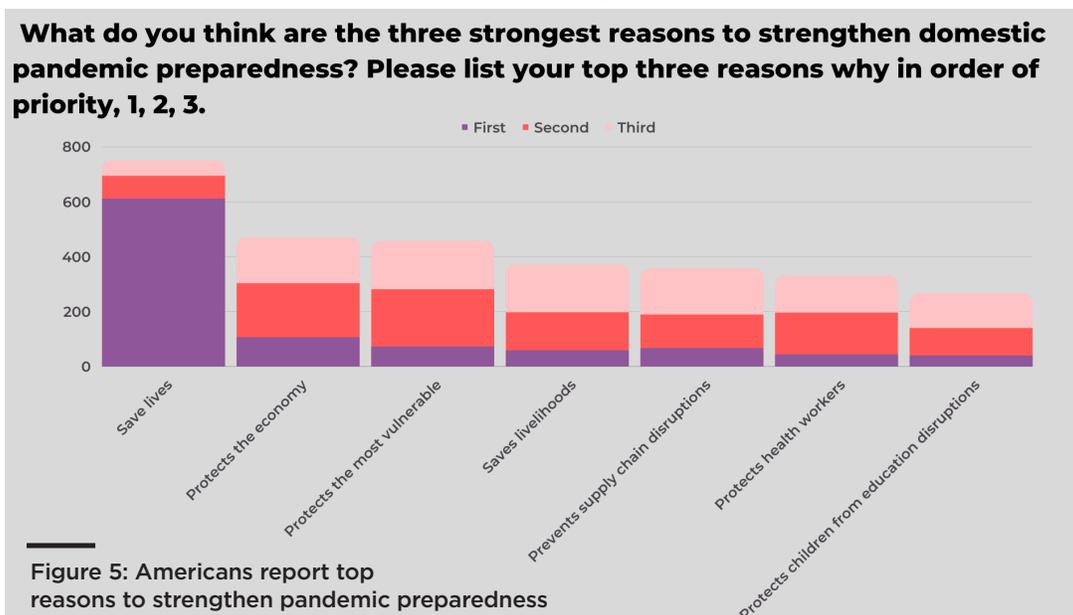
<sup>3</sup> See Technical Appendix for details.

## COVID'S Impact on Americans



Personal experiences of loss appear to be driving American's thinking about pandemic preparedness. When asked to pick the top three reasons why it might be important to strengthen pandemic preparedness, the overwhelming majority of respondents — 77.5%<sup>4</sup> — pick saving lives as one of the top three reasons, and 63% of the sample pick it as the number one reason. Similarly, when asked why it might be important to invest in global pandemic preparedness 65% say because it saves lives (49% selected this as the first reason), and 53% say that it is important to invest in global preparedness to prevent outbreaks from spreading to America (23% select this as the first reason).

## Americans' Top Three Reasons to Strengthen Pandemic Preparedness



When support for federal funding is analyzed statistically<sup>5</sup>, the experiences people have had during the COVID-19 pandemic turn out to be a significant predictor of support. Watching others suffer had a significant effect on support — support for federal funding is predicted by knowing others who got seriously ill. Feeling impacted personally also predicts support — those people who report significant worsening of their mental health are more likely to support federal funding.

<sup>4</sup> Percentages for reasoning are raw unweighted percentages.

<sup>5</sup> See Technical Appendix for details.

**Most Americans don't believe the U.S. government was sufficiently prepared for COVID-19, and they are under the impression that the government will take the necessary steps to be better prepared for the next pandemic.**

Participants were asked whether they thought that the U.S. government was prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic, and their responses were overwhelmingly negative. 45% said that they felt that the government was “very unprepared” for COVID-19, and an additional 24% felt that the government was somewhat unprepared. Only 4% felt that the government was very prepared.

Looking forward, participants were asked “How prepared do you feel the U.S. is for the next pandemic?” The answers to this were optimistic: 49% felt that we are more prepared for the next pandemic than before COVID-19, and an additional 34% felt that we are about as prepared as we were for COVID-19 (although, given the findings reported above, how optimistic that 34% may be about U.S. preparedness is somewhat of an open question).

## **Analysis Summary**

This poll shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a human disaster at every level, and its impacts are still being felt. Americans we polled know that the risk of a future pandemic is real, and want to see the U.S. government invest in pandemic preparedness both at home and abroad. They know that such investment is economically wise, and that it protects livelihoods, but that's not the reason why most participants want to see the investment take place. More than the economic impact and practicality, Americans want the government to invest in pandemic preparedness because it saves lives. On balance, they believe that COVID-19 has created a chance for the U.S. government to become more prepared than it was. Whether that actually happens or not is ultimately up to the choices that policymakers collectively make now.

# TECHNICAL APPENDIX

## Background and funders

This poll was commissioned by PAX sapiens and Pandemic Action Network to examine U.S. popular opinions about federal investment in pandemic preparedness and response. The goals of this poll were to understand population-level support for federal investment in pandemic preparedness and specifically explore the public's interest and willingness for the federal government to increase funding for pandemic preparedness at home and abroad.



PAX *sapiens* is a grantmaking and operating foundation that works to generate new systems of collective coordination to address serious, systemic global problems. As a part of that work, PAX *sapiens* has a major focus on strengthening the systems for disease detection and effective response with the goal of preventing future pandemics.

Learn more at [www.paxsapiens.org](http://www.paxsapiens.org).



Pandemic Action Network drives collective action to end the COVID-19 crisis and ensure the world is prepared to respond to outbreaks and prevent the next pandemic. The Network consists of more than 350 global multi-sector partners, working both publicly and behind the scenes to inform policy, mobilize public support and resources, and catalyze action in areas of acute need. Partners are aligned in ensuring that the lessons from the COVID crisis translate into a future where humanity is better prepared to deal with outbreaks and prevent a deadly and costly pandemic from happening again.

Learn more at [www.pandemicactionnetwork.org](http://www.pandemicactionnetwork.org).

## Sample and timeline

The poll was conducted by YouGov as a part of their online YouGov panel survey. The sample was a sample of 2,000 U.S. residents, matched to a sample frame on the basis of gender, age, race, and education. The sample frame is designed to be representative of U.S. adults on the basis of demographics and political activity as captured in prior surveys including the American Community Survey, the 2020 Current Population Survey Voting and Registration supplements, the 2020 National Election Pool exit poll, and the 2020 CES surveys, as well as other data. Data was collected from Jan. 4-19, 2023.

## Details about reporting

Poll results presented as percentages or as a breakdown of responses are presented as weighted averages, weighted by age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, region, and 2020 presidential vote choice.

Demographic data and the results of statistical analyses are presented as raw numbers, unweighted.

## General analysis details

Statistical analyses were carried out using RStudio 2022.12.0+353 for Windows and the lme4 package. Predictor variables were treated as categorical variables and entered as dummy codes for the different responses, except age which was calculated as a linear variable by selecting the participant birth year from the year 2022. When analyzing support, outcome variables were coded as a binary variable with responses of “strongly agree” and “agree” were combined to indicate support.

## Analysis of voluntary contribution question

This question was asked as an open-response question. Several participants entered unrealistically high numbers, so data were first cleaned by dropping all answers where the respondent provided an answer in excess of their self-reported annual income or where such calculation was impossible because participants proposed an annual amount but did not report annual income (183 responses dropped). Of the remaining participants, 654 participants entered “0” for the amount they would voluntarily contribute. The unweighted range, mean, median, and standard deviation are presented below for the full sample, the full sample with outliers dropped and for only those who provided a number greater than zero with outliers dropped.

	Range	Mean	SD	Median
All raw responses	0-1x10 <sup>14</sup>	100,319,268,274	3.16x10 <sup>12</sup>	50
All responses (outliers dropped)	0-240,000	\$580.12	6,248.73	25
Only positive numbers (outliers dropped)	0.01-240,000	\$908.04	7,799.94	100

## Analysis of support for federal funding

Data were analyzed using binomial logistic regression. Demographic variables including age, gender, race, annual income, political identification, and education were entered as a block. Separately, COVID-19 experiences were entered as a block. Significant predictors were carried forward and entered into a combined model. The final model is below.

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	Z Score	P
Intercept	-0.2592	0.1144	-2.266	0.023
COVID economic stress	-0.2589	0.1212	-2.137	0.033
Know someone seriously ill from COVID	0.3593	0.1231	2.919	0.004
Personally ill from COVID	-0.6562	0.2012	-3.262	0.001
Know someone who died from COVID	0.2502	0.1242	2.014	0.044
COVID worsened mental health	0.699	0.1397	5.003	0.000
COVID increased separation from family	0.5458	0.1221	4.47	0.000
Democratic identification	1.3426	0.1333	10.069	0.000
Republican identification	-0.3733	0.1276	-2.926	0.003

Education - some college	0.4923	0.1401	3.515	0.000
Education - 4 year degree	0.7974	0.152	5.247	0.000
Education - postgraduate degree	0.4379	0.1833	2.389	0.017
Income - prefer not to disclose	-0.4113	0.1546	-2.661	0.008

## COMPLETE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

For the purposes of this survey, pandemic preparedness means *stopping a local disease outbreak before it becomes an epidemic and then escalates to a pandemic*. This requires countries at national, state, and local levels to have pandemic preparedness plans and capacities in place, including, for example, teams of experts for rapid detection, alerting, and early response to an outbreak, disease surveillance systems and well-equipped and trained health care workers and facilities that are prepared to isolate and treat cases, and supply chains that can accelerate development, production, and distribution of tests, vaccines, and treatments.

### Q1. Perceived risk

**Intent: Capture perception of risk of future pandemics.**

How much do you agree or disagree with the statement “From COVID to mpox, RSV, and Ebola, we are now in an era of increasing risk due to deadly infectious disease outbreaks and pandemic threats that can land at our doorstep in a matter of days.”

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

### Q2. Personal experience of COVID

**Intent: Ground poll participant in the issue and personal impact; capture personal COVID-19 impact perception.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted people in a variety of ways. Below is a list of impacts. Please indicate which, if any, of these you personally experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Select all that apply.

Lost job or livelihood
Other economic loss or stress
Know someone who got seriously ill
Personally got COVID-19
Personally got COVID-19 and got seriously ill
Know someone who died
Education disruption for self or family member
Major life plans or events were put on hold
Increased drinking or substance use

Increased depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues for yourself or family member
Increased separation from family or friends due to COVID-19
Increased closeness to family or friends due to COVID-19
Improvement in work experience
Improved mental health and/or well-being

## Introduction: U.S. Government (USG)

*Intent: Introduce USG role and federal budget ideas.*

In the United States, pandemic preparedness is supported by government agencies at the local, state, and federal levels. At the federal government level, there are proposals before Congress to increase federal spending on pandemic preparedness to detect, prevent and rapidly respond to emerging infectious disease threats, which includes facilitating cooperation across states and also with other nations to stop pandemics. We would like to ask you some questions about your views toward funding for these activities.

### Q3. USG COVID preparedness perception risk

*Intent: Capture perception of COVID preparedness; also a soft transition question .*

How prepared do you believe the federal government was for the COVID-19 pandemic?

Very unprepared	Somewhat unprepared	Neither prepared nor unprepared	Somewhat prepared	Very prepared
1	2	3	4	5

### Q4. USG pandemic preparedness perception risk

*Intent: Capture perception of pandemic preparedness; also a soft transition question from above to start asking about money.*

How prepared do you feel the U.S. is for the next pandemic?

Much less prepared than before COVID-19	Less prepared than before COVID-19	About as prepared as for COVID-19	Somewhat more prepared than before COVID-19	Much more prepared than before COVID-19
1	2	3	4	5

## Message baseline

**M0. Please rate your support or opposition for the idea that the federal government should fund pandemic preparedness.**

Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither oppose nor support	Somewhat support	Strongly support
1	2	3	4	5

**M1. Please rate your support or opposition for federal government spending on US national and state programs for domestic pandemic preparedness to strengthen pandemic preparedness capacities for U.S. states.**

Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither oppose nor support	Somewhat support	Strongly support
1	2	3	4	5

**M2. Please rate your support or opposition for federal government spending on strengthening the international systems and systems in other countries for global pandemic preparedness around the world.**

Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither oppose nor support	Somewhat support	Strongly support
1	2	3	4	5

**Q5. What do you think are the three strongest reasons to strengthen domestic pandemic preparedness? Please list your top three reasons why in order of priority, 1, 2, 3.**

Saves lives	Protects health workers
Protects the economy	Protects children from education disruption
Prevents supply chain disruption and inflation	Protects the elderly and most vulnerable/immunocompromised
Saves livelihoods and protects businesses	

**Q6. What do you think are the three strongest reasons to strengthen global pandemic preparedness in countries around the world? Please list your top three reasons why in order of priority, 1, 2, 3.**

Saves lives	Saves livelihoods and protects businesses
Prevents dangerous outbreaks from spreading to America	Protects health workers
Ensures a more secure world	Protects children from education disruption
Protects the global economy	Protects the elderly and most vulnerable/immunocompromised
Prevents supply chain disruption and inflation	

**Q7. Personal/family willingness-to-pay**

*Intent: Capture general willingness to pay directly for pandemic preparedness.*

If you were able to pay directly to improve pandemic preparedness, how much money would you be willing to contribute on a yearly basis to a reliable and effective national and global system to help detect, prevent, and rapidly respond to outbreaks to help stop them from spreading and becoming deadly and costly pandemics?

[open answer]

**Q8. Tax/government spending for pandemic preparedness**

*Intent: Capture willingness to use personal tax payments to increase federal government spending for pandemic preparedness.*

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to have cost the federal government \$14 trillion so far and pandemic-induced economic impacts continue to be felt today. A recent budget proposal to Congress is to spend an additional \$88 billion over the next five years, or about \$17.5 billion per year, to strengthen U.S. and global pandemic preparedness.

All and all, this means, the cost of preparedness is less than half of one percent of the cost of the response of COVID response to date. Considering that context, please indicate how much you support an increase in federal spending by this amount to make America and the world safer from future pandemics?

Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither oppose nor support	Somewhat support	Strongly support
1	2	3	4	5

**Q9. Perception of role of federal government**

*Intent: Understand to what degree do respondents think the federal government should prioritize pandemic preparedness as part of its role.*

How important to you is it that the federal government prioritizes pandemic preparedness in its annual budget and planning?

Not important at all	A little important	Very important	Extremely important
1	2	3	4

**Q10. Perception of defense spending**

*Intent: Understand to what degree do respondents think the federal government should consider pandemic preparedness a part of defense and national security spending.*

Please indicate how much you agree with this statement: “Pandemic preparedness is an issue of national and economic security, so it would be appropriate to allocate a portion of our defense spending to bolster pandemic preparedness.”

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

**Message testing**

We would like you to read a few messages about pandemic preparedness. After each message, we would like to know whether you think hearing that message makes you more or less likely to support the idea of the federal government funding pandemic preparedness.

**M1. Outbreaks are inevitable. Pandemics are not. Letting pandemics persist and failing to prepare for pandemic threats is a crisis of leadership and a failure of leaders choosing to take action. We need leaders who prioritize making America prepared for the next pandemic and who make the choice to invest in pandemic preparedness so that a deadly and costly crisis like COVID never happens again.**

Does hearing this message make you more or less willing to support the idea of increasing federal government funding for pandemic preparedness?

Makes me much less willing to support federal funding	Makes me less willing to support federal funding	No impact	Makes me more willing to support federal funding	Makes me much more willing to support federal funding
1	2	3	4	5

**M2. The COVID-19 pandemic showed both the long-term health and social costs of pandemics as well as the huge economic costs. The costs of response are exponentially greater than investing to prepare for and prevent pandemics. The total cost of the COVID-19 pandemic response over the last 2.5 years to American taxpayers is at least \$14 trillion and counting, while the estimated cost of strengthening pandemic preparedness is an increase in spending of \$88.2 billion over five years. This proposed investment in preparedness is less than half of one percent of the cost of the response to date. Now is the time for leaders to invest in pandemic preparedness so that a deadly and costly pandemic like COVID never happens again. We can't afford not to.**

Does hearing this message make you more or less willing to support the idea of increasing federal government funding for pandemic preparedness?

Makes me much less willing to support federal funding	Makes me less willing to support federal funding	No impact	Makes me more willing to support federal funding	Makes me much more willing to support federal funding
1	2	3	4	5

**M3. From the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to the spread of mpox and polio and recurring Ebola outbreaks in Africa, we are now living in an era of pandemic threats. Just as we maintain a strong military and national security capabilities to be prepared for future threats, this new era demands that our government and security leaders make pandemic preparedness and response an ongoing priority by investing to bolster our domestic and international defenses against pandemics.**

Does hearing this message make you more or less willing to support the idea of increasing federal government funding for pandemic preparedness?

Makes me much less willing to support federal funding	Makes me less willing to support federal funding	No impact	Makes me more willing to support federal funding	Makes me much more willing to support federal funding
1	2	3	4	5

**Final Question**

Is there anything else you'd like to add or for us to know about your views on U.S. support for pandemic preparedness?

[Open-ended response]