



Survey of American Adults on Sports Jan. 25-30, 2023

N = 1,000 American adults

The sample has an adjusted margin of error +/-3.6 percentage points.

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

Survey design and analysis by John Cluverius, director of survey research, University of Massachusetts Lowell Center for Public Opinion.

Do you have a question about this poll? If so, tweet @UML_CPO and we'll get back to you.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Despite reservations over injuries, professional football remains America's game

"Americans are profoundly concerned about almost every aspect of professional football on and off the field. Nonetheless, they can't stop watching. This reveals something at the heart of American sports fandom: Americans are so disturbed by the excesses of professional football precisely because they love it so much," said Associate Professor John Cluverius, director of survey research at the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion.

Professional football is the most popular sport in the United States. Forty-two percent of Americans say football is the sport they watch most frequently, and 39% describe themselves as fans of professional football. The numbers remain true across all demographic and political subgroups, even in a time of profound political polarization:

- While a slightly larger share of Democrats (43%) than Republicans (37%) describe themselves as fans of professional football, these numbers are about even across people who identify as liberal (39%) and conservative (38%).
- While women are less likely to say they are fans of professional football than men, 48% to 32%, women make up 41% of self-described professional football fans in the survey.

Despite this, Americans have a litany of concerns about the game. Most clear are the issues around the violence inherent to the game, the believed long-term health risks to players, and the perceived poor response of the league to the problem. More than half of respondents (52%) described injuries caused by hits and tackling as a major problem in the NFL and more than two-thirds (67%) said long-term health issues caused by these hits were a major problem.

Respondents were also concerned with off-field player behavior:

- 49% said domestic violence committed by players is a major problem
- 43% said violent crimes committed by players are a major problem.
- 38% said local governments paying for stadiums is a major problem.
- 37% said players being paid too much is a major problem, while 38% said owners making too much is also a major problem.

2. As states expand legal sports betting, few Americans placing bets

“States are full steam ahead on sports betting despite mixed opinions and serious reservations from citizens” said Cluverius. “Access to legal sports betting is far less popular than access to abortion or cannabis in the United States, and yet, Americans face a much more difficult time seeking an abortion or a cannabis product than placing a wager on a game. Sports fans are fed up with the deluge of ads from betting operations and seem to want sports betting to go back in the shadows.”.

More than 30 states now offer some option for people to place bets on sporting events after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a federal ban on single-game sports betting in 2018. Despite this change in policy, there is little appetite for it in the electorate, according to Center for Public Opinion poll results. Thirty-one percent of respondents approve of making sports betting legal, while 31% disapprove.

In the current poll, 15% of respondents say they have placed a bet on a sporting event in the last five years. Approval of legal sports betting is also about even across both major political parties: 34% of Democrats approve of legal sports betting while 33% of Republicans approve.

Participation in fantasy sports leagues and daily fantasy is also relatively low among American adults surveyed. One tenth of the sample say they have participated in some kind of fantasy sports league, while 8% reported daily use of fantasy apps like FanDuel and DraftKings.

3. Popularity of sports figures

Respondents were also queried about prominent figures in the American sports landscape. Retired tennis star Serena Williams had the highest net favorability of any figure, 62%, while 10% view her unfavorably. Twenty-four percent have no opinion on

Williams and 4% have never heard of her. U.S. Olympic gymnast Simone Biles also holds a high net favorability rating among respondents: 51% of respondents view her favorably, 7% view her unfavorably, 21% have no opinion and 21% have never heard of her.

NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who has not played in the league since 2016, is the only figure asked about with a net negative favorability rating: 32% favorable to 33% unfavorable. Other athletes who have spoken out on political and social issues enjoy more generous favorability ratings. U.S. women's soccer gold-medal winner Megan Rapinoe is viewed narrowly favorably overall, 23% favorable to 18% unfavorable, and NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers is viewed quite favorably, 34% favorable to 17% unfavorable.