



Youth Anxiety About Political News

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Abstract

This study assessed youth anxiety about political issues and associated characteristics. Caregivers ($N = 374$) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk and reported on their child's anxiety about 15 voting issues covered in the media since the 2016 presidential election as well as their child's psychological functioning and their own trait anxiety. For the majority of voting issues, over 50% of caregivers indicated that their child experienced at least one related worry; worries about the environment and gun violence were most common. Youth empathy and intolerance of uncertainty were each positively associated with worry about political issues but did not predict such worry after accounting for the effect of youth trait anxiety. Youth with clinical levels of generalized anxiety experienced more severe worry about political issues than did youth with minimal/subthreshold anxiety. Future studies should identify strategies for mitigating the negative impact of political news on youth with anxiety disorders.

Keywords Anxiety · Children · Adolescents · Assessment · Media · Politics

News consumption has increased with advances in technology (e.g., mobile devices) and the rise of social media [1]. On average, youth watch up to 4.5 h of television/day [2–4] and adolescents spend as much time online as they do watching television [3]. Media use has been associated with elevated perceptions of the world as threatening [5] and repeated exposure to news stories involving violence may result in posttraumatic stress symptoms, anxiety, and depression [6–11], especially for youth with preexisting vulnerabilities (e.g., history of psychopathology) [5, 7, 12].

Relatively few studies, however, have investigated the impact of nonviolent media content on internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety, depression) in youth. This is surprising given that news of political events, though primarily nonviolent, may be interpreted by youth as threatening and result in distress. Research on emotional reactions to political news has primarily sampled adults due to their ability to vote [13]. There has been little, if any, attention to youth emotional reactions to political news.

Whether or not political news is interpreted by youth as distressing may be influenced by the events/policies reported (i.e., how likely they are to affect the child or his/her loved ones), the child's cognitive capacity to understand the news and its potential implications, and discussions about news or politics that take place in his/her environment (e.g., at home and at school). Trait anxiety, which is related to hypervigilance to threat [14] and biased information processing [15, 16], might also impact youths' emotional responses to political news. In particular, youth with generalized anxiety disorder (the hallmark of which is worry about a number of events or activities [17]) might be more likely than non-anxious youth to monitor and worry about news events. Anecdotally, youth presenting for the treatment of anxiety have communicated a range of developmentally influenced worries about political issues. For example, youth referred to clinics directed by the first author have worried about the possibility of deportation (regardless of citizenship status), "World War III," peer victimization due to Muslim worship (e.g., in the aftermath of a travel ban), and being "kidnapped" by a political party and separated from family.

In addition to worrying about political issues that are personally relevant, youth with high levels of empathy might worry about issues that exclusively affect others. Empathy has been broadly defined as an affective response that is more appropriate to another's situation than to one's own [18].

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Empathy is often considered to have two components: (1) affective empathy/empathic concern, which can be observed as early as the neonatal period and is a response to witnessing another's emotions, and (2) cognitive empathy, which emerges later in development and involves perspective taking required to understand and consider others' viewpoints [19, 20]. In the context of political news, images (e.g., of family separation at the border) might elicit affective empathy whereas discussions of the impact of events/policies (e.g., difficulty accessing prescription medication) would require cognitive empathy to generate an empathic response. There is emerging evidence that internalizing problems in youth are positively associated with self-reported empathy [21, 22]. Many adults with internalizing problems exhibit hyperresponsivity to empathy-eliciting stimuli, though some show atypically muted reactions [23, 24]. Because empathy is interpersonally adaptive but might confer risk for anxiety and depression when present at extreme levels, it has been described as a "risky strength" in youth [25].

Youth who have difficulty tolerating uncertainty might also be expected to show relatively high levels of anxiety about political news. Intolerance of uncertainty is a dispositional characteristic that reflects negative behavioral, cognitive, and emotional reactivity to events or situations that are ambiguous or uncertain [26]. Youth who are high in intolerance of uncertainty evaluate uncertainty as threatening even when adverse outcomes are not likely [27], leaving them at risk for the development or maintenance of anxiety [28–30]. Indeed, youth with anxiety disorders have exhibited greater intolerance of uncertainty than have healthy controls [31]. In the current political climate, uncertainty about the future might be exacerbated by elected officials' frequent shifts on policy [32], leaving youth with difficulty tolerating uncertainty particularly vulnerable to worry.

Against the backdrop of a "Trump bump" in news consumption [33], the current study assessed youth anxiety about political issues covered in the media and associated characteristics. Specifically, the study aimed to (1) evaluate the psychometric properties (i.e., internal consistency, concurrent and discriminant validity) of a newly created measure of youth anxiety about political news, (2) examine the frequency with which youth experience anxiety related to specific political issues, and (3) identify characteristics associated with the severity of youths' anxiety about political news—as they may suggest risk and inform intervention. It was hypothesized that (a) youth anxiety about political news would be more strongly associated with trait anxiety than with depression and anger, and (b) youth anxiety about political news would be more strongly associated with youth trait anxiety than with parent anxiety, supporting concurrent and discriminant validity of our measure. It was also hypothesized that (c) youth with generalized anxiety at clinical levels would exhibit significantly greater anxiety about

political news than would youth with subthreshold symptoms/minimal anxiety, and (d) youth anxiety about political news would be positively associated with youth empathy and intolerance of uncertainty, especially prospective intolerance of uncertainty (apprehension regarding future events). Finally, the relationship between youth anxiety about political issues and caregiver party affiliation was explored.

Method

Participants

Primary caregivers ($N=374$; 67.6% female) of children ages 6–17 years ($M=11.67$, $SD=3.27$) who reside in the United States were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Most caregivers were between 31 and 40 years old (43.9%) or 41 and 50 years old (41.4%). The racial breakdown was approximately 85.3% White, 9.6% Black/African American, 2.4% Asian, 1.1% American Indian/Native Alaskan, and 1.6% other. With regard to ethnicity, approximately 5% of the sample self-identified as Hispanic. About half of the sample (52.7%) had graduated from college. Annual household income less than \$35,000 was reported by about 20% of caregivers; \$35,000–\$65,000 by about 30%; \$65,000–\$100,000 by about 29%; and over \$100,000 by about 21%. Caregivers were excluded if they did not speak English fluently or did not reside in the United States. Approximately 41% of the sample resided in the South, 23% in the Midwest, 19% in the Northeast, and 17% in the West.

Procedure

This study was approved by the university Institutional Review Board. Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk for a larger study on family interactions and data were collected from January through April 2019 using Qualtrics [34]. Four screening items (assessing the respondent's age, country of residence, fluency in written and spoken English, and age of his/her children) were used to determine eligibility to participate. Caregivers who met inclusion criteria were invited to complete questionnaires assessing demographics, political knowledge, youth anxiety about political news, youth media use, youth anxiety and depression, youth empathy, parent anxiety, youth anger, and youth intolerance of uncertainty (in that order). Caregivers of multiple children were instructed to complete the measure with only one child in mind and were asked for this child's age as a prompt to focus on him/her. Insufficient effort response (IER) items (e.g., "I have been to the planet Mars") were included in the survey to screen out computerized or automated survey respondents and retain data from participants who responded thoughtfully to items [35]. Also,

data from participants who didn't spend at least 2 s per item, on average, were excluded from analyses. Participants were compensated \$0.02 for completing the screening items and \$6.00 for their participation in the long survey. A total of 494 caregivers consented to participation; 120 cases were dropped because the participant reported on a child outside of the 6–17 age range, the participant did not spend an average of two or more seconds per item, the participant completed less than 50% of the survey, and/or insufficient effort was detected with IER items.

Measures

Background Information

Parents responded to demographic items about themselves (e.g., parental age, education), their families (e.g., household income), and their child (e.g., gender, age). To characterize the sample, they reported on their party affiliation and answered three multiple-choice questions assessing their political knowledge. They also provided information about their child's media use.

Youth Anxiety About Political News

A parent-report measure of youths' anxiety about contemporary issues related to political news was developed for this study. Items assessed anxiety in 15 main categories: Economy, Terrorism, Foreign Policy, Healthcare, Gun Policy, Immigration, Social Security, Education, Supreme Court Appointments, Treatment of Racial and Ethnic Minorities, Trade Policy, Environment, Abortion, Treatment of Sexual Minorities, and Women's Issues. For each main category, respondents completed a checklist of possible worries (4–25 yes/no items) followed by three items assessing the severity of anxiety (i.e., frequency of worry, physical symptoms, and behavioral avoidance) specific to that category. For example, "How frequently does your child have worries related to terrorism?" These three items were rated on a 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*) scale and summed to yield a total anxiety score. Participants were given the following instructions:

Below is a series of checklists about issues covered in the news. For each issue (e.g., the economy), check any worry related to this issue that your child seems to have experienced. You may check as many worries as you see fit. The worries listed reflect a range of possible views. Children/adolescents differ in terms of how much they know about or understand current events, so there may be issues that are not relevant for your child. Please read all items anyway and be sure to complete the checklist thinking about *your child's* worries rather than your own.

Also, please complete the three questions at the end of each checklist (even if you did not check any worries).

After examining item distributions (i.e., skewness and kurtosis), total scores were calculated using only the overall frequency of worry item associated with each category. That is, items that assess physical symptoms of anxiety and behavioral avoidance were eliminated, as variability was so limited that analysis of transformed data would not be meaningful. Cronbach's alpha for the 15 frequency of worry items was .92.

Checklist items were informed by mainstream media reports and initially assessed worry in each of 14 categories identified by the Pew Research Center as the top voting issues in the 2016 presidential election [36]. Worries were generally organized from least to most developmentally advanced, with alternating liberal and conservative themes for items with ideological significance. To avoid overlap, worries that are relevant to more than one category (e.g., concern that lawmakers will cut funding for women's health services) were not repeated. The measure was reviewed by an expert panel comprised of two clinical child psychologists with expertise in youth anxiety (i.e., at least eight years of specialized clinical practice and at least ten publications on anxiety in children/adolescents) and a full professor of political science. Based on feedback, a fifteenth category—women's issues—was added to the measure. Finally, content was cross-referenced with transcriptions of qualitative phone interviews conducted with eight caregivers of youth 5 to 16 years old as part of a larger study. Discussions of youths' emotional reactions to political news were analyzed using an "inductive" or "bottom-up" process described by Braun and Clark [37]. Results did not suggest the need to add or modify items on the measure of youth anxiety about political news.

Griffith Empathy Measure (GEM [38])

The GEM is a 23-item parent-report measure of youth empathy. Items are rated on a 9-point Likert scale and summed to yield a total score that encompasses both cognitive empathy (i.e., taking the perspective of another person) and affective empathy (i.e., emotional responding congruent with another's situation). The GEM has demonstrated good test-retest reliability over 1-week and 6-month intervals, inter-parental agreement, and convergence with independent observations of child behavior [38]. The factor structure has been found stable across age and gender groups. In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha was .78.

Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale for Children (IUSC [39])

The parent-report IUSC was administered to measure youths' tendency to react negatively to uncertain situations

and events. The original IUSC was adapted from a psychometrically sound adult measure [40–42] and consists of 27 items rated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) scale. The IUSC has demonstrated significant associations with anxiety and worry, and has distinguished diagnosed youth from non-referred youth in the community [39]. More recent data have yielded support for a 12-item version of the IUSC, which has two subscales: Prospective IU (apprehension regarding future events) and Inhibitory IU (present inhibition of behavior due to uncertainty) [43]. In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha was .96 for the full IUS, .93 for the 12-item IUS, and .89 for each subscale.

Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System Anxiety Measure (PROMIS-Anxiety [44])

The PROMIS-Anxiety was administered to assess caregiver self-reported fear, anxious misery, hyperarousal, and somatic symptoms [44]. The PROMIS-Anxiety consists of 21 items that are rated 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) and summed to yield a total score. Convergent and divergent validity have been established [45, 46]. Cronbach's alpha was .96 in the current sample.

Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale—Parent Version (RCADS-P [47])

The RCADS-P consists of 47 items that assess symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety disorder, obsessive–compulsive disorder, specific phobia, panic disorder, and major depressive disorder in youth. Items are rated on a 0 (*never*) to 3 (*always*) scale. Convergent and divergent validity have been established [48, 49]. The RCADS-P has discriminated between youth with and without each of these disorders, and between youth with anxiety and depression [47]. The Total Anxiety and GAD scores were used in the current study. In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha was .93 for Total Anxiety and .84 for GAD.

Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS) Parent Proxy Mental Health Measures [50, 51]

Caregivers were administered the PROMIS Parent Proxy measures of youth anxiety (8 items), depression (6 items), and anger (5 items), which were developed as part of an NIH initiative to capitalize on psychometric advances (e.g., item response theory). Each measure assesses symptoms over the past 7 days. Items are rated on a 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost always*) scale and summed to yield a total score. Cronbach's alpha in the current sample ranged from .87 to .91.

Results

Sample Characteristics

When asked about political party affiliation, approximately 29% of caregivers self-identified as Republicans, 38% as Democrats, 29% as Independents, and 4% as other (e.g., Green Party). More independents leaned toward the Democratic Party (40%) than the Republican Party (24%), with many (36%) reporting no party leaning. Approximately 56% of caregivers who self-identified as Republicans reported not being very strong Republicans. Approximately 55% of caregivers who self-identified as Democrats reported not being very strong Democrats. Regarding political knowledge, approximately 36% of the sample correctly identified the Speaker of the House in 2018, 78% correctly identified the current Vice President, and 80% correctly identified Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas when presented with a photograph.

Based on RCADS-P responses, approximately 26% of caregivers were reporting on a child/adolescent who experiences GAD symptoms at clinical levels. According to caregivers, youths most frequently used the internet ($M=9.28$, $SD=13.02$ h per week) and watched television ($M=9.19$, $SD=11.71$ h per week). On average, youths spent 5.64 ($SD=12.39$) hours per week engaging with social media specifically. Print media were consumed least often ($M=1.45$, $SD=3.94$ h per week). Age was positively associated with internet use ($r=.15$, $p<.01$) and social media use ($r=.19$, $p<.001$), and negatively associated with the use of print media ($r=-.12$, $p<.05$). Means and standard deviations for all other study measures are reported in Table 1.

Frequency and Severity of Youth Anxiety About Political News

Table 2 displays the frequencies of worries related to political news in 15 categories (Economy, Terrorism, Foreign Policy, Healthcare, Gun Policy, Immigration, Social security, Education, Supreme Court Appointments, Treatment of Racial and Ethnic Minorities, Trade Policy, Environment, Abortion, Treatment of Sexual Minorities, and Women's Issues), for the full sample and broken down by caregiver party affiliation. At least 50% of the sample reported one or more worries in each category, with the exception of Social Security, Supreme Court Appointments, Trade Policy, Abortion, and Women's Issues.

A number of specific worries were reported by more than 25% of the sample. In particular, youth have worried about family finances and have worried that the child will

Table 1 Means and standard deviations for study measures ($N=374$)

| Scale | Mean | SD | Possible range |
|--|-------|-------|----------------|
| Worry about Political News | 11.62 | 9.15 | 0 to 60 |
| RCADS-P Anxiety | 18.46 | 12.50 | 0 to 111 |
| RCADS-P Generalized Anxiety Disorder | 3.64 | 2.63 | 0 to 18 |
| PROMIS Child Anxiety | 13.81 | 5.28 | 8 to 40 |
| RCADS-P Depression | 8.99 | 3.52 | 0 to 40 |
| PROMIS Child Depression | 3.57 | 3.50 | 6 to 30 |
| PROMIS Child Anger | 9.51 | 3.38 | 5 to 25 |
| Griffith Empathy Measure | 8.30 | 19.13 | -92 to 92 |
| Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale for Children, 27-item | 46.60 | 19.13 | 27 to 135 |
| Prospective Intolerance of Uncertainty | 13.78 | 5.99 | 7 to 35 |
| Inhibitory Intolerance of Uncertainty | 8.11 | 3.99 | 5 to 25 |
| PROMIS Parent Anxiety | 43.95 | 17.15 | 21 to 105 |

RCADS-P Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale-Parent, PROMIS Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System

not be able to do things other kids do because [the family] doesn't have enough money (Economy). They have worried about the possibility of a terrorist attack (Terrorism) and that the U.S. will get into a war (Foreign Policy). They have also worried that there will be a shooting at school (> 50%) and that someone will shoot them (Gun Policy). They have worried that children of racial/ethnic minority groups will be bullied/physically harmed and teased/excluded from peer activities in the current political climate, and that there will be violence against people of racial/ethnic minority groups in the current political climate (Treatment of Racial/Ethnic Minorities). Finally, youth have worried about global warming, that humans are polluting the earth too much (> 50%), that our air will not be safe to breathe someday, that animals will die because humans don't take care of the earth, that the earth will not be safe for future generations and in their lifetime due to climate change, and that climate change is causing/will cause natural disasters (Environment).

On average, worry reported by caregivers was mild in frequency ($M=11.62$, $SD=9.15$, possible range 0 to 60). Consistent with checklist data, worry about the Environment, Gun Policy, Education, and the Economy was reported as most severe/occurring most frequently.

Associations with Youth and Parent Characteristics

Missing data were handled using multiple imputation, with pooled estimates reported when available. Worry about political issues was not related to youth sex but was positively associated with youth age ($r=.22$, $p<.001$). When restricting the sample to adolescents (ages 13 through 17 years, $N=157$), scores were normally distributed and the mean was 13.96 ($SD=8.70$). Youth worry about political issues was significantly associated with caregivers'

political party affiliation, $F(3,367)=3.38$, $p=.02$. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that Republican caregivers reported significantly more youth worry about political issues than did Democratic caregivers ($p<.01$).

Pearson's zero-order correlations are presented in Table 3. The alpha level was adjusted using a modified Bonferroni procedure [52]. Controlling for age, youth worry about political issues was positively associated with caregiver-reported youth anxiety on both the PROMIS (partial $r=.40$, $p<.001$) and the RCADS (partial $r=.43$, $p<.001$), and with youth GAD symptoms (based on the RCADS; partial $r=.41$, $p<.001$). Also, parents of youth with GAD symptoms at clinical levels reported greater youth worry about political issues than did parents of youth below the clinical threshold for GAD, $t(370)=-5.64$, $p<.001$.

When comparing correlated correlation coefficients [53], worry about political issues was significantly more strongly associated with youth trait anxiety on the RCADS (partial $r=.43$) than with parent trait anxiety (partial $r=.17$; $z=4.98$, $p<.001$). Also, worry about political issues was significantly more strongly associated with youth trait anxiety on the RCADS (partial $r=.43$) than with youth anger (partial $r=.15$; $z=5.15$, $p<.001$). Finally, worry about political issues was significantly more strongly associated with youth trait anxiety on the RCADS (partial $r=.43$) than with youth depressive symptoms on the RCADS (partial $r=.33$; $z=2.77$, $p<.01$). The association between worry about political news and youth trait anxiety on the RCADS (partial $r=.43$) did not differ significantly from the association between worry about political news and youth depressive symptoms on the PROMIS (partial $r=.34$). This pattern of findings held when the PROMIS (as opposed to the RCADS) was used to measure youth trait anxiety, with one exception: although the association between youth worry about political news and youth trait anxiety (partial $r=.40$)

Table 2 Frequencies of worries related to political issues

| | Caregiver Party Affiliation | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Democratic (n = 142) | Republican (n = 108) | Independent (n = 110) | Full sample (N = 374) |
| <i>Economy</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| About our family's finances | 43.0% | 31.5% | 30.0% | 36.6% |
| About whether or not he/she will have enough money in future | 27.5 | 19.4 | 22.7 | 24.3 |
| Our family will not be able to pay bills | 21.8 | 13.0 | 18.2 | 17.6 |
| We will not be able to pay family expenses | 21.1 | 11.1 | 15.5 | 16.3 |
| He/she will not be able to do things other kids do because we don't have enough money | 47.9 | 38.0 | 32.7 | 40.9 |
| A parent will lose his/her job | 16.2 | 12.0 | 20.0 | 16.0 |
| Our family will owe too much money in taxes | 2.1 | 2.8 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| About the economy | 16.2 | 10.2 | 12.7 | 13.1 |
| Our family will have to move because of financial stress | 11.8 | 13.9 | 11.8 | 15.0 |
| Our family will have to give up too much money to pay for others' expenses | 3.5 | 0.9 | 2.7 | 2.4 |
| Decisions by our nation's leaders will add to the deficit or debt | 14.8 | 4.6 | 6.4 | 9.4 |
| Decisions by our nation's leaders will result in financial loss for our family | 14.1 | 12.0 | 9.1 | 12.3 |
| Friends will struggle financially due to decisions by our nation's leaders | 16.9 | 7.4 | 12.7 | 13.4 |
| People he/she does not know will struggle financially due to decisions by our nation's leaders | 16.2 | 7.4 | 13.6 | 12.8 |
| Our stocks/bonds will be affected by decisions of our nation's leaders | 6.3 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 4.0 |
| Other | 1.4 | 0.9 | 2.7 | 1.6 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 88.0 | 77.8 | 80.9 | 82.9 |
| <i>Terrorism</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| About the possibility of a terrorist attack | 36.6 | 37.0 | 30.0 | 35.8 |
| He/she will be harmed in a terrorist attack | 14.1 | 12.0 | 16.4 | 14.4 |
| Someone he/she knows might be a terrorist | 6.3 | 1.9 | 4.5 | 4.5 |
| About attending crowded events due to the possibility of a terrorist attack | 16.2 | 13.0 | 14.5 | 15.2 |
| Someone he/she knows will be harmed in a terrorist attack | 14.1 | 13.9 | 17.3 | 15.8 |
| About traveling due to the possibility of a terrorist attack | 18.3 | 17.6 | 15.5 | 17.9 |
| His/her town/city will be the target of a terrorist attack | 7.7 | 8.3 | 5.5 | 8.0 |
| He/she will be picked on/bullied because he/she is a Muslim | 5.6 | 0.9 | 1.8 | 3.2 |
| Someone he/she knows will be picked on/bullied because he/she is a Muslim | 11.3 | 0.9 | 6.4 | 6.7 |
| The government is not doing enough to protect us from terrorist attacks | 4.2 | 8.3 | 5.5 | 6.1 |
| Politicians/lawmakers will make poor decisions when it comes to terrorism | 8.5 | 5.6 | 9.1 | 8.0 |
| Politicians will increase the risk of terrorism by using language that angers others | 11.3 | 1.9 | 9.1 | 8.0 |
| Politicians will unintentionally encourage people to become terrorists | 4.2 | 1.9 | 3.6 | 3.2 |
| Muslims will be targeted/victimized due to the way leaders/politicians talk about terrorism | 12.7 | 2.8 | 3.6 | 6.7 |
| Other | 0.7 | 1.9 | 0 | 0.8 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 59.9 | 52.8 | 54.5 | 56.7 |
| <i>Foreign Policy</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| The U.S. will get into a war | 40.8 | 32.4 | 33.6 | 36.1 |
| There will be a nuclear war | 26.8 | 12.0 | 16.4 | 19.5 |
| Someone we know serving our country will not return from an assignment | 15.5 | 18.5 | 17.3 | 16.6 |
| Someone we know serving our country will die or be badly injured | 16.9 | 19.4 | 16.4 | 17.6 |
| Another nation will attack us in the U.S | 23.9 | 20.4 | 20.0 | 21.7 |
| Conflict with other countries will hurt our nation | 17.6 | 11.1 | 16.4 | 15.8 |
| The U.S. will not do enough to protect human rights in other parts of the world | 11.3 | 6.5 | 6.4 | 8.6 |

Table 2 (continued)

| | Caregiver Party Affiliation | | | Full sample (N=374) |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| | Democratic (n=142) | Republican (n=108) | Independent (n=110) | |
| Other | 0.7 | 0.9 | 0 | 0.5 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 68.3 | 54.6 | 59.1 | 61.2 |
| <i>Healthcare</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| He/she will not be able to get medicine he/she needs due to costs | 12.7 | 4.6 | 18.2 | 12.6 |
| Someone he/she knows will not be able to afford medicine he/she needs | 26.8 | 16.7 | 26.4 | 23.3 |
| Some politicians/ lawmakers want to take away our freedom to make decisions about our healthcare | 12.0 | 3.7 | 11.8 | 9.4 |
| He/she will not be able to visit the doctor when sick due to costs | 18.3 | 7.4 | 19.1 | 15.5 |
| Someone he/she knows will not be able to visit the doctor when sick due to costs | 22.5 | 15.7 | 24.5 | 21.1 |
| Our family will have to pay too much for other people's health problems | 6.3 | 6.5 | 7.3 | 6.4 |
| Someone he/she knows will die because he/she can't afford treatment/pay medical bills | 15.5 | 4.6 | 11.8 | 11.5 |
| Someone he/she knows will suffer because he/she can't afford treatment/pay medical bills | 17.6 | 10.2 | 19.1 | 15.8 |
| We would not be able to choose our own doctors if some politicians/lawmakers had their way | 5.6 | 4.6 | 9.1 | 7.0 |
| There would be long waits to see doctors if some politicians had their way | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.7 | 3.2 |
| Government/ lawmakers will require us to pay for health insurance we don't want/ can't afford | 6.3 | 6.5 | 6.4 | 6.7 |
| Children he/she does not know will suffer because their families can't afford treatment/pay medical bills | 17.6 | 7.4 | 17.3 | 14.7 |
| He/she will not be able to access mental health care due to costs | 4.2 | 6.5 | 7.3 | 6.1 |
| Someone he/she knows will not be able to access mental health care due to costs | 9.2 | 4.6 | 10.9 | 8.3 |
| We will lose our home/belongings as a result of medical expenses | 4.9 | 1.9 | 3.6 | 4.0 |
| Politicians/lawmakers do not adequately consider women's issues when making health care decisions | 7.0 | 0.9 | 3.6 | 4.3 |
| Politicians/lawmakers will cut funding for women's health services | 8.5 | 0 | 4.5 | 4.8 |
| Taxpayer dollars will pay for medical services that go against our values/beliefs | 1.4 | 2.8 | 4.5 | 2.9 |
| Other | 0 | 1.9 | 0 | 0.8 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 54.9 | 49.1 | 50.9 | 52.1 |
| <i>Gun Policy</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| Someone with a gun will shoot him/her | 30.3 | 23.1 | 22.7 | 26.2 |
| There will be a shooting at his/her school | 64.1 | 41.7 | 52.7 | 53.7 |
| There will be a shooting when he/she is at a crowded event | 29.6 | 18.5 | 20.9 | 23.5 |
| Our family will not be safe if lawmakers make it more difficult to buy guns | 7.0 | 12.0 | 7.3 | 8.8 |
| Some lawmakers want to take away our right to own guns | 7.0 | 24.1 | 13.6 | 14.4 |
| Someone he/she knows will be shot by a person with a gun | 25.4 | 18.5 | 22.7 | 22.5 |
| It is too easy for dangerous people to buy guns | 31.0 | 14.8 | 24.5 | 23.8 |
| People with mental illness can buy guns | 19.7 | 11.1 | 11.8 | 14.7 |
| Lawmakers will raise the minimum age to buy a gun | 4.9 | 5.6 | 3.6 | 4.5 |
| His/her teacher(s) may have to carry a gun at school | 11.3 | 6.5 | 9.1 | 9.4 |
| His/her teacher(s) do not have guns to keep students safe | 5.6 | 10.2 | 8.2 | 8.3 |
| There are no security guards/officers at his/her school | 15.5 | 13.9 | 9.1 | 12.8 |
| A classmate will harm others with a gun | 26.1 | 20.4 | 20.9 | 23.3 |
| Other | 1.4 | 0.9 | 0.9 | 1.1 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 82.4 | 66.7 | 72.7 | 74.6 |
| <i>Immigration</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| The U.S. does/will not allow people from certain countries to come here | 26.1 | 14.8 | 15.5 | 20.3 |

Table 2 (continued)

| | Caregiver Party Affiliation | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Democratic (n = 142) | Republican (n = 108) | Independent (n = 110) | Full sample (N = 374) |
| He/she will be separated from loved ones due to immigration policy | 8.5 | 1.9 | 6.4 | 6.4 |
| He/she will be deported | 2.8 | 1.9 | 0.9 | 2.4 |
| Someone he/she knows (e.g., a family member, friend, classmate) will be deported | 19.7 | 7.4 | 9.1 | 13.6 |
| Immigrants will physically harm him/her | 5.6 | 8.3 | 4.5 | 5.9 |
| Immigrants will physically harm someone he/she knows | 4.2 | 4.6 | 2.7 | 4.0 |
| Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will raid our community | 4.2 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 2.7 |
| There are too many immigrants in our country | 4.9 | 8.3 | 7.3 | 6.4 |
| It is too easy for immigrants to come to our country | 4.2 | 11.1 | 7.3 | 7.5 |
| It is too easy for criminals from other countries to enter the U.S | 6.3 | 17.6 | 11.8 | 12.0 |
| It is too easy for criminals to become U.S. citizens | 3.5 | 10.2 | 7.3 | 7.5 |
| People around the world will be hurt as a result of our nation's immigration policy | 12.0 | 2.8 | 10.0 | 8.8 |
| A family member will not be able to enter the U.S. due to immigration policy | 5.6 | 1.9 | 0.9 | 3.5 |
| Refugees will not be able to enter the U.S | 15.5 | 2.8 | 9.1 | 9.6 |
| Our nation's leaders will make it difficult for immigrants to enter the U.S | 14.8 | 4.6 | 8.2 | 9.6 |
| Money we pay in taxes helps immigrants more than it helps us | 2.1 | 6.5 | 7.3 | 5.9 |
| Our family will have to pay more taxes to support immigrants | 1.4 | 6.5 | 5.5 | 4.8 |
| The safety of U.S. citizens is threatened by undocumented immigrants | 0.7 | 10.2 | 7.3 | 6.1 |
| The 'American way of life' is/will be threatened by immigrants | 1.4 | 8.3 | 5.5 | 5.1 |
| Our country's lawmakers don't take immigration seriously | 3.5 | 5.6 | 3.6 | 4.5 |
| He/she will not be able to plan for the future due to U.S. immigration policy | 1.4 | 3.7 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| A friend/family member will not be able to plan for the future due to U.S. immigration policy | 7.7 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 4.5 |
| Immigrants will take jobs or other opportunities away from American citizens | 3.5 | 9.3 | 7.3 | 6.7 |
| Changes to U.S. census procedures will discourage non-citizens from responding or lead to their deportation | 1.4 | 1.9 | 0.9 | 1.3 |
| Other | 2.1 | 0 | 0.9 | 1.1 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 57.7 | 50.9 | 41.8 | 51.9 |
| <i>Social Security</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| Our country will not take care of older people/the elderly | 16.2 | 11.1 | 20.0 | 16.3 |
| The government will run out of money to pay social security | 14.1 | 11.1 | 14.5 | 14.2 |
| The government will run out of money to pay for older people's living expenses | 12.7 | 7.4 | 10.9 | 11.0 |
| Family members have given money to the government that they will not get back after retirement | 12.7 | 7.4 | 14.5 | 11.8 |
| Money that has been taken out of family members' paychecks' will be mismanaged | 8.5 | 5.6 | 7.3 | 7.5 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0.9 | 0.3 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 35.9 | 29.6 | 32.7 | 33.7 |
| <i>Education</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| His/her school will not have enough money for things students need | 31.0 | 18.5 | 29.1 | 26.5 |
| His/her school will have to cut programs he/she likes | 29.6 | 23.1 | 33.6 | 28.6 |
| Free/discounted school lunches will be taken away from students | 22.5 | 10.2 | 11.8 | 15.2 |
| His/her school will not have enough money for student field trips | 23.9 | 19.4 | 22.7 | 21.7 |
| Our family has not choice when it comes to which school he/she attends | 13.4 | 15.7 | 18.2 | 16.0 |
| Only families with a high income can send their children to good schools | 16.2 | 11.1 | 16.4 | 14.4 |
| Students will not be able to choose which bathroom to use | 11.3 | 9.3 | 6.4 | 8.8 |
| Students of a different gender will be able to use the same bathroom as him/her at school | 4.9 | 21.3 | 10.0 | 11.8 |
| Schools will not thoroughly investigate claims of harassment, discrimination, or violence | 16.2 | 11.1 | 17.3 | 15.8 |

Table 2 (continued)

| | Caregiver Party Affiliation | | | Full sample (N=374) |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| | Democratic (n=142) | Republican (n=108) | Independent (n=110) | |
| Schools focus too much on being politically correct and not enough on educating | 7.7 | 14.8 | 20.0 | 14.4 |
| Schools will not have resources to support students with disabilities | 9.9 | 8.3 | 12.7 | 10.7 |
| Student loans will be too difficult to pay off | 21.1 | 19.4 | 15.15 | 19.0 |
| Public schools do not or will not receive enough funding | 12.0 | 6.5 | 10.9 | 10.2 |
| Other | 0.7 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 1.6 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 73.2 | 70.4 | 72.7 | 71.4 |
| <i>Supreme Court Appointments</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| Supreme Court appointees will not represent his/her views | 16.2 | 7.4 | 11.8 | 12.8 |
| The Supreme Court will become more conservative than he/she would like | 14.1 | 3.7 | 8.2 | 9.1 |
| The Supreme Court will become more liberal that he/she would like | 3.5 | 8.3 | 5.5 | 5.9 |
| Other | 0.7 | 0 | 0 | 0.3 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 33.8 | 25.0 | 25.5 | 29.1 |
| <i>Treatment of Racial/Ethnic Minorities</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| Children of racial/ethnic minority groups will be bullied/physically harmed in current political climate | 45.1 | 14.8 | 34.5 | 32.6 |
| Children of racial/ethnic minority groups will be teased/ excluded from peer activities in current political climate | 38.0 | 21.3 | 28.2 | 30.2 |
| There will be violence against people of racial/ethnic minority groups in current political climate | 41.5 | 14.8 | 22.7 | 27.5 |
| There will be nonviolent hate crimes against people of racial/ethnic minorities in current political climate | 25.4 | 9.3 | 15.5 | 17.6 |
| Our nation's leaders will pass laws or interpret laws in ways that harm racial/ethnic minorities | 15.5 | 3.7 | 9.1 | 9.9 |
| Our nation's leaders will pass laws/interpret laws in ways that prevent racial/ethnic minorities from having the same opportunities as everyone else | 13.4 | 3.7 | 5.5 | 8.3 |
| People of racial/ethnic minority groups get special treatment due to pressure to be politically correct | 3.8 | 11.1 | 7.3 | 6.4 |
| People of racial/ethnic minority groups will be discriminated against in the current political climate | 30.3 | 6.5 | 18.2 | 19.3 |
| Movements focused on a particular minority group single out that group as more important than everyone else | 3.5 | 7.4 | 10.0 | 7.0 |
| Movements focused on particular minority groups often have little to no justification for their cause | 4.2 | 2.8 | 10.0 | 5.3 |
| Racial/ethnic minority groups will not be held accountable for violence | 3.5 | 5.6 | 10.0 | 6.7 |
| People of racial/ethnic minority groups are unfairly criticized for peaceful protest | 11.3 | 1.9 | 14.5 | 9.6 |
| Efforts to protect racial/ethnic minorities will result in fewer resources or opportunities for everyone else | 4.9 | 5.6 | 7.3 | 6.1 |
| People of racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to be harmed or treated unfairly by police/law enforcement | 25.4 | 9.3 | 15.5 | 17.9 |
| People of racial/ethnic minority groups are not adequately protected by police/law enforcement | 19.0 | 2.8 | 13.6 | 12.6 |
| Police/law enforcement who unjustly harm people of racial/ethnic minority groups are/will not be held accountable in courts of law | 19.0 | 3.7 | 11.8 | 12.3 |
| Politicians/leaders are not concerned enough about how racial/ethnic minorities are treated by police | 17.6 | 2.8 | 10.0 | 11.0 |
| Some politicians/ lawmakers are trying to make it more difficult for racial/ethnic minorities to vote | 8.5 | 0.9 | 3.6 | 4.8 |
| The federal government will not provide enough aid following disasters in areas with relatively large populations of racial/ethnic minorities | 7.7 | 0.9 | 9.1 | 6.4 |

Table 2 (continued)

| | Caregiver Party Affiliation | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Democratic (n = 142) | Republican (n = 108) | Independent (n = 110) | Full sample (N = 374) |
| Other | 0.7 | 3.7 | 0 | 1.6 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 69.7 | 42.6 | 56.4 | 57.8 |
| <i>Trade Policy</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| The cost of items we buy will increase due to trade policy | 16.9 | 10.2 | 18.2 | 15.8 |
| The U.S. will get into a trade war | 10.6 | 6.5 | 3.6 | 7.8 |
| Trade deals have not been fair to the U.S | 6.3 | 5.6 | 3.6 | 5.9 |
| There is not enough focus on American industry | 6.3 | 6.5 | 10.0 | 8.6 |
| Other | 0.7 | 0 | 0 | 0.3 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 24.6 | 20.4 | 24.5 | 24.1 |
| <i>Environment</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| About global warming | 57.0 | 22.2 | 44.5 | 42.2 |
| Humans are polluting the earth too much | 65.5 | 50.9 | 60.0 | 59.4 |
| Our air will not be safe to breathe some day | 38.0 | 25.0 | 34.5 | 33.4 |
| Animals will die because humans don't take care of the earth | 57.0 | 38.9 | 47.3 | 48.1 |
| It's hard to really know the truth about the environment/ climate change | 13.4 | 20.4 | 12.7 | 16.3 |
| The earth will not be safe for humans in his/her lifetime due to climate change | 32.4 | 15.7 | 27.3 | 26.2 |
| The earth will not be safe for future generations due to climate change | 34.5 | 16.7 | 30.0 | 27.8 |
| Some politicians tell lies about the environment to make us pay more taxes | 7.0 | 4.6 | 10.9 | 8.0 |
| Climate change is causing/will cause natural disasters | 38.0 | 20.4 | 36.4 | 31.6 |
| Leaders/politicians don't care enough about the environment | 26.8 | 10.2 | 21.8 | 20.3 |
| The U.S. will be hurt or burdened by global efforts to protect the environment | 4.9 | 3.7 | 6.4 | 5.3 |
| Environmental regulations take away jobs or hurt U.S. businesses | 4.9 | 3.7 | 3.6 | |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 1.8 | 0.5 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 88.7 | 72.2 | 80.0 | 81.3 |
| <i>Abortion</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| Our nation's leaders will deny women the right to make decisions about their own bodies | 18.3 | 10.2 | 16.14 | 15.0 |
| Our nation's leaders will limit women's reproductive rights | 12.0 | 5.6 | 12.7 | 10.4 |
| Our nation's leaders will make/keep it legal for women to have abortions | 4.9 | 13.0 | 7.3 | 8.0 |
| Taxpayer dollars will be spent on abortion | 4.2 | 6.5 | 8.2 | 6.1 |
| Our nation's leaders will make it more difficult for women to access or pay for birth control | 9.2 | 3.7 | 7.3 | 7.0 |
| Our nation's leaders don't respect human life | 4.9 | 20.4 | 8.2 | 11.0 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 27.5 | 33.3 | 29.1 | 29.9 |
| <i>Treatment of Sexual Minorities</i> | | | | |
| My child worries... | | | | |
| Sexual minorities will be teased/excluded from peer activities in the current political climate | 26.8 | 9.3 | 18.2 | 19.0 |
| Sexual minorities will be bullied/physically harmed in the current political climate | 27.5 | 10.2 | 21.8 | 20.6 |
| There will be violence against sexual minorities in this political climate | 24.4 | 4.6 | 22.7 | 18.2 |
| There will be nonviolent hate crimes against sexual minorities in the current political climate | 14.1 | 6.5 | 12.7 | 12.0 |
| Sexual minorities will be discriminated against in the current political climate | 19.7 | 7.4 | 15.5 | 14.7 |
| Our nation's leaders will pass laws/ interpret laws in ways that harm sexual minorities | 14.1 | 1.9 | 10.0 | 9.6 |

Table 2 (continued)

| | Caregiver Party Affiliation | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | Democratic (<i>n</i> = 142) | Republican (<i>n</i> = 108) | Independent (<i>n</i> = 110) | Full sample (<i>N</i> = 374) |
| Our nation's leaders will pass laws/ interpret laws in ways that prevent sexual minorities from having the same opportunities as everyone else | 9.9 | 1.9 | 10.9 | 8.0 |
| Efforts to protect sexual minorities will result in fewer resources or opportunities for everyone else | 4.9 | 6.5 | 5.5 | 5.9 |
| Efforts to protect sexual minorities will infringe on religious freedom | 4.2 | 9.3 | 4.5 | 6.1 |
| Our nation's leaders will pass/interpret laws that condone/encourage the lifestyle of sexual minorities | 2.1 | 6.5 | 4.5 | 4.3 |
| Our nation's leaders will pass/interpret laws in ways that conflict with our religious view of sexual minorities | 2.8 | 8.3 | 4.5 | 4.8 |
| He/she will be forced by law to interact with sexual minorities | 0 | 6.5 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| Laws/court rulings to include sexual minorities will cost taxpayers a lot of money | 2.1 | 0.9 | 1.8 | 1.9 |
| Taxpayer dollars will fund sex reassignment surgery or other transition-related care | 0.7 | 1.9 | 6.4 | 2.7 |
| Other | 0 | 0.9 | 0 | 0.3 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 40.1 | 28.7 | 34.5 | 35.3 |
| <i>Women's Issues</i> | | | | |
| <i>My child worries...</i> | | | | |
| It is too difficult for women to both have children and work in the U.S | 16.9 | 12.0 | 18.2 | 16.0 |
| Women don't get enough time off from work after having a baby | 12.7 | 8.3 | 13.6 | 11.8 |
| Women don't get a paycheck when home from work after having a baby | 8.5 | 8.3 | 14.5 | 10.7 |
| Paid family leave would hurt the economy/business or cost taxpayers too much | 4.9 | 1.9 | 2.7 | 3.5 |
| There are too few women in government/politics | 19.7 | 8.3 | 10.9 | 13.4 |
| The public will be harmed because women are not fit to govern | 1.4 | 1.9 | 3.6 | 2.4 |
| Women's involvement in government/politics will lead to changes that are unfair to men | 2.1 | 2.8 | 3.6 | 2.7 |
| Women don't receive equal pay as men for the same work | 29.6 | 19.4 | 13.6 | 21.4 |
| Laws to guarantee equal pay for women would end up creating more problems | 2.1 | 0.9 | 1.8 | 1.9 |
| Women are concerned about inequality that doesn't exist | 4.2 | 2.8 | 2.7 | 3.5 |
| The legal system doesn't sufficiently protect women from sexual harassment | 7.0 | 5.6 | 7.3 | 7.0 |
| The legal system doesn't sufficiently protect women from gender discrimination | 9.2 | 4.6 | 7.3 | 7.2 |
| The legal system doesn't sufficiently protect women from sexual violence | 8.5 | 4.6 | 7.3 | 7.0 |
| The legal system doesn't sufficiently protect women from domestic violence | 10.6 | 4.6 | 10.0 | 8.6 |
| Perpetrators of sexual violence are not punished enough in the U.S | 7.7 | 8.3 | 10.9 | 9.4 |
| Men are/will be punished unfairly because women make false allegations of sexual harassment/assault | 2.8 | 5.6 | 5.5 | 5.1 |
| There is too much pressure on our nation's leaders to be sensitive to "women's issues" | 2.8 | 2.8 | 4.5 | 3.5 |
| Our nation's leaders will pass/interpret laws in ways that harm women | 8.5 | 0 | 5.5 | 5.1 |
| Our nation's leaders will pass/interpret laws in ways that prevent women from having the same opportunities as everyone else | 6.3 | 0 | 4.5 | 4.0 |
| Male leaders/ politicians are judged for behaviors that are typical of men | 2.8 | 0.9 | 1.8 | 1.9 |
| Proponents of equal rights ignore ways that men and women are different | 1.4 | 5.6 | 6.4 | 4.3 |
| Efforts to address women's issues will result in fewer resources or opportunities for men | 4.2 | 0.9 | 2.7 | 2.9 |
| Conservative women are viewed as not caring about women's issues | 1.4 | 7.4 | 4.5 | 4.5 |
| The recent women's movement is so extreme it ends up hurting women | 1.4 | 8.3 | 4.5 | 4.8 |
| Other | 0 | 0.9 | 0 | 0.3 |
| (At least one worry endorsed) | 47.2 | 41.7 | 41.8 | 44.1 |

Participants specified "other" worries, which were coded by the research team as relevant or not. Rates for the full sample were calculated using data from caregivers who self-identified as Democrats, Republicans, Independents, or Other

Table 3 Pearson's correlations among study variables ($N=374$)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|----|
| 1. Worry about Political News | – | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. RCADS-P Anxiety | .41 ^c | – | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. RCADS-P Generalized Anxiety Disorder | .41 ^c | .86 ^c | – | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. PROMIS Child Anxiety | .37 ^c | .65 ^c | .65 ^c | – | | | | | | | | |
| 5. RCADS-P Depression | .35 ^c | .74 ^c | .61 ^c | .47 ^c | – | | | | | | | |
| 6. PROMIS Child Depression | .33 ^c | .62 ^c | .54 ^c | .59 ^c | .68 ^c | – | | | | | | |
| 7. PROMIS Child Anger | .12 ^a | .39 ^c | .38 ^c | .45 ^c | .35 ^c | .50 ^c | – | | | | | |
| 8. Griffith Empathy Measure | .11 ^a | .27 ^c | .25 ^c | .26 ^c | .20 ^c | .17 ^b | .05 | – | | | | |
| 9. IUSC, 27-item | .30 ^c | .61 ^c | .48 ^c | .45 ^c | .49 ^c | .45 ^c | .34 ^c | .18 ^b | – | | | |
| 10. Prospective Intolerance of Uncertainty | .32 ^c | .56 ^c | .46 ^c | .41 ^c | .43 ^c | .37 ^c | .27 ^c | .16 ^b | .91 ^c | – | | |
| 11. Inhibitory Intolerance of Uncertainty | .21 ^c | .56 ^c | .43 ^c | .43 ^c | .44 ^c | .43 ^c | .36 ^c | .16 ^b | .92 ^c | .76 ^c | – | |
| 12. PROMIS Parent Anxiety | .16 ^b | .45 ^c | .44 ^c | .49 ^c | .40 ^c | .46 ^c | .47 ^c | .22 ^c | .35 ^c | .28 ^c | .38 ^c | – |

IUSC Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale for Children, RCADS-P Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale-Parent, PROMIS Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System

^a $p < .05$

^b $p < .01$

^c $p < .001$

was greater than the association between youth worry about political news and youth depression on the RCADS (partial $r = .33$), this difference was not significant.

Youth worry about political issues was positively associated with overall intolerance of uncertainty, partial $r = .29$, $p < .001$ for 27-item IUSC,¹ as well as with prospective intolerance of uncertainty (partial $r = .30$, $p < .001$) and inhibitory intolerance of uncertainty (partial $r = .21$, $p < .001$). Finally, youth worry about political issues was positively associated with empathy (partial $r = .14$, $p < .01$).

A multiple regression was carried out to examine trait anxiety (RCADS Total Anxiety), intolerance of uncertainty, and empathy as predictors of worry about political issues, controlling for age and parent anxiety. The model was significant, $F(4,358) = 27.29$, $p < .001$, and explained 23% of the variance in worry about political issues. Only trait anxiety significantly predicted worry about political issues ($b = .29$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

This study suggests that worry about political issues is prevalent among youth in the United States, albeit mild in frequency (on average). For the majority of voting issues related to the 2016 presidential election, over 50% of caregivers indicated that their child experienced at least one related

worry. The specific worries most commonly endorsed were related to voting issues that may disproportionately impact younger generations: the environment and gun policy. Worry related to the economy, terrorism, foreign policy, and the treatment of racial/ethnic minorities was also common. It is unclear whether youth worry about political issues is adaptive, motivating civic engagement, or interfering.

The measure of youth worry about political news was developed for this study based on a review of the mainstream media reports, qualitative interviews with caregivers, and feedback from an expert panel. Although the measure was initially intended to tap physical symptoms of anxiety and behavioral avoidance in addition to worry, item distributions (i.e., positive skew) indicated that these symptoms were infrequently endorsed. Given that the threat presented in political news stories is typically distal rather than proximal, it makes sense that anxiety about political issues would manifest as worry—which is primarily anticipatory [54]. Internal consistency for worry items was excellent and in support of their concurrent and discriminant validity, youth worry about political issues was significantly more strongly associated with youth trait anxiety (medium to large effect) than with parent trait anxiety and youth anger (small to medium effects). Also, youth worry about political issues was significantly more strongly associated with youth trait anxiety than with youth depressive symptoms (small to medium effects), according to some measures.

The current findings are in line with limited available data from prior studies and suggest that youth are not immune to

¹ Analyses were repeated with the 12-item IUSC total score. Results generally converged and are available upon request.

worry about political news. According to a 2017 national survey of adults, 82% of whom reported checking the news at least once/day, 63% believe that the future of the nation is a significant source of stress and 53% believe that the United States is at the lowest point they can remember in its history [55]. These adults endorsed worry about terrorism, the economy, and health care at rates similar to those found for youth in the current study. In another national survey, 56% of adults reported feeling at least somewhat anxious about the impact of politics on their daily lives [56]. Although similar studies with youth are lacking, our finding that about 54% of youth have worried that there will be a shooting at their school is consistent with a Pew Research Center report indicating that the majority of youth ages 13 to 17 years (57%) fear this possibility [57]. In addition to media coverage of gun violence, these fears might be triggered by regular active shooter drills conducted at school. Over 90% of public schools have drilled students on lockdown and evacuation procedures, as mandated in many states [58].

Youth empathy and intolerance of uncertainty were each positively associated with worry about political issues (with a larger effect size for intolerance of uncertainty) but did not predict such worry after accounting for the effect of youth trait anxiety. As expected, youth trait anxiety was positively associated with worry about political issues and youth with clinical levels of generalized anxiety were reported to experience more worry about political issues than is experienced by youth with subthreshold symptoms or minimal anxiety. It's possible that youth predisposed to worry in general are more likely to monitor political news and interpret it as threatening. Given experimental research suggesting that political campaigns achieve their goals by appealing to emotions such as fear, which facilitates persuasion [59], it may be challenging for youth with GAD to stay informed of voting issues without experiencing significant worry. Practitioners working with clinically anxious youth should assess anxiety about political news. In addition to alleviating distress, a primary goal in clinical contexts, addressing anxiety about political news (e.g., through cognitive restructuring) may have a secondary benefit of assisting youth in evaluating the veracity of claims communicated in the media.

Caregivers who self-identified as Republicans reported that their children experienced greater worry about political issues than did caregivers who self-identified as Democrats. The opposite might be expected given that youth typically adopt the party affiliation of their parents [60] and data were collected during a Republican presidency with Republican control of the Senate. However, Democratic takeover of the House of Representatives shortly before data were collected might have increased Republicans' anxiety. Also, the finding that children of Republicans are worrying more about voting issues than children of Democrats is consistent with evidence that conservatism is associated with intolerance of

uncertainty and anxiety/fearfulness [61, 62]. Further, anxiety may lead to biased information processing in a political context; for example, adults have been shown to exhibit biased information processing (i.e., reading, remembering, and agreeing with threatening information) after anxiety about immigration is induced [63]. According to Jost et al. [61, 64], the core components of political conservatism, resistance to change and opposition to equality, reduce uncertainty and perceived threat (i.e., the risky prospect of social change)—perhaps enhancing the appeal of conservatism to people high in anxiety.

Several limitations of the current study warrant mention. First, it relied on caregiver report. Although caregivers were explicitly instructed to report on their child's worry rather than their own worry, it's possible that—in this charged political climate—caregivers used the questionnaire to express their own political views. Also, reliance on caregiver report may have resulted in inflated relationships among study variables due to shared method variance. Future studies should sample youth, whose report of their own internal experiences may be discrepant with parent reports [65]. Second, Hispanics were under-represented in the current sample, limiting the extent to which results generalize to the broader United States population. Political issues such as immigration policy disproportionately impact Hispanic communities, increasing the likelihood that Hispanic youths' emotional responses differ from those experienced by non-Hispanic youth. Third, youths' knowledge of politically relevant issues (e.g., climate science), which may vary with exposure to information outside of the media (e.g., school curriculum) as well as consumption of news from unbiased and biased sources (e.g., Facebook news feed), was not assessed and may partially account for rates of worry by issue. Finally, many cases were dropped from the sample because insufficient effort was detected, suggesting the need to replicate current findings with data from caregivers recruited in other settings.

In addition to recruiting diverse samples of youth, future studies should identify strategies for mitigating the negative impact of political news on youth with anxiety disorders. There is some evidence that parents can decrease the likelihood that youth feel threatened by news of terrorist attacks, specifically, by modeling and positively reinforcing children's use of coping thoughts, and by helping children to better understand the media (e.g., describing the disproportionately extreme violence presented in the news versus in reality [66]). Similarly, research with adults has demonstrated that both cognitive and emotion-focused interventions enhance coping with media exposure to terrorism [67]. Studies have generally suggested that co-viewing and openly discussing violent/tragic news with youth is associated with lower levels of anxiety (e.g., compared to restricting access to media) [68–70], although findings are mixed [71, 72] and

it's not clear that the relationship is causal. Future research should consider whether the benefits of particular caregiving strategies extend to youth's coping with broader exposure to political news.

Beyond parenting strategies for mitigating the impact of negative news, journalism adapted to youths' sensitivities might protect youth against impairing levels of anxiety. Constructive reporting that focuses on solution-based narratives and includes positive emotions in negative stories has been shown to elicit lower levels of negative emotional responses (i.e., fear, sadness, and anger) and provide more inspiration for engagement among youth than nonconstructive news [73]. When constructive reporting is not available, peer discussion of news can reduce youths' negative emotional responses [74]. Although empirical studies are needed, ensuring access to accurate information about current events may be critical for promoting youths' mental health. Given that social media, which are used extensively by youth, are the primary outlets for "fake news," teaching media literacy might protect against impairing levels of anxiety. Research showing that young adults are better than earlier generations at separating fact from opinion in the news is encouraging [75].

For youth without anxiety disorders, it may not be advantageous to target anxiety about political news. Anxiety that is in proportion to threat in the environment (i.e., that's not excessive) is adaptive and in this context, may motivate problem-solving or civic engagement. Also, there is some evidence that anxiety in adults promotes beliefs or judgments based less on partisanship and predispositions ("standing beliefs") and more on contemporaneous information [76, 77]. Although this can allow for persuasion based on political misinformation, it can also motivate reasoned consideration of counterarguments and the investigation of new solutions [76]. Future studies should directly examine the impact of mild anxiety about political issues on youths' judgment and decision-making as well as behavior.

Summary

This study examined youth anxiety about political issues and associated characteristics. Using a measure developed for this study, caregivers ($N=374$) recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk reported on their child's anxiety about 15 voting issues covered in the media since the 2016 presidential election. Worry about political issues was common, though mild (on average); for the majority of voting issues, over 50% of caregivers indicated that their child experienced at least one worry. Worries about the environment and gun violence were most common, followed by worry related to the economy, treatment of racial/ethnic minorities, foreign policy, and terrorism. In support of concurrent

and discriminant validity of the measure, youth worry about political issues was significantly more strongly associated with youth trait anxiety than with parent trait anxiety, youth anger, and—on some measures—youth depressive symptoms. Youth empathy and intolerance of uncertainty were each positively associated with worry about political issues but did not predict such worry after accounting for the effect of youth trait anxiety. Consistent with prior research showing that conservatism is related to intolerance of uncertainty as well as fearfulness/anxiety, caregivers who self-identified as Republicans reported that their children experienced greater worry about political issues than did caregivers who self-identified as Democrats. Youth with clinical levels of generalized anxiety experienced more severe worry about political issues than did youth with minimal/subthreshold anxiety and may be particularly vulnerable to politicians' efforts to induce fear with the goal of persuasion. Future studies should evaluate the benefits of caregiving behaviors (e.g., co-viewing and open discussion of news) that might minimize the negative impact of political news on youth with anxiety disorders.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

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Research Involving Human and Animal Rights All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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