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# The State of Online Harassment

*Roughly four-in-ten Americans have experienced online harassment, with half of this group citing politics as the reason they think they were targeted. Growing shares face more severe online abuse such as sexual harassment or stalking*

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## How we did this

Pew Research Center has a history of studying online harassment. This report focuses on American adults' experiences and attitudes related to online harassment. For this analysis, we surveyed 10,093 U.S. adults from Sept. 8 to 13, 2020. Everyone who took part is a member of the Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), an online survey panel that is recruited through national, random sampling of residential addresses. This way nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. The survey is weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education and other categories. Read more about the [ATP's methodology](#).

Here are the [questions used for this report](#), along with responses, and [its methodology](#).

## The State of Online Harassment

*Roughly four-in-ten Americans have experienced online harassment, with half of this group citing politics as the reason they think they were targeted. Growing shares face more severe online abuse such as sexual harassment or stalking*

Stories about online harassment have captured headlines for years. Beyond the more severe [cases of sustained, aggressive abuse](#) that make the news, name-calling and belittling, derisive comments have come to characterize how many view [discourse online](#) – especially in the political realm.

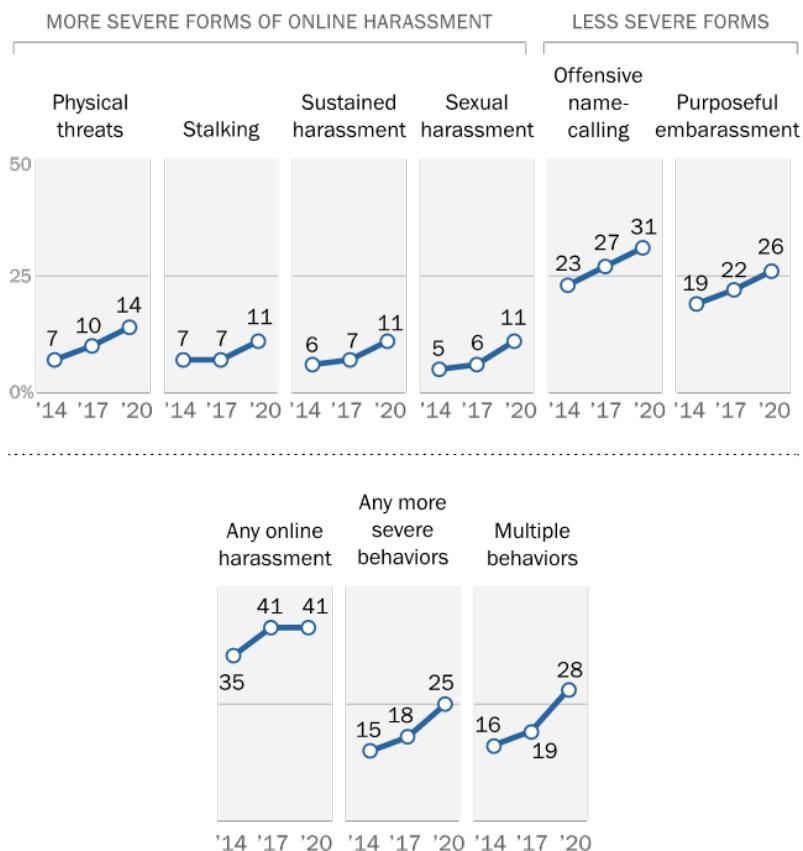
A Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults in September finds that 41% of Americans have personally experienced some form of online harassment in at least one of the six key ways that were measured. And while the overall prevalence of this type of abuse is the same as it was in 2017, there is evidence that online harassment has intensified since then.

To begin with, growing shares of Americans report experiencing more severe forms of harassment, which encompasses physical threats, stalking, sexual harassment and sustained harassment. Some 15% experienced such problems in 2014 and a slightly larger share (18%) said the same in 2017.<sup>1</sup> That group has risen to 25% today.

Additionally, those who have been the target of online abuse are more likely today than in 2017 to report that their most recent experience involved more varied types and more severe forms of online abuse.

## **Compared with 2017, similar share of Americans have experienced any type of online harassment – but more severe encounters have become more common**

*% of U.S. adults who say they have personally experienced the following behaviors online*



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2014 data was reweighted to be comparable to the data collected in 2017. See the [2017 report's methodology](#) for more information about how this was done.

In a political environment where Americans are stressed and frustrated and [antipathy has grown](#), online venues often serve as platforms for highly contentious or even extremely offensive political debate. And for those who have experienced online abuse, politics is cited as the top reason for why they think they were targeted.

Indeed, 20% of Americans overall – representing half of those who have been harassed online – say they have experienced online harassment because of their political views. This is a notable increase from three years ago, when 14% of all Americans said they had been targeted for this reason. Beyond politics, more also cite their gender or their racial and ethnic background as reasons why they believe they were harassed online.

While these kinds of negative encounters may occur anywhere online, social media is by far the most common venue cited for harassment – a pattern consistent across the Center’s work over the years on this topic. The latest survey finds that 75% of targets of online abuse – equaling 31% of Americans overall – say their most recent experience was on social media.

As online harassment permeates social media, the public is highly critical of the way these companies are tackling the issue. Fully 79% say social media companies are doing an only fair or poor job at addressing online harassment or bullying on their platforms.

But even as social media companies receive low ratings for handling abuse on their sites, a minority of Americans back the idea of holding these platforms legally responsible for harassment that happens on their sites. Just 33% of Americans say that people who have experienced harassment or bullying on social media sites should be able to sue the platforms on which it occurred.

## Defining online harassment

This report measures online harassment using six distinct behaviors:

- Offensive name-calling
- Purposeful embarrassment
- Stalking
- Physical threats
- Harassment over a sustained period of time
- Sexual harassment

Respondents who indicate they have personally experienced any of these behaviors online are considered targets of online harassment in this report.

Further, this report distinguishes between “more severe” and “less severe” forms of online harassment. Those who have only experienced name-calling or efforts to embarrass them are categorized in the “less severe” group, while those who have experienced any stalking, physical threats, sustained harassment or sexual harassment are categorized in the “more severe” group.

These are some of the key findings from a nationally representative survey of 10,093 U.S. adults conducted online Sept. 8 to 13, 2020, using Pew Research Center's [American Trends Panel](#). The following are among the major findings.

### 41% of U.S. adults have personally experienced online harassment, and 25% have experienced more severe harassment

On a broad level, Americans agree that online harassment is a problem plaguing digital spaces. Roughly nine-in-ten Americans say people being harassed or bullied online is a problem, including 55% who consider it a major problem.

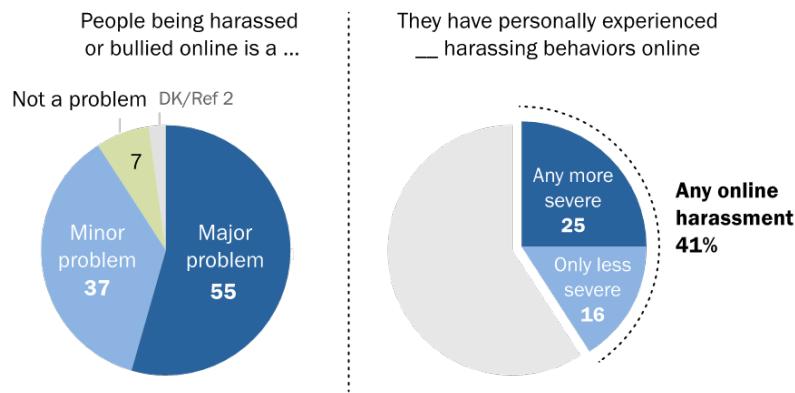
Many Americans have also had their own experience with being targeted online. While about four-in-ten Americans (41%) have experienced some form of online harassment, growing shares have faced more severe and multiple forms of harassment. For example, in 2014, 15% of

Americans said they had been subjected to more severe forms of online harassment. That share is now 25%. There has also been a double-digit increase in those experiencing multiple types of online abuse – rising from 16% to 28% since 2014. This number is also up since 2017, when 19% of Americans had experienced multiple forms of harassing behaviors online.

Many individual types of behaviors are on the rise as well. The shares of Americans who say they have been called an offensive name, purposefully embarrassed or physically threatened while online have all risen since 2014. However, the share who have experienced any of the less severe behaviors is largely on par with that of 2017 (37% in 2020 vs. 36% in 2017).

### Majority say online harassment is a major problem; 41% have personally experienced this, with more than half of this group experiencing more severe behaviors

% of U.S. adults who say the following



Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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## A majority of younger adults have encountered harassment online

Online harassment is a particularly common feature of online life for younger adults, and they are especially prone to facing harassing behaviors that are more serious. Roughly two-thirds of adults under 30 (64%) have experienced any form of the online harassment activities measured in this survey – making this the only age group in which a majority have been subjected to these behaviors. Still, about half of 30- to 49-year-olds have been the target of online harassment, while smaller shares of those ages 50 and older (26%) have encountered at least one of these harassing activities.

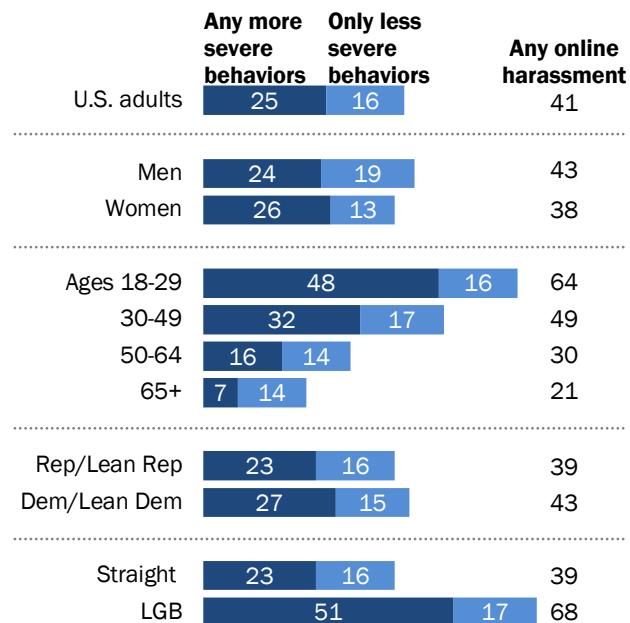
A similar pattern is present when looking at those who have faced more severe forms of online abuse: 48% of 18- to 29-year-olds have been targeted online with more severe behaviors, compared with 32% of those ages 30 to 49 and just 12% of those 50 and older.

Gender also plays a role in the types of harassment people are likely to encounter online. Overall, men are somewhat more likely than women to say they have experienced any form of harassment online (43% vs. 38%), but similar shares of men and women have faced more severe forms of this kind of abuse. There are also differences across individual types of online harassment in the types of negative incidents they have personally encountered online. Some 35% of men say they have been called an offensive name versus 26% of women, and being physically threatened online is more common occurrence for men rather than women (16% vs. 11%).

Women, on the other hand, are more likely than men to report having been sexually harassed online (16% vs. 5%) or stalked (13% vs. 9%). [Young women](#) are particularly likely to have

## Roughly two-thirds of adults under 30 have been harassed online

% of U.S. adults who say they have personally experienced \_\_\_ online



Note: More severe behaviors include being physically threatened, stalked, sexually harassed or harassed for a sustained period of time. Less severe behaviors include being called an offensive name or having someone trying to purposefully embarrass them. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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experienced sexual harassment online. Fully 33% of women under 35 say they have been sexually harassed online, while 11% of men under 35 say the same.

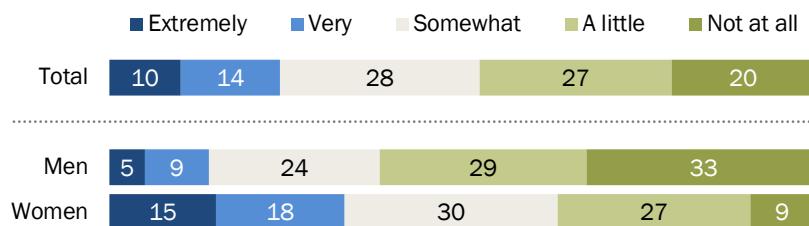
Lesbian, gay or bisexual adults are particularly likely to face harassment online. Roughly seven-in-ten have encountered any harassment online and fully 51% have been targeted for more severe forms of online abuse. By comparison, about four-in-ten straight adults have endured any form of harassment online, and only 23% have undergone any of the more severe behaviors.

While men are somewhat more likely than women to experience harassment online, women are more likely to be upset about it and think it is a major problem. Some 61% of women say online harassment is a major problem, while 48% of men agree. In addition, women who have been harassed online are more than twice as likely as men to say they were extremely or very upset by their most recent encounter (34% vs. 14%).

Conversely, 61% of men who have been harassed online say they were not at all or a little upset by their most recent incident, while 36% of women said the same. Overall, 24% of those who have experienced online harassment say that their most recent incident was extremely (10%) or very (14%) upsetting.

### **Women targeted in online harassment are more than twice as likely as men to say most recent incident was very or extremely upsetting**

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say their most recent experience was \_\_\_ upsetting*



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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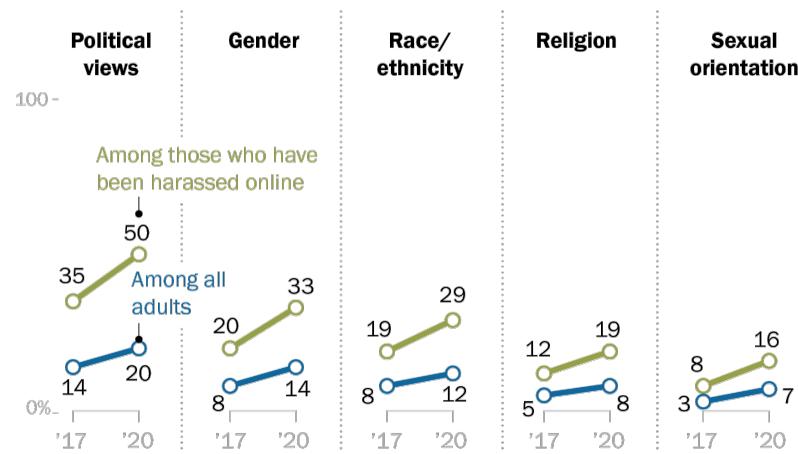
## One-in-five adults report being harassed online for their political views

Those who have been harassed were then asked whether they believed certain personal characteristics – political views, gender, race or ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation – played a role in the attacks.

Fully 20% of all adults – or 50% of online harassment targets – say they have been harassed online because of their political views. At the same time, 14% of U.S. adults (33% of people who have been harassed online) say they have been harassed based on their gender, while 12% say this occurred because of their race or ethnicity (29% of online harassment targets). Smaller shares point to their religion or their sexual orientation as a reason for their harassment.

### Growing share of Americans who've been harassed online cite their political views as a reason why they think they were targeted

*% who say they have experienced online harassment because of their ...*



Note: Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.  
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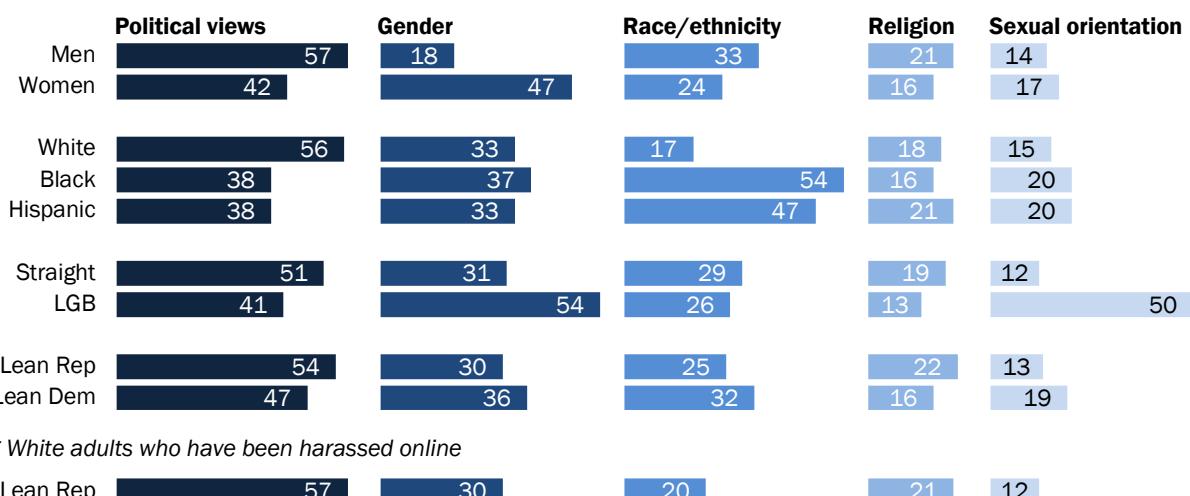
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Each of these reasons has risen since the Center last asked these questions in 2017. There have been 6 percentage point increases in the shares of Americans attributing their harassment to their political views as well as gender. Race or ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion each saw a modest rise since 2017.

There are several demographic differences regarding who has been harassed online for their gender or their race or ethnicity. Among adults who have been harassed online, roughly half of women (47%) say they think they have encountered harassment online because of their gender, whereas 18% of men who have been harassed online say the same. Similarly, about half or more Black (54%) or Hispanic online harassment targets (47%) say they were harassed due to their race or ethnicity, compared with 17% of White targets.

## Black, Hispanic targets of online harassment more likely than their White counterparts to say they've been harassed online because of their race, ethnicity

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say they think their online harassment was a result of their ...*



Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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While small shares overall say their harassment was due to their sexual orientation, 50% of lesbian, gay or bisexual adults who have been harassed online say they think it occurred because of their sexual orientation.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, only 12% of straight online harassment targets say the same. Lesbian, gay or bisexual online harassment targets are also more likely to report having encountered harassment online because of their gender (54%) compared with their straight counterparts (31%).

Men and White adults who have been harassed online are particularly likely to say this harassment was a result of their political views. Harassed men are a full 15 percentage points more likely than their female counterparts to cite political views as the reason they were harassed online (57% vs. 42%). Similarly, White online harassment targets are 18 points more likely than Black or Hispanic targets to point to their political views as the reason they were targeted for abuse online.

<sup>2</sup> Because of the relatively small sample size and a reduction in precision due to weighting, we are not able to analyze lesbian, gay or bisexual respondents by demographic categories such as gender, age or education.

And while there are some partisan differences in citing political views as the perceived catalyst for facing harassment, these differences do not hold when accounting for race and ethnicity. For example, White Democrats and Republicans, including independents who lean toward each respective party, who have been harassed are about equally likely to say their political views were the reason they were harassed (55% vs. 57%).

## Most online harassment targets say their most recent experience occurred on social media

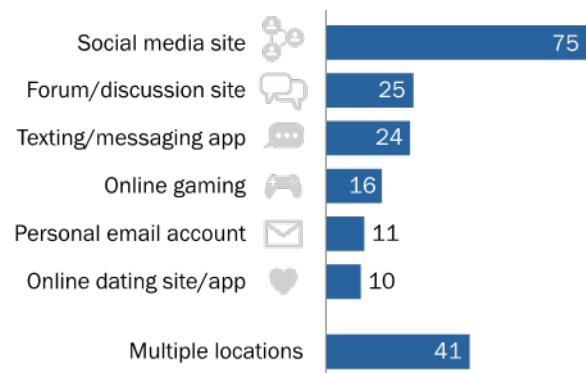
As was true in [previous Center surveys](#) about online harassment, social media continue to be the most commonly cited online venues where harassment takes place. When asked where their most recent experience with online harassment occurred, 75% of targets of this type of abuse say it happened on social media.

By comparison, much smaller shares of this group mention online forums or discussion sites (25%) or texting or messaging apps (24%) as the location where their most recent experience occurred, while about one-in-ten or more cite online gaming, their personal email account or a dating site or app. In total, 41% of targets of online harassment say their most recent experience of harassment spanned more than one venue.

While social media are the most commonly cited online spaces for both men and women to say they have been harassed, women who have been harassed online are more likely than men to say their most recent experience was on social media (a 13 percentage point gap). On the other hand, men are more likely than women to report their most recent experience occurred while they were using an online forum or discussion site or while online gaming (both with a 13-point gap).

### Majority of people who've been harassed online say the most recent experience occurred on social media

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say their most recent experience occurred in the following online environments*



Note: Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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Most Americans are critical of how social media companies address online harassment; only a minority say users should be able to hold sites legally responsible

While most Americans feel that harassment and bullying are a problem online, the way to address this issue remains up for debate. The [policies used to combat](#) harassment and the [transparency in reporting](#) how [content is being moderated](#) vary drastically across online platforms. Social media companies have been [highly criticized](#) for their current tactics in addressing harassment, with [advocates saying](#) these companies should be doing more.

The public is similarly critical of social media companies. When asked to rate how well these companies are addressing online harassment or bullying on their platforms, just 18% say social media companies are doing an excellent or good job. Much larger shares – roughly eight-in-ten – say these companies are doing an only fair or poor job.

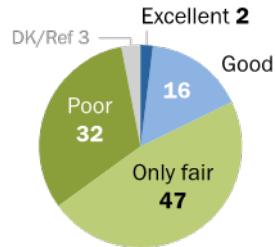
Despite most Americans being critical of the job social media companies are doing to address harassment, some are optimistic about a variety of possible solutions asked about in the survey that could be enacted to combat online harassment.

About half of Americans say permanently suspending users if they bully or harass others (51%) or requiring users of these platforms to disclose their real identities (48%) would be very effective in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media.

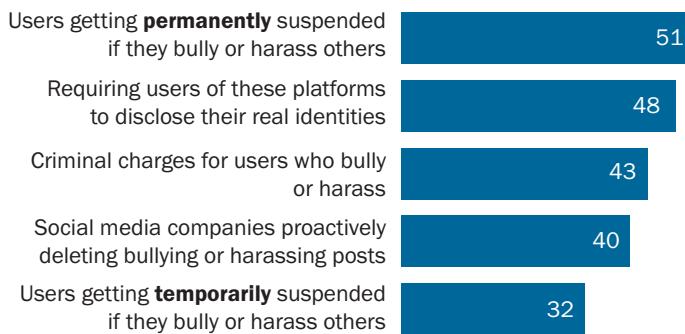
Around four-in-ten say criminal charges for users who bully or harass (43%) or social media companies proactively deleting bullying or harassing posts (40%) would be very effective.

## A majority say social media companies are doing an only fair or poor job addressing online harassment

*% of U.S. adults who say social media companies are doing a(n) \_\_\_ job when it comes to addressing online harassment or bullying on their platforms*



*% of U.S. adults who say \_\_\_ would be **very effective** in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media*



*% of U.S. adults who say people who have been bullied or harassed by others on social media \_\_\_ the platforms where the harassment occurred*



Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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Temporary bans are deemed the least effective solution about which respondents were asked. A third (32%) of Americans say users getting temporarily suspended if they bully or harass others would be a very effective measure against harassment.

When it comes to holding social media companies accountable for the harassment on their platforms, few think personal lawsuits should be the solution. A third of adults say people who have been bullied or harassed by others on social media should be able to sue the platforms where the harassment occurred, whereas a much larger share – 63% – believe targets of online abuse *should not* be able to bring legal action against social media sites.

## 1. Personal experiences with online harassment

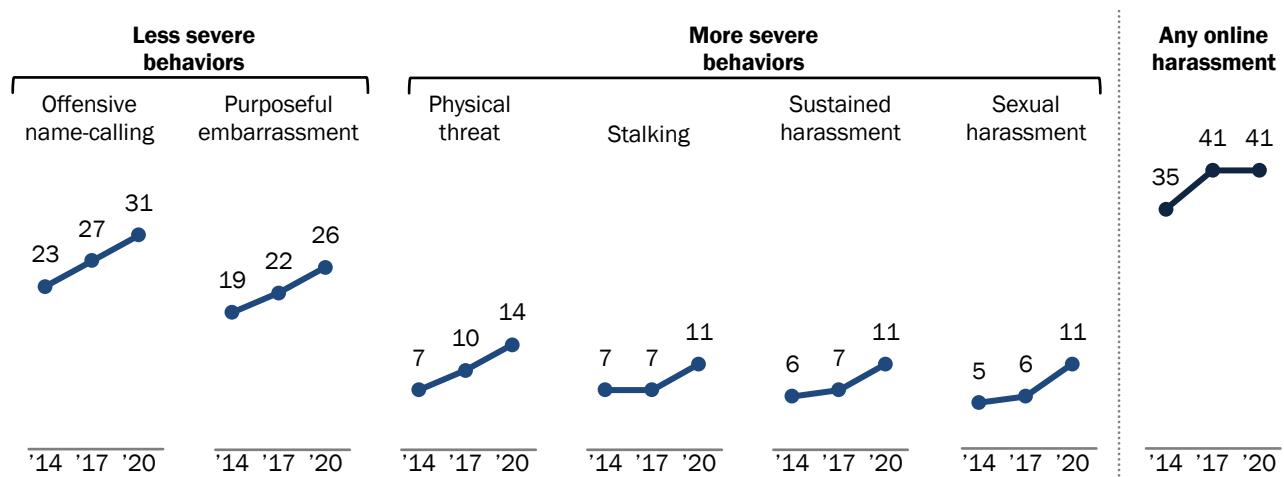
Online harassment is a nuanced and complex topic that can involve a multitude of behaviors. This chapter explores Americans' experiences with six broad types of harassing behaviors, ranging from being called a bad name or purposefully embarrassed to being physically threatened or stalked, in order to capture a broad range of experiences. Overall, the survey shows that the share of U.S. adults who report experiencing any form of online harassment is similar to that found in the Center's 2017 study. But there are differences when it comes to the shares of adults who have experienced each of the individual harassing behaviors and the shares who have experienced more severe forms of harassment. This chapter also explores the reasons why people think they were targeted for this online abuse. Political views are the most common reason cited overall, but notable demographic differences underlie the reasons people named.

**Roughly four-in-ten Americans have personally experienced online harassment**

Overall, 41% of Americans have experienced some form of online harassment measured in the latest survey, which is identical to the share who had been the target of online abuse in 2017 and a slight uptick from the 35% in 2014 when the Center first polled on this topic.

### 41% of Americans have experienced online harassment

*% of U.S. adults who say they have personally experienced the following behaviors online*



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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As was true in previous surveys, less severe forms of online abuse – name-calling and purposeful embarrassment – are the most common types of negative experiences reported. Some 31% say they have been called an offensive name online, while 26% report having had someone try to purposefully embarrass them.

At the same time, about one-in-ten or more say they have experienced more severe forms of harassment online, such as being physically threatened (14%), stalked (11%), sexually harassed (11%) or harassed for a sustained period of time (11%).

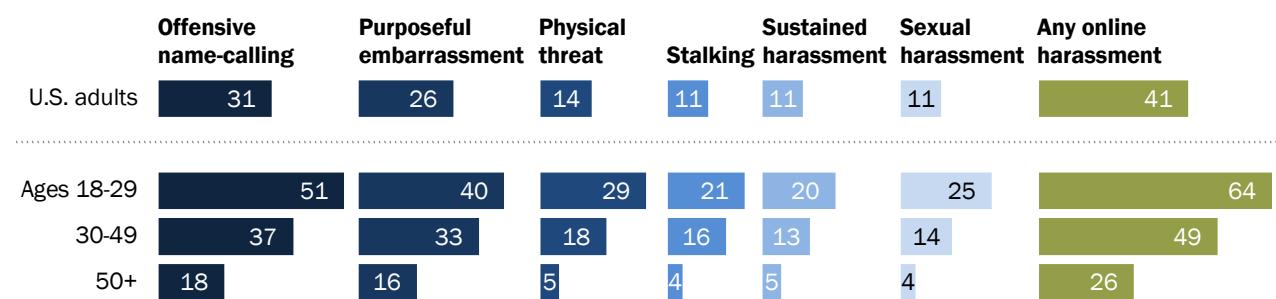
The share of Americans who say they have experienced at least one of the more severe forms of harassment has been on the rise. One-quarter of adults say they've been the target of at least one of these severe forms of online abuse, a share that has increased in each of the Center's surveys on the issue (from 18% in 2017 and 15% in 2014). Conversely, the share who have experienced either of the less severe behaviors is largely on par with that of 2017 (37% in 2020 vs. 36% in 2017).

### **Experience with certain types of online abuse varies by age, gender, race or ethnicity**

Younger adults are more likely to report having experienced harassment in general as well as more severe forms of harassment. Roughly two-thirds of adults under 30 (64%) say they have experienced any form of online harassment, and 48% say they have faced at least one type of more severe harassment. Roughly half of 30- to 49-year-olds report that they have faced harassment online, while about a third (32%) say they have experienced at least one of the more severe types of harassment. By comparison, much smaller shares of adults 50 and older say the same (26% and 12%, respectively).

### **Adults under 30 are more likely than any other age group to report experiencing any form of harassment online**

*% of U.S. adults who say they have personally experienced the following behaviors online*



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

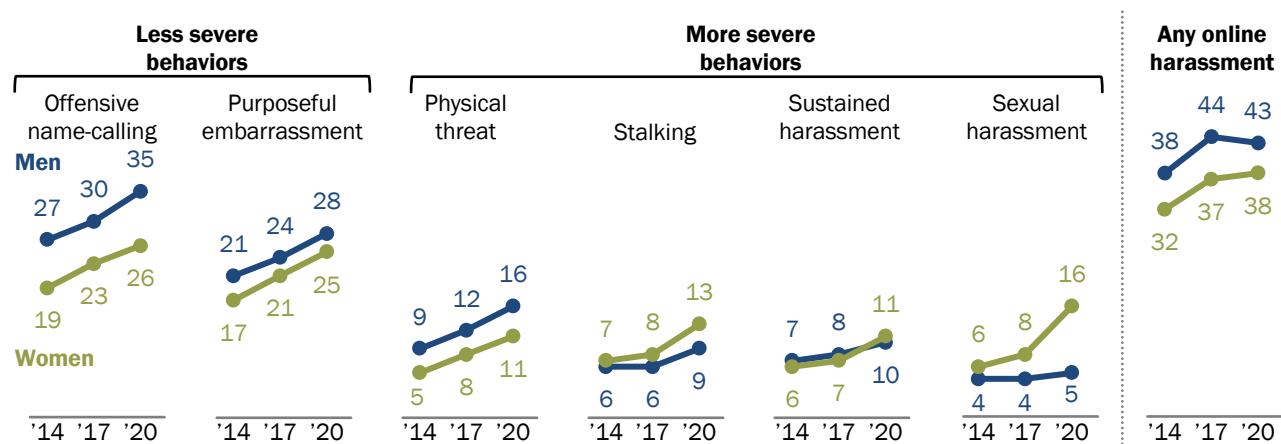
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Across all six types of online harassment measured in the survey, younger adults are more likely to have been the target of these behaviors online. Fully 51% of adults ages 18 to 29 say they have been called an offensive name online, compared with 37% of those 30 to 49 and 18% of those 50 and older. While very small shares of adults ages 50 and older say they have been physically threatened, sexually harassed, stalked or harassed for a sustained period of time, one-in-five or more adults under 30 and roughly one-in-ten or more adults 30 to 49 have been the target of these behaviors online.

Gender also plays a role in the types of harassment people are likely to encounter online. Overall, men are somewhat more likely than women to say they have experienced any form of harassment online (43% vs. 38%). There are also differences across individual types of negative incidents they have personally encountered online.

### Share of women who report being sexually harassed online has doubled since 2017

*% of U.S. adults who say they have personally experienced the following behaviors online*



Note: For 2020 estimates, respondents are grouped according to their gender. Prior to 2020, groupings were defined according to their biological sex. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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To begin with, more men than women say they were called an offensive name (35% vs. 26%) or physically threatened (16% vs. 11%). Women, on the other hand, are more likely than men to report having been sexually harassed online (16% vs. 5%), with young women being particularly likely to have experienced sexual harassment. A third of women under 35 (33%) report having been sexually harassed online, compared with 11% of men under 35. The percentage of women who report having been sexually harassed online has doubled since the Center last asked in early

2017, from 8% to 16%. However, this data cannot parse the reasons as to why this increase has occurred.

Women are more likely than men to report being stalked online (13% vs. 9%), but this difference is more modest in comparison to the difference seen for sexual harassment.

Regardless of differences on individual behaviors, there are no gender differences overall when it comes to having experienced any more severe behaviors.

There are also racial and ethnic differences in people's experiences with online harassment. About half of Hispanic adults say they have been harassed online, compared with 40% of White adults and 37% of Black adults. (There are no statistical differences between Asian and Hispanic adults.)<sup>3</sup>

### **Hispanic adults are more likely to say they have experienced sexual harassment online than other racial and ethnic groups**

*% of U.S. adults who say they have personally experienced the following behaviors online*

	Offensive name-calling	Purposeful embarrassment	Physical threat	Stalking	Sustained harassment	Sexual harassment	Any online harassment
U.S. adults	31	26	14	11	11	11	41
White	31	26	13	9	10	11	40
Black	27	22	13	11	11	9	37
Hispanic	33	31	17	20	13	16	47
Asian*	23	24	10	14	11	5	40

\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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Moreover, Hispanic Americans experience many types of harassment at higher rates than other racial or ethnic groups. In general, Hispanics (33%) are more likely to say they have faced more severe harassment online compared with White (23%), Black (25%) or Asian adults (24%). Specifically, the share of Hispanic adults who report that they have been sexually harassed online

<sup>3</sup> This survey includes a total sample size of 303 Asian Americans. The sample includes English-speaking Asian Americans only and, therefore, may not be representative of the overall Asian American population (72% of our weighted Asian American sample was born in another country, compared with 77% of the Asian American adult population overall). Despite this limitation, it is important to report the views of Asian Americans on the topics in this study. As always, Asian Americans' responses are incorporated into the general population figures throughout this report. Asian Americans are shown as a separate group when the question was asked of the full sample. Because of the relatively small sample size and a reduction in precision due to weighting, we are not able to analyze Asian American respondents by demographic categories, such as gender, age or education.

is greater than any other racial or ethnic group. They are also more likely to experience being stalked or purposefully embarrassed online compared with Black or White adults. In addition, Hispanic adults are at a somewhat greater likelihood of reporting having been physically threatened than their White or Asian counterparts. About a third of Hispanic (33%) and White adults (31%) say they have been called an offensive name, whereas 23% of Asian adults say the same. The share of Black adults who were called an offensive name did not differ from any of the other racial or ethnic groups.

But in the case of sustained harassment, people's experiences are somewhat similar across groups. Roughly one-in-ten from each racial or ethnic group say they have undergone harassment for a sustained period of time.

### Half of online harassment targets – or one-in-five Americans overall – think the experience was due to their political views

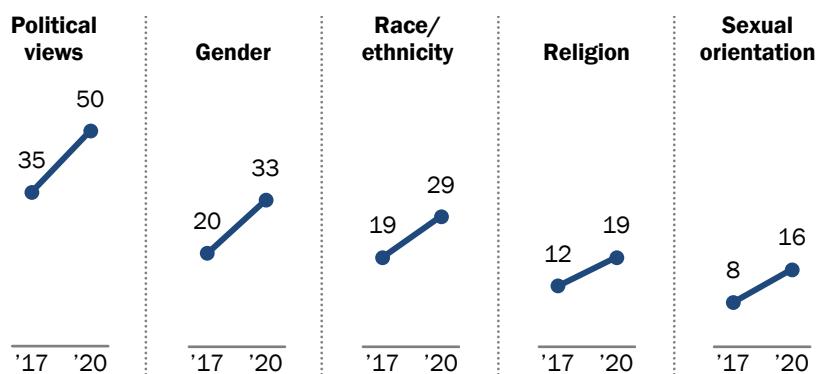
Americans cite a variety of reasons why they encountered harassment online. Half of people who have experienced online harassment (equaling 20% of Americans overall) think they were harassed because of their political views – making this the most common reason cited among the five characteristics asked about in this survey.

At the same time, one-third of those who have been the target of online harassment (14% of all adults) say they have been harassed based on their gender, while 29% say this occurred because of their race or ethnicity (12% of all adults).

Smaller shares point to their religion (19% of online harassment targets, representing 8% of U.S.

### Growing share of Americans who've been harassed online cite their political views as a reason why they think they were targeted

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say they think their online harassment was a result of their ...*



Note: Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.  
“The State of Online Harassment”

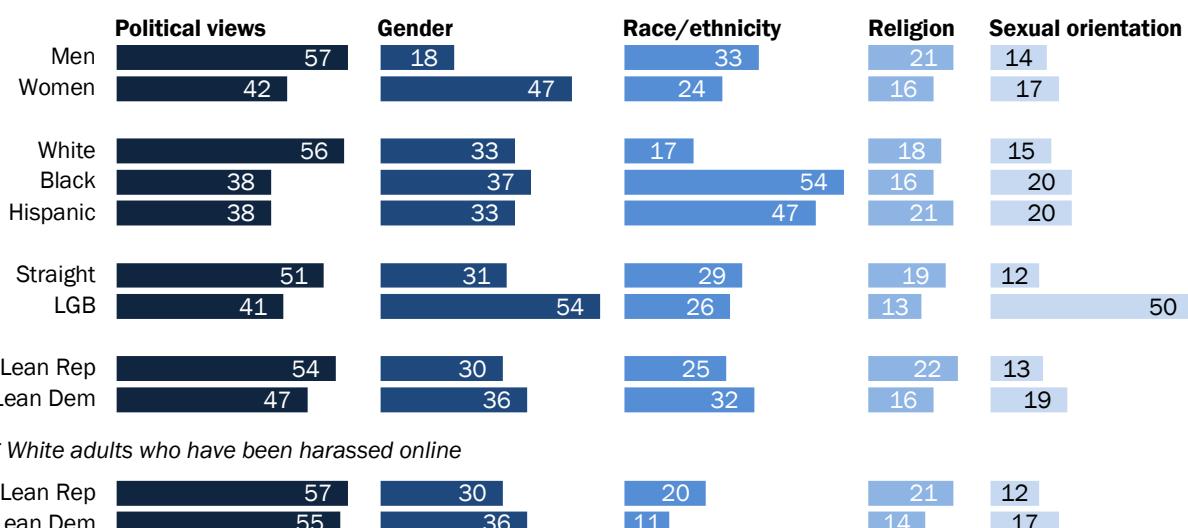
adults overall) or their sexual orientation as a reason for their harassment (16% of online harassment targets, or 7% of all adults).

Each of these reasons has grown more common since the Center last asked these questions in 2017. There has been a 15 percentage point increase in the share of online harassment targets attributing their harassment to their political views; gender has seen a similar rise of 14 points. Race or ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion also rose since 2017.

There are some demographic differences in who points to politics as the reason they were harassed. Indeed, men who have been harassed online are 15 points more likely than women who

### **Men, White adults who have been harassed online are especially likely to say they were targeted because of their political views**

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say they think their online harassment was a result of their ...*



Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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have been targeted to say this was a result of their political views (57% vs. 42%). There are also large racial and ethnic gaps in citing politics as a perceived catalyst for their abuse: 56% of White adults who have been harassed online say this, compared with 38% each of Black or Hispanic targets.

And while there are some partisan differences, these differences do not hold when accounting for race and ethnicity. For example, White Democrats and Republicans (including independents who lean toward each party) who have been harassed are about equally likely to say their political views were the reason they were harassed (55% vs. 57%). Harassed non-White Democrats and Republicans differ little in believing their harassment experiences were due to politics (39% vs. 43%).

Despite politics being the top-cited reason overall, male (57%) and White online harassment targets (56%) are particularly likely to think their political views were the reason for their online harassment – especially White men (61%). Other groups commonly point to other elements of their identity as the reason they faced harassment online. Roughly half of women who have been harassed online say it was due to their gender, compared with 18% of their male counterparts. Among those who've been harassed online, Black (54%) or Hispanic adults (47%) are far more likely than White adults (17%) to identify their race or ethnicity as a reason they were harassed.<sup>4</sup>

While small shares overall say their harassment was due to their sexual orientation, 50% of online harassment targets who are lesbian, gay or bisexual say they have been harassed online because of their sexual orientation. By comparison, only 12% of straight online harassment targets say the same.

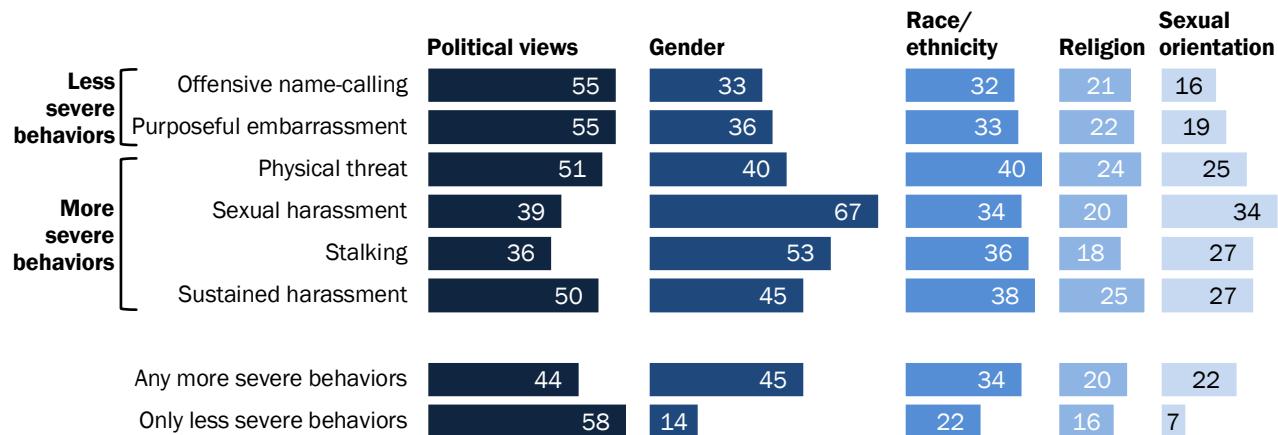
The reason people give for why they were harassed also differs based on the types of harassing behaviors they have experienced. For example, two-thirds (67%) of targets who were sexually harassed say it was due to their gender. Similarly, 53% of people who have been stalked online report gender as a reason they were harassed.

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<sup>4</sup> Because of the relatively small sample size and a reduction in precision due to weighting, results are not shown separately for Asian Americans for questions that are filtered based on experiencing online harassment.

## Two-thirds of Americans who have been sexually harassed online say it was due to their gender

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say their online harassment was a result of their ...*



Note: Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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In general, 45% of people who have experienced any of the more severe forms of harassment say their gender contributed to their harassment, while 14% of those who have experienced only less severe behaviors say the same. People who have undergone more severe forms of harassment are also more likely to attribute their experiences to their race or ethnicity (34%) or their sexual orientation (22%), compared with people who have faced only less severe forms of harassment (22% and 7%, respectively). Conversely, people who have dealt only with less severe forms of harassment are more likely to say their experiences were a result of their political views, compared with those who had gone through more severe harassment (58% vs. 44%).

## 2. Characterizing people's most recent online harassment experience

In order to gain a more detailed understanding of the daily realities of online harassment, the 41% of adults who have been targeted online were asked a series of questions about their most recent experience. These questions cover everything from the behaviors involved to how upsetting they may have found the experience.

This new survey finds some similarities between the recent experiences now and those in the past. To begin with, social media sites remain the most common venue for this type of online abuse, while name-calling continues to be the most commonly reported form of online abuse. About a third say they experienced more severe behaviors or multiple harassing behaviors. Still, roughly a third say they do not consider what happened to them to be online harassment.

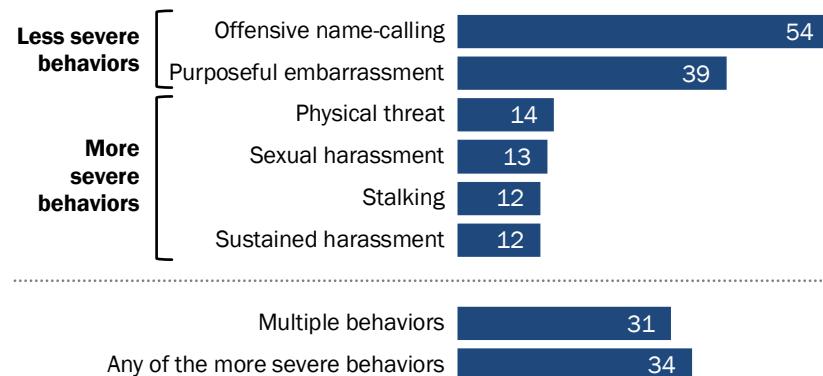
**About a third of online harassment targets say their most recent experience involved more severe forms of harassment**

Among the 41% of Americans who report ever being harassed online, 73% say their most recent experience involved at least one less severe behavior, while about a third (34%) report at least one of the more severe behaviors was involved in the most recent incident. About three-in-ten say their most recent experience involved two or more of the behaviors they were asked about.

Some 54% of adults who report having personally experienced online harassment say they were called an offensive name in their most recent experience, while 39% of this group reports being purposefully embarrassed. On the other hand, more severe behaviors – such as being physically threatened, sexually

### More than half of most-recent online harassment experiences involved being called an offensive name

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say \_\_\_ was involved in their most recent experience*



Note: Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

"The State of Online Harassment"

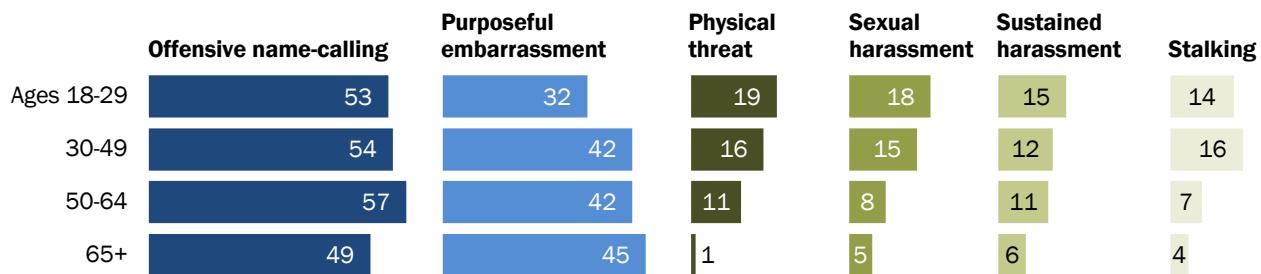
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harassed, stalked or harassed for a sustained period of time – are less commonly cited as occurring in their most recent experience.

Among people who have been harassed online, adults under 30 years old (32%) are less likely than those in older age groups to say their most recent experience involved someone trying to intentionally embarrass them.

### About a fifth of online harassment targets ages 18 to 29 say their most recent experience involved physical threats

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say \_\_\_ was involved in their most recent experience*



Note: Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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Conversely, younger online harassment targets are more likely to report their most recent experience involved more severe forms of harassment. Specifically, adults under 50 are more likely than adults 50 and older to say their most recent experience involved physical threats (17% vs. 8%), sexual harassment (16% vs. 7%) or stalking (15% vs. 6%). While similar shares of adults ages 18 to 29 and 30 to 49 report experiencing each of the more severe behaviors, adults 65 and older who have experienced online harassment differ from those 50 to 64 in being less likely to report encountering physical threats, stalking or sustained harassment in their most recent experience.

About six-in-ten White online harassment targets (57%) say they were called an offensive name in their most recent experience, compared with approximately half of Hispanic harassment targets (48%). Hispanic (20%) or Black (17%) adults who have experienced online harassment are about twice as likely as their White counterparts (9%) to say they were stalked in their most recent online harassment experience.

**Social media sites are the most common location for online harassment**

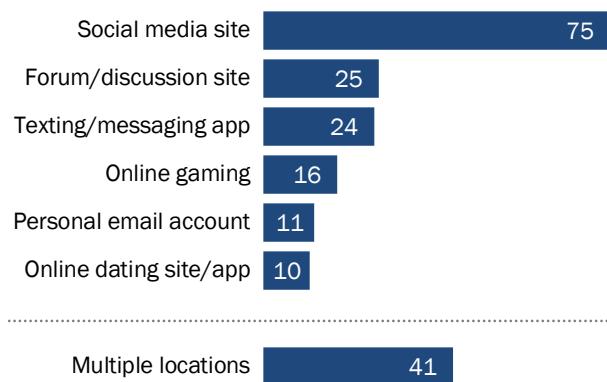
Three-quarters of Americans who have been the target of online harassment say that their most recent experience occurred on social media – making this the only venue measured in this survey that a majority cited as being a location where their most recent online abuse took place.

By comparison, roughly one-quarter of this group mentions online forums or discussion sites (25%) or texting or messaging apps (24%) as the location where their most recent experience occurred. Smaller shares say their most recent experience occurred during an online game, in their personal email account or on a dating site or app (10%). In total, 41% say their most recent experience of harassment spanned multiple platforms.

Looking back to 2017, most of these online spaces have seen an increase in people saying their most recent harassment occurred there. Social media are up 17 percentage points, and online forums or discussion sites are up 18 points since 2017. The share who say their most recent experience occurred on a texting or messaging app was up 10 points, from 15% in 2017 to 24% in 2020. Smaller increases were seen in the shares who mention online gaming (5 points) or dating sites or apps (5 points).

### **Vast majority of people who've been harassed online say it occurred on social media**

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say their most recent experience occurred in the following online environments*



Note: Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

"The State of Online Harassment"

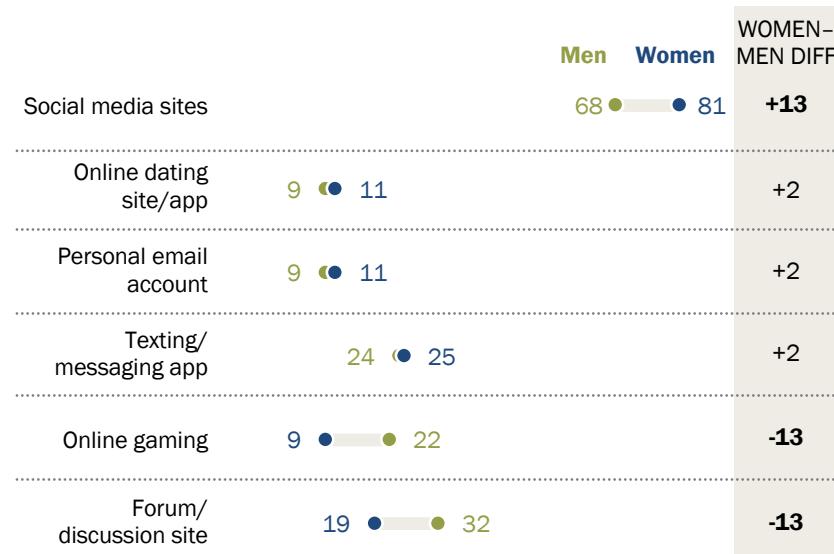
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There are also some gender differences in where people report encountering this type of harassment in their most recent episode. While social media is the most commonly cited online space for both men and women to say they've been harassed, women who have been harassed online are more likely than men to say their most recent experience was on social media (a 13 percentage point gap). On the other hand, men are more likely to report their most recent experience was while using an online forum or discussion site or while online gaming (both with a 13-point gap).

There are no statistically significant differences by gender when it comes to being harassed via texting or messaging apps or in personal email accounts. Among adults under 35, women (12%) and men (13%) who have been harassed are equally likely to say their most recent harassment occurred on an online dating site or app. But when looking at harassed parties 35 and older, women are marginally more likely to have been harassed while online dating than their male counterparts (10% vs. 6%).

## **Women who have been harassed more likely to say most recent experience was on social media; men more likely to cite online gaming**

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say their most recent experience occurred in the following online environments*



Note: Statistically significant differences in **bold**. Figures may not subtract to the DIFF value due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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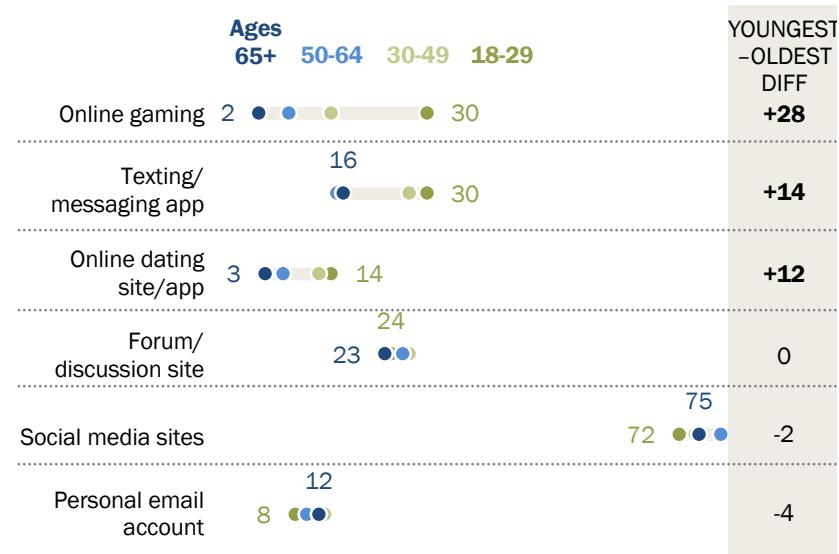
Younger adults who have been harassed online are also more to say their most recent encounter was while online gaming. Three-in-ten online harassment targets ages 18 to 29 say their most recent experience was while online gaming, compared with 14% of online harassment targets who are 30 to 49. Even smaller shares of targets ages 50 to 64 or 65 and older say the same.

Among adults who say they have faced online harassment in the past, adults under 50 are about twice as likely as those ages 50 to 64 to say their most recent experience was on an online dating site or app. This was the case for only 3% of online harassment targets 65 and older. In addition, adults under 50 who have faced online harassment are more likely to report that their most recent experience with online harassment took place on a texting or messaging app compared with adults 50 and older (28% vs. 15%).

Similarly, Black or Hispanic online harassment targets are more likely to report their most recent experience involved a texting or messaging app (31% and 34%) or their personal email account (16% and 15%), compared with 20% of White targets who say their most recent experience took place on a texting or messaging app and 8% who report their experience involved email. In addition, about a quarter of Black adults who have been harassed online (23%) point to online dating sites or apps as where their most recent encounter occurred, while about one-in-ten White (7%) or Hispanic online harassment targets (11%) say the same.

## **Younger online harassment targets more likely to say they were harassed online most recently while gaming, messaging or online dating**

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say their most recent experience occurred in the following online environments*



Note: Statistically significant differences in bold. Figures may not subtract to the DIFF value due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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## Roughly a quarter of online harassment targets say their most recent experience was very or extremely upsetting

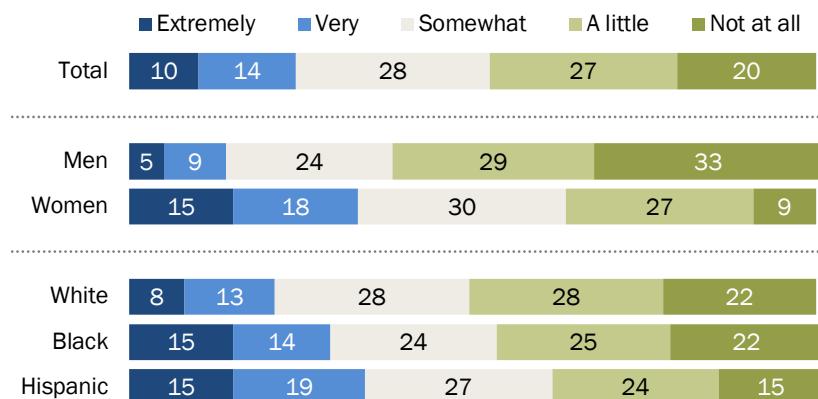
Just as online harassment exists along a spectrum of severity, those who have encountered some form of harassment feel its impact in various ways. While only a minority of those who have experienced online harassment say that their most recent incident was extremely (10%) or very (14%) upsetting, some groups – particularly women – are especially likely to find these incidents troubling.

Women who have been harassed online are more than twice as likely as men to say they were extremely or very upset by their most recent encounter (34% vs. 14%). They were also more likely to say this experience was somewhat upsetting (30% vs. 24%). Conversely, about six-in-ten men who have been harassed online (61%) say they were not at all or a little upset by their most recent incident, while 36% of women said the same.

While racial and ethnic differences are not as common, Black or Hispanic online harassment targets are about twice as likely as White targets to say their most recent harassment experience was extremely upsetting (15% vs. 8%).

### **Women who have been harassed online are three times as likely as men to say their most recent experience was extremely upsetting**

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say their most recent experience was \_\_\_ upsetting*



Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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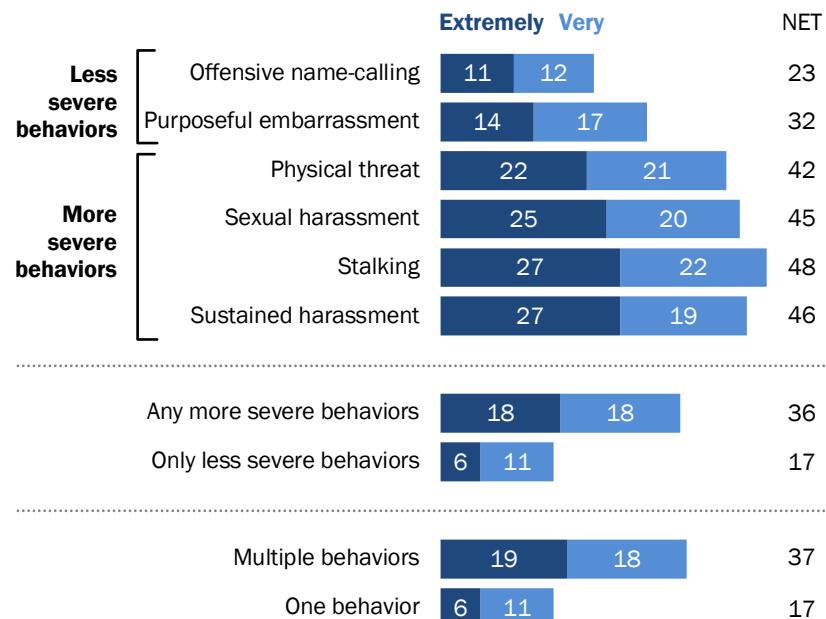
The type of harassment people experienced in their most recent encounter plays an important role in how upsetting they found the experience to be. Overall, 36% of those who reported any of the more severe behaviors as being involved in their most recent experience say that this experience was extremely (18%) or very upsetting (18%), while only 17% of those who only faced less severe behaviors say the same.

Additionally, those targeted by online abuse who report that their most recent incident involved multiple harassing behaviors are more likely to report greater distress than those who faced just one type of harassment. About four-in-ten of this group who dealt with

multiple forms of harassment in their most recent experience say they were at least very upset by this incident, and 19% say it was extremely upsetting. Meanwhile, 17% of those who only encountered one type of harassment in their most recent incident report they were at least very upset, and only 6% say it was extremely upsetting.

## Those who experienced more severe forms of online harassment report feeling higher levels of distress

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say their most recent experience was **extremely** or **very** upsetting*



Note: Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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36% of people who encountered harassment online would not personally call their most recent experience ‘online harassment’

While this report uses a broad definition of harassment – from name-calling and purposeful embarrassment to stalking and physical threats, people’s own definition of online harassment may differ. Previous Center research has shown that online harassment can be [very subjective](#), with people who face the same behaviors differing in whether to label it as “online harassment.”

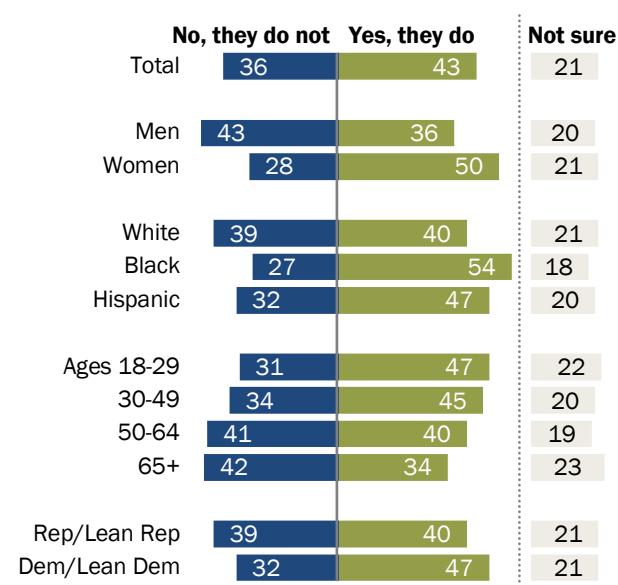
Some 43% of online harassment targets say they consider their most recent experience to be “online harassment,” while 36% say they do not call their experience “online harassment.” Another 21% feel unsure of whether they would consider what happened to them to be “online harassment.” The share of people who label their experience “online harassment” is growing, up 7 percentage points since 2017.

Among those who have been the target of online harassment, women are more likely than men to say they consider their most recent experience to be “online harassment” (50% vs. 36%). Conversely, a greater share of men who have been harassed online say they do not consider their most recent experience to be “online harassment,” compared with women (43% vs. 28%).

In addition, Black (54%) or Hispanic online harassment targets (47%) are more likely to label their experience as “online harassment,” compared with White harassment targets (40%). On the other hand, a greater share of White targets say they don’t see their most recent experience as “online harassment” compared with their Black counterparts (39% vs. 27%).

### **Women online harassment targets are more likely than men to consider their experience to be ‘online harassment’**

*Among the 41% of U.S. adults who have personally experienced online harassment, % who say \_\_ consider their most recent experience to be ‘online harassment’*



Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.  
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### 3. Americans' views on how online harassment should be addressed

Beyond their experiences and the effect online harassment has had on them, Americans hold a variety of opinions about the broader impact of harassment and how it could be addressed. A majority consider online harassment to be a major issue in American society and the vast majority are critical of the way social media companies are handling this issue on their platforms. However, notable shares of Americans are optimistic that permanent bans and identity disclosure could be effective in curtailing online harassment on social media sites.

#### 55% of Americans consider online harassment to be a major problem

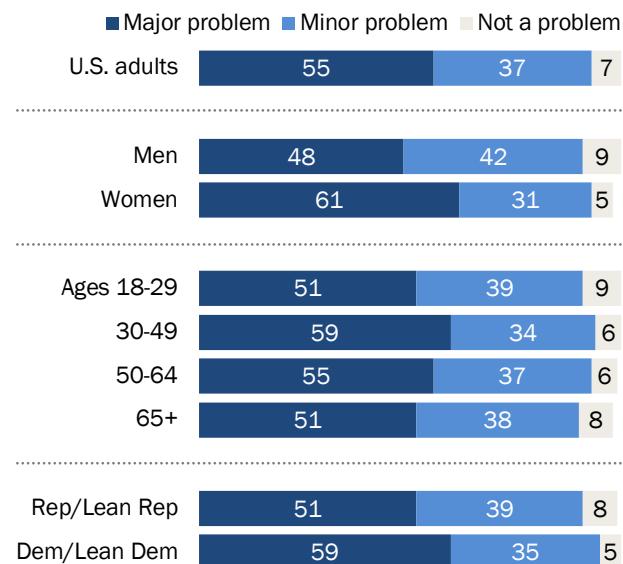
Fully 91% of Americans say people being harassed or bullied online is a problem, including 55% who describe this as a major problem. Still, the share who say online harassment is a major problem has decreased in the past three years, from 62% in 2017 to 55% in 2020.

Several demographic differences are present when it comes to the degree to which people describe online harassment as a major problem. For example, women are 13 percentage points more likely than men to say online harassment is a major problem (61% vs. 48%).

There are also some partisan differences, with about six-in-ten Democrats and independents who lean Democratic and roughly half of Republicans and Republican leaners saying online harassment is a major problem. However, this difference is due entirely to liberal Democrats: 65% of liberal Democrats say online harassment is a major problem, while approximately half of moderate to conservative Democrats (53%) and Republicans of any political ideology say the same (53% of moderate to liberal Republicans and 50% of conservative Republicans).

#### Pluralities across groups say people being harassed or bullied is a major problem online

% of U.S. adults who say people being harassed or bullied when they use the internet is a ...



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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Additionally, personally experiencing online harassment is associated with a greater likelihood of categorizing it as a major problem. Americans who report facing these types of negative behaviors online are more likely than those who have not to say online harassment is a major problem (60% vs. 52%).

### Many are critical of the job social media companies are doing to address online harassment

While most Americans agree that harassment and bullying are a problem online, the question remains of how social media companies, whose platforms are the most common place people report encountering online harassment, have been handling abusive and negative behaviors on their sites. These companies have faced criticism for how they deal with harassment on their platforms.

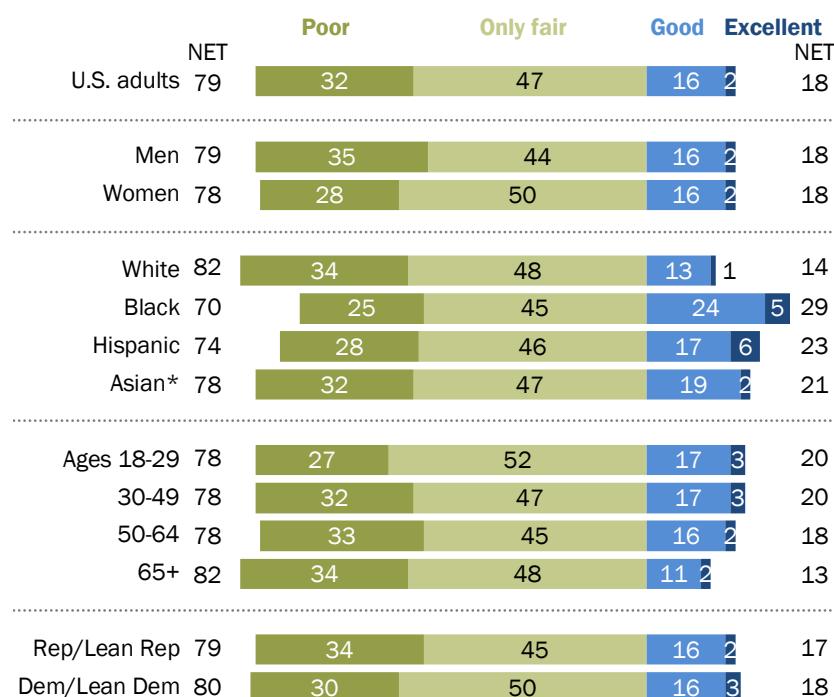
When asked to evaluate how well these platforms address online harassment or bullying on their platforms, just 18% feel social media companies are doing an excellent or good job. Much larger shares – roughly eight-in-ten – say these companies are doing an only fair to poor job.<sup>5</sup>

Across major demographic groups, people are critical of how social media companies are handling online harassment. However, White adults (82%) are slightly more likely to say social media companies are doing an only fair or poor job at addressing online harassment compared with Black (70%) and Hispanic (74%) adults.

Those who have experienced online harassment are no more critical of these platforms' handling of harassment and bullying than adults who have faced no such online abuse.

## Roughly eight-in-ten Americans say they think social media companies are not doing a good job at addressing online harassment

*% of U.S. adults who say social media companies are doing a(n) \_\_\_ job when it comes to addressing online harassment or bullying on their platforms*



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add up to the NET value due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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<sup>5</sup> A majority of U.S. teens also are critical of the job social media companies are doing to address online abuse. A [2018 Center survey](#) of teens found that 66% of these youth believed that social media sites were doing an only fair to poor job at addressing online harassment and bullying.

## Majority of Americans say targets of online harassment should not be able to sue social media companies

Over the past several years, much [controversy has surrounded](#) whether social media companies should be [held accountable](#) for the things they allow their users to say and do on their platforms. President-elect Joe Biden has [proposed a plan](#) to address tech companies' shortfalls in this area more directly by [increasing platform accountability](#).

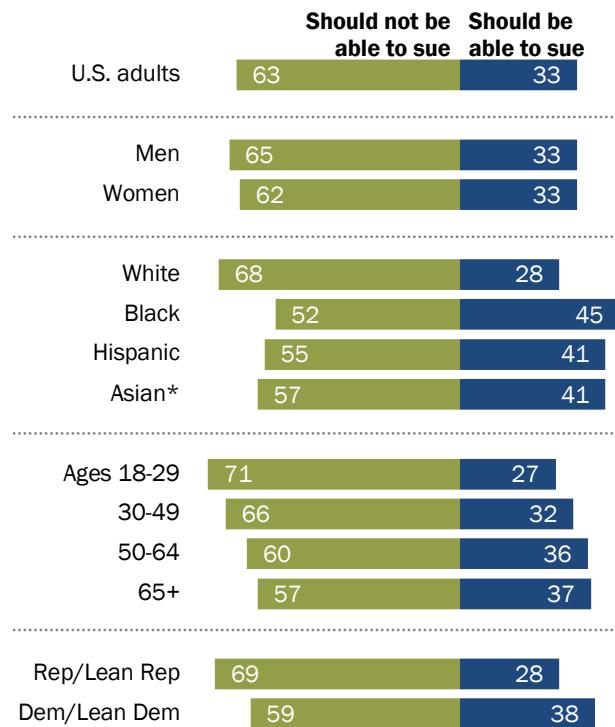
When it comes to accountability, most Americans believe personal lawsuits against social media companies are not the right course of action. While a third of adults feel people who have been bullied or harassed by others on social media should be able to sue the platforms where the harassment occurred, a much larger share – 63% – believe targets of online abuse *should not* be able to bring legal action against social media sites.

White adults are more likely than those in other racial and ethnic groups to say people should not be able to sue. About seven-in-ten White adults say online harassment victims should not be able to sue the platforms where they were harassed, versus somewhat smaller shares of Asian (57%), Hispanic (55%) and Black (52%) adults.

Similarly, adults under 50 years old are more likely than those 50 and older to say harassment victims should not be able to sue the platforms where they were harassed (67% vs. 59%). There are also modest partisan differences on the issue, with 59% of Democrats and 69% of Republicans in opposition of being able to sue.

### A third of Americans say targets of online harassment should be able to sue the site where the harassment occurred

% of U.S. adults who say people who have been bullied or harassed by others on social media \_\_ the platforms where the harassment occurred



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

"The State of Online Harassment"

Personal experience with online harassment does not color people's opinions about whether victims of harassment should be able to sue the platforms where it occurred.

Roughly half of Americans say permanently banning users who harass others would be a very effective way to reduce harassment on social media

Even though most Americans are critical of how social media companies are currently handling harassment, they are optimistic about a variety of possible solutions that could be implemented to curtail online harassment.

Around half of Americans say permanently suspending users if they bully or harass others (51%) or requiring users of these platforms to disclose their real identities (48%) would be very effective in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media.

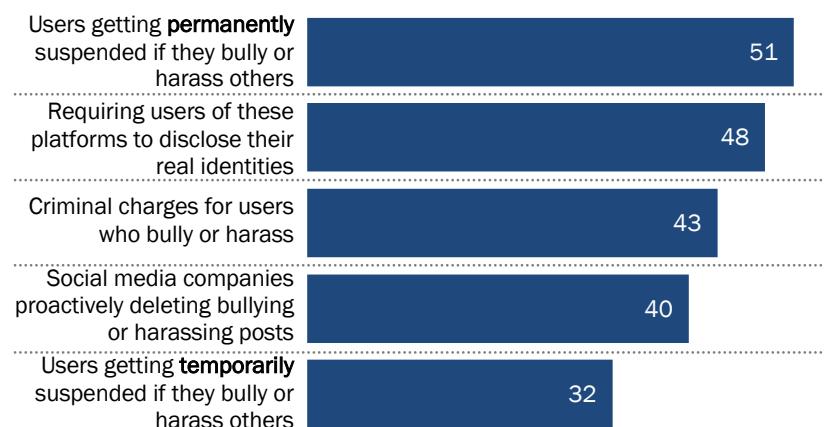
The idea of forcing people to disclose their identity has been controversial since the early days of the internet.

Proponents argue it would help hold abusers accountable, while detractors believe it could worsen harassment and hurt those who try to speak out against authoritarian regimes.

Roughly four-in-ten say criminal charges for users who bully or harass (43%) or social media companies proactively deleting bullying or harassing posts (40%) would be very effective.

### **51% of Americans see permanent bans from social media for harassing others as very effective for reducing online harassment**

*% of U.S. adults who say \_\_ would be **very effective** in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media*



Note: Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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While permanent bans are a popular potential solution measured in this survey, temporary bans are the least popular among the measures about which respondents were asked. Still, a third of

Americans (32%) think users getting temporarily suspended if they bully or harass others would be a very effective measure against harassment.

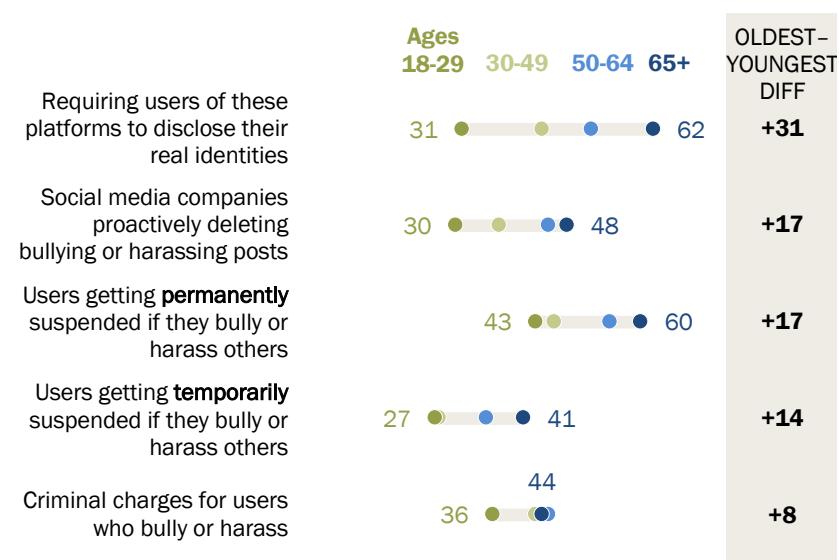
For most potential solutions, women are more optimistic about these efforts to reduce harassment than men. Fully 55% of women see permanently banning users who harass others as a very effective measure to reduce harassment on social media. In comparison, 47% of men say the same. Women are also more likely than men to say social media companies proactively deleting bullying or harassing posts (45% vs. 35%), temporary bans (36% vs. 28%) and criminal charges (45% vs. 40%) would be a very effective tactic.

Adults under 30 are consistently the most pessimistic about the efficacy of various measures intended to reduce harassment on social media. For example, 62% of adults 65 and older say requiring users of these platforms to disclose their real identities would be very effective in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media, while half as many adults under 30 (31%) say the same.

The only measure that at least four-in-ten younger adults see as very effective is permanently banning users who harass others. Still, adults 65 and older are far more optimistic about this option, with six-in-ten saying this would be very effective in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media.

### **Older adults are twice as likely as younger adults to say requiring users to disclose their real identities would be very effective in reducing harassment**

*% of U.S. adults, by age, who say \_\_ would be very effective in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media*



Note: All differences shown are statistically significant. Figures may not subtract to the DIFF value due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.  
“The State of Online Harassment”

Notable racial and ethnic divides are seen in beliefs about the efficacy of measures to address harassment on social media. A majority of Black adults see social media companies deleting bullying or harassing posts (57%) and users getting permanently suspended if they bully or harass others (58%) as very effective in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media, while smaller shares of White adults say the same (36% and 49%, respectively).

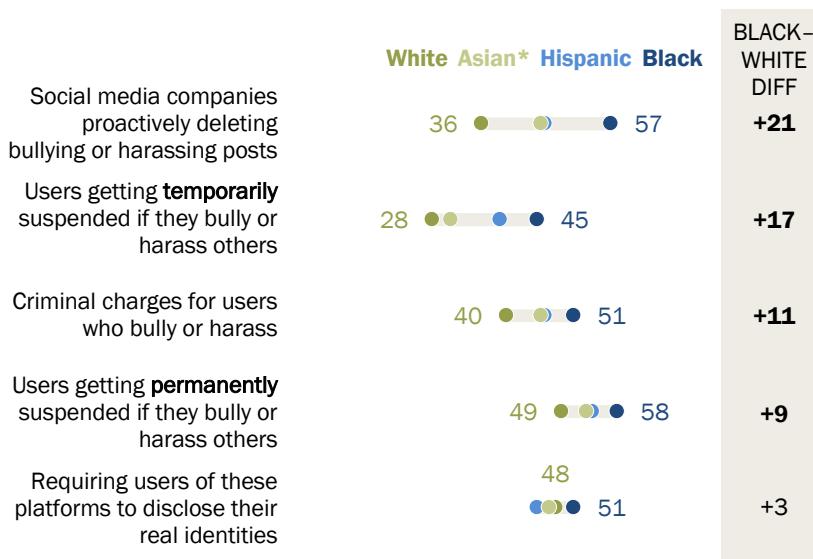
White adults are 21 percentage points less likely than Black adults to say companies proactively deleting harassing posts would be very effective and 10 points less likely than Hispanic and Asian adults. Black or Hispanic adults are also more optimistic than White adults about the efficacy of temporary bans and criminal charges.

Partisans also differ in their views of these potential solutions. Democrats are consistently more likely to say a measure would be very effective than their Republican counterparts. In fact, roughly half or more of Democrats see many measures as very effective solutions to online harassment, including criminal charges (47%), proactively deleting harassing posts (48%), required disclosure of identity (52%) and permanent bans (57%).

In many instances, Americans who report having encountered harassment online are less optimistic about the effectiveness of potential measures to address online harassment compared with those who have not experienced this online abuse. Those who have not faced harassment are more likely to say proactively deleting posts, temporary bans, permanent bans and requiring users

## About six-in-ten Black adults say permanently banning users who harass others would be a very effective solution to harassment on social media

*% of U.S. adults, by race and ethnicity, who say \_\_\_ would be **very effective** in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media*



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Statistically significant differences in bold. Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.

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to disclose their identities are very effective ways to reduce harassment online compared with those who report having experienced online harassment. The most effective solutions in the eyes of those who have faced harassment online are permanent bans (48%) and requiring users of these platforms to disclose their real identities (46%), though no option has a majority who think the measure would be very effective.

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## Methodology

### The American Trends Panel survey methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access at home are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

Data in this report is drawn from the panel wave conducted Sept. 8 to 13, 2020. A total of 10,093 panelists responded out of

11,506 who were sampled, for a response rate of 88%. This does not include three panelists who were removed from the data due to extremely high rates of refusal or straightlining. The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 5%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 1.7%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 10,093 respondents is plus or minus 1.6 percentage points.

### American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

Recruitment dates	Mode	Invited	Joined	Active panelists remaining
Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014	Landline/cell RDD	9,809	5,338	2,302
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/cell RDD	6,004	2,976	1,334
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/cell RDD	3,905	1,628	683
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS/web	9,396	8,778	6,398
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS/web	5,900	4,720	3,023
June 1 to July 19, 2020	ABS/web	1,865	1,636	1,633
<b>Total</b>		<b>36,879</b>	<b>25,076</b>	<b>15,373</b>

Note: Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel.

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This study featured a stratified random sample from the ATP. The sample was allocated according to the following strata, in order: tablet households, U.S.-born Hispanics, foreign-born Hispanics, high school education or less, foreign-born Asians, not registered to vote, people ages 18 to 34, uses internet weekly or less, non-Hispanic Black adults, nonvolunteers and all other categories not already falling into any of the above. Panelists who had not yet completed the annual profile survey were ineligible.

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 9,942 (50%) agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Across these three address-based recruitments, a total of 17,161 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 15,134 (88%) agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. In each household, the adult with the next birthday was asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. Of the 25,076 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 15,373 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey was conducted.

The U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.<sup>6</sup> The American Trends Panel never uses breakout routers or chains that direct respondents to additional surveys.

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<sup>6</sup> AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. "[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling](#)."

## Weighting

The ATP data was weighted in a multistep process that accounts for multiple stages of sampling and nonresponse that occur at different points in the survey process. First, each panelist begins with a base weight that reflects their probability of selection for their initial recruitment survey (and the probability of being invited to participate in the panel in cases where only a subsample of respondents were invited). The base weights for panelists recruited in different years are scaled to be proportionate to the effective sample size for all active panelists in their cohort. To correct for nonresponse to the initial recruitment surveys and gradual panel attrition, the base weights for all active panelists are calibrated to align with the population benchmarks identified in the accompanying table to create a full-panel weight.

For ATP waves in which only a subsample of panelists are invited to participate, a wave-specific base weight is created by adjusting the full-panel weights for subsampled panelists to account for any differential probabilities of selection for the particular panel wave. For waves in which all active panelists are invited to participate, the wave-specific base weight is identical to the full-panel weight.

In the final weighting step, the wave-specific base weights for panelists who completed the survey are again calibrated to match the population benchmarks specified above. These weights are trimmed (typically at about the 1st and 99th percentiles) to reduce the loss in precision stemming from variance in the weights. Sampling errors and test of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting.

## Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age x Gender	2018 American Community Survey
Education x Gender	
Education x Age	
Race/Ethnicity x Education	
Born inside vs. outside the U.S. among Hispanics and Asian Americans	
Years lived in the U.S.	
Census region x Metro/Non-metro	2019 CPS March Supplement
Volunteerism	2017 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	Average of the three most recent Pew Research Center telephone surveys
Frequency of internet use	ATP 2020 ABS recruitment survey
Religious affiliation	

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total U.S. adult population. The ATP 2020 ABS recruitment survey featured 1,862 online completions and 2,247 mail survey completions.

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The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Weighted percentage</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	10,093		1.6 percentage points
Men	4,529		2.5 percentage points
Women	5,483		2.0 percentage points
White, non-Hispanic	6,989		1.8 percentage points
Black, non-Hispanic	822		5.1 percentage points
Hispanic	1,509		4.9 percentage points
Asian, non-Hispanic	303		8.2 percentage points
Ages 18-29	983		4.7 percentage points
30-49	3,239		2.7 percentage points
50-64	3,022		2.8 percentage points
65+	2,804		2.8 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	4,129	45	2.3 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	5,719	50	2.2 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

For details about how the 2017 and 2014 data sets were collected and weighted, see the 2017 report's [methodology](#).

#### **A note about the Asian sample**

This survey includes a total sample size of 303 Asian Americans. The sample includes English-speaking Asian Americans only and, therefore, may not be representative of the overall Asian American population (72% of our weighted Asian American sample was born in another country, compared with 77% of the Asian American adult population overall). Despite this limitation, it is important to report the views of Asian Americans on the topics in this study. As always, Asian Americans' responses are incorporated into the general population figures throughout this report. Because of the relatively small sample size and a reduction in precision due to weighting, we are

not able to analyze Asian American respondents by demographic categories, such as gender, age or education. For more, see “[Polling methods are changing, but reporting the views of Asian Americans remains a challenge.](#)”

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## Topline questionnaire

**2020 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL  
WAVE 74 SEPTEMBER 2020  
FINAL TOPLINE  
SEPTEMBER 8-13, 2020  
N= 10,093**

**THE QUESTIONS PRESENTED BELOW ARE PART OF A LARGER SURVEY CONDUCTED ON THE AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL. OTHER QUESTIONS ON THIS SURVEY HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY RELEASED OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE.**

**NOTE: ALL NUMBERS ARE PERCENTAGES UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED. THE PERCENTAGES LESS THAN 0.5% ARE REPLACED BY AN ASTERISK (\*). ROWS/COLUMNS MAY NOT TOTAL 100% DUE TO ROUNDING.**

	Sample size	Margin of error at 95% confidence level
U.S. adults	10,093	+/- 1.6 percentage points

**ASK ALL:**

PROB1a Thinking of some experiences that might happen to people when they use the internet, how much of a problem, if at all, is people being harassed or bullied?<sup>7</sup>

<u>Sept 8-13, 2020</u>		<u>Jan 9-23, 2017</u>
55	Major problem	62
37	Minor problem	33
7	Not a problem	5
2	No answer	1

**ASK ALL:**

SMSUEOH In your opinion, should people who have been bullied or harassed by others on social media be able to sue the platforms where the harassment occurred? [RANDOMIZE ITEMS]

<u>Sept 8-13, 2020</u>	
33	Yes, they should be able to sue social media platforms
63	No, they should not be able to sue social media platforms
4	No answer

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<sup>7</sup> In the 2017 survey, this was part of a larger battery regarding how much of a problem, if at all, people thought various experiences that might happen to people when they use the internet might be.

**ASK ALL:**

OHCNS How effective, if at all, do you think the following steps would be in helping to reduce harassment or bullying on social media? **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

		<u>Very effective</u>	<u>Somewhat effective</u>	<u>Not too effective</u>	<u>Not at all effective</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a.	Criminal charges for users who bully or harass Sept 8-13, 2020	43	32	14	10	1
b.	Users getting temporarily suspended if they bully or harass others Sept 8-13, 2020	32	37	19	10	1
c.	Users getting permanently suspended if they bully or harass others Sept 8-13, 2020	51	29	12	7	1
d.	Social media companies proactively deleting bullying or harassing posts Sept 8-13, 2020	40	33	15	10	1
e.	Requiring users of these platforms to disclose their real identities Sept 8-13, 2020	48	29	13	9	1

**ASK ALL:**

SMOH In your opinion, how good of a job are social media companies doing when it comes to addressing online harassment or bullying on their platforms?

Sept 8-13, 2020

2	Excellent
16	Good
47	Only fair
32	Poor
3	No answer

**ASK IF INTERNET USER (XTABLET=2) [N=9,925]:**

ON7

Which, if any, of the following have happened to you, personally, ONLINE?<sup>8</sup>  
**[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

		Yes, this has happened to <u>me online</u> <sup>9</sup>	No, this has not happened <u>to me online</u>	No answer
a.	Been called offensive names			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	32	67	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	30	70	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	26	74	
b.	Been physically threatened			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	14	85	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	11	89	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	8	92	
c.	Been harassed for a sustained period			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	11	88	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	8	92	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	7	93	
d.	Been stalked			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	12	87	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	8	92	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	7	93	
e.	Had someone try to purposefully embarrass you			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	28	72	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	25	75	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	21	79	

## NO ITEMS F OR G

h.	Been sexually harassed			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	12	87	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	7	93	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	5	95	

**Yes to any (NET)**

Sept 8-13, 2020	<b>43</b>
Jan 9-23, 2017	<b>45</b>
May 30-Jun 30, 2014	<b>39</b>

<sup>8</sup> The question wording in the 2014 survey was “Which, if any, of the following have occurred to you, personally, ONLINE?” which differs from the wording used in the 2017 and current surveys.

<sup>9</sup> This battery in the 2017 and 2014 surveys was a checklist where people were instructed to “Check all that apply,” which differs slightly from the response options in the current survey. As a result, not checking a box (i.e., not responding to an item) in the 2017 and 2014 surveys was coded as people not experiencing that type of harassment online.

**ON7 BASED ON ALL RESPONDENTS:**

	<u>Yes, this has happened to me online<sup>10</sup></u>	<u>No, this has not happened to me online</u>	<u>No answer</u>	<u>Does not use internet</u>
a. Been called offensive names				
Sept 8-13, 2020	31	64	1	4
Jan 9-23, 2017	27	63		10
May 30-Jun 30, 2014	23	66		11
b. Been physically threatened				
Sept 8-13, 2020	14	81	1	4
Jan 9-23, 2017	10	80		10
May 30-Jun 30, 2014	7	82		11
c. Been harassed for a sustained period				
Sept 8-13, 2020	11	84	1	4
Jan 9-23, 2017	7	83		10
May 30-Jun 30, 2014	6	82		11
d. Been stalked				
Sept 8-13, 2020	11	84	1	4
Jan 9-23, 2017	7	83		10
May 30-Jun 30, 2014	7	82		11
e. Had someone try to purposefully embarrass you				
Sept 8-13, 2020	26	69	1	4
Jan 9-23, 2017	22	67		10
May 30-Jun 30, 2014	19	70		11

## NO ITEMS F OR G

h. Been sexually harassed				
Sept 8-13, 2020	11	84	1	4
Jan 9-23, 2017	6	83		10
May 30-Jun 30, 2014	5	84		11

**Yes to any (NET)**

Sept 8-13, 2020	<b>41</b>
Jan 9-23, 2017	<b>41</b>
May 30-Jun 30, 2014	<b>35</b>

<sup>10</sup> This battery in the 2017 and 2014 surveys was a checklist where people were instructed to “Check all that apply,” which differs slightly from the response options in the current survey. As a result, not checking a box (i.e., not responding to an item) in the 2017 and 2014 surveys was coded as people not experiencing that type of harassment online.

**ASK IF YES TO ANY IN ON7 (ON7a-h=1) [N=3,893]:**

IDENTITY      Do you think any of these experiences were a result of your... [IF ONLY ONE SELECTED  
IN ON7 "Do you think this experience was a result of your..."] **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

		<u>Yes, were [was] a result of this<sup>11</sup></u>	<u>No, were [was] not a result of this</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a.	Gender			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	33	66	*
	Jan 9-23, 2017	20	80	
NO ITEM B				
c.	Sexual orientation			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	16	83	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	8	92	
d.	Political views			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	50	50	*
	Jan 9-23, 2017	35	65	
e.	Religion			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	19	81	*
	Jan 9-23, 2017	12	88	
f.	Race or ethnicity			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	29	71	*
	Jan 9-23, 2017	19	81	

NO ITEMS G – I

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<sup>11</sup> This battery in the 2017 survey was a checklist where people were instructed to “Check all that apply,” which differs slightly from the response options in the current survey. As a result, not checking a box (i.e., not responding to an item) in the 2017 survey was coded as that characteristic not contributing to prior online harassment experiences.

**ASK IF YES TO MORE THAN 1 ITEM IN ON7 (MORE THAN 1 ON7a-h=1) [N=2,484]:**

ON7REC Still thinking about the behaviors you have experienced, which of the following were involved the MOST RECENT time something like this happened to you?

**[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ONLY INCLUDE SELECTED RESPONSES FROM ON7 AND DISPLAY IN SAME ORDER]**

**NOTE: RESULTS ARE PRESENTED BASED ON THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED ANY ONLINE HARASSMENT (ON7A-H=1) [N=3,893]**

		<u>Yes, this was involved the most recent time<sup>12</sup></u>	<u>No, this was not involved the most recent time</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a.	Being called offensive names			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	54	46	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	50	50	
b.	Being physically threatened			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	14	85	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	9	91	
c.	Being harassed for a sustained period			*
	Sept 8-13, 2020	12	88	
	Jan 9-23, 2017	7	93	
d.	Being stalked			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	12	87	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	8	92	
e.	Having someone try to purposefully embarrass you			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	39	60	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	36	64	
NO ITEMS F OR G				
h.	Being sexually harassed			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	13	86	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	6	94	

<sup>12</sup> This battery in the 2017 survey was a checklist where people were instructed to “Check all that apply,” which differs slightly from the response options in the current survey. As a result, not checking a box (i.e., not responding to an item) in the 2017 survey was coded as that person not experiencing that type of harassment online in their most recent experience.

**ASK IF YES TO ANY IN ON7 (ON7a-h=1) [N=3,893]:**

ON10 Thinking about your most recent experience, how upsetting was this, if at all?<sup>13</sup>  
**[REVERSE SCALE FOR RANDOM 1/2 OF RESPONDENTS]**

<u>Sept 8-13, 2020</u>		<u>Jan 9-23, 2017</u>	<u>May 30-Jun 30, 2014</u>
10	Extremely upsetting	12	13
14	Very upsetting	13	14
28	Somewhat upsetting	25	22
27	A little upsetting	26	29
20	Not at all upsetting	23	22
*	No answer	*	*

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<sup>13</sup> The question wording in the 2014 survey was “Overall, how upsetting was this, if at all?” which differs from the wording used in the 2017 and current surveys.

**ASK IF YES TO ANY IN ON7 (ON7a-h=1) [N=3,893]:**

ON12 In which of the following online environments did your most recent experience occur?<sup>14</sup>  
**[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

		<u>Yes, it happened in this online environment<sup>15</sup></u>	<u>No, it did not happen in this online environment</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a.	Social media sites <sup>16</sup>			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	75	25	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	58	42	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	65	35	
b.	Online dating sites or apps <sup>17</sup>			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	10	88	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	6	94	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	6	94	
NO ITEMS C OR D				
e.	Online gaming			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	16	83	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	10	90	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	16	84	
f.	Personal email account			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	11	88	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	10	90	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	16	84	
g.	Online forum or discussion site <sup>18</sup>			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	25	74	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	7	93	
	May 30-Jun 30, 2014	10	90	
h.	A text or messaging app			
	Sept 8-13, 2020	24	75	1
	Jan 9-23, 2017	15	85	

NO ITEM I

<sup>14</sup> The question wording in the 2014 survey was “In which of the following online environments did this occur?” which differs from the wording used in the 2017 and current surveys.

<sup>15</sup> This battery in the 2017 and 2014 surveys was a checklist where people were instructed to “Check all that apply,” which differs slightly from the response options in the current survey. As a result, not checking a box (i.e., not responding to an item) in the 2017 and 2014 surveys was coded as the most recent experience of online harassment not occurring in that environment.

<sup>16</sup> This item in the 2017 and 2014 surveys read “Social networking sites/apps,” which differs slightly from the wording used in the current survey.

<sup>17</sup> This item in the 2017 and 2014 surveys read “Online dating websites/apps,” which differs slightly from the wording used in the current survey.

<sup>18</sup> This item in the 2017 and 2014 surveys read “Online discussion site such as Reddit,” which differs slightly from the wording used in the current survey.

**ASK IF YES TO ANY IN ON7 (ON7a-h=1) [N=3,893]:**

YOU1 Still thinking about your most recent experience, do you consider what happened to you to be "online harassment"?

Sept 8-13, 2020

43	Yes, I consider it to be online harassment <sup>19</sup>
36	No, I do not consider it to be online harassment
21	Not sure
*	No answer

Jan 9-23, 2017

36
37
27
*

PARTY In politics today, do you consider yourself a:

**ASK IF INDEP/SOMETHING ELSE (PARTY=3 or 4) OR MISSING:**

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to...<sup>20</sup>

	Republican	Democrat	Independent	Something else	No answer	Lean Rep	Lean Dem
	27	30	29	13	1	18	21

<sup>19</sup> The response options for this item in the 2017 survey read "Yes," "No" or "Not sure," which differ slightly from the wording used in the current survey.

<sup>20</sup> PARTY and PARTYLN asked in a prior survey.