

Breaking Report: The Impact of Current National Politics on Sleep Health

National Sleep Foundation's Analysis of Americans' Sleep During the 2024 Presidential Election



October 29, 2024

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Introduction

Broadscale societal events can have a profound effect on health and well-being by affecting the 'public mood' and an individual's emotional state.¹ Public mood shifts during presidential elections are well documented and can add to existing stressors.^{2,3} Election stress can be widespread, with 65% of U.S. adults having reported they always or often feel exhausted when thinking about politics and 55% reporting always or often feeling angry.⁴

Election night itself has been associated with elevated stress levels and disturbed sleep.² Previous work examining the impact of presidential elections on sleep has focused on election night. This Breaking Report highlights the impact of the 2024 U.S. presidential election on American adults' sleep, with an advanced view leading up to election night.

The differences observed in data described in this report have been tested for statistical significance. Differences that are significant at the 95% confidence level (or higher) are reported without qualification.

The 2024 Presidential Election Negatively Impacted Americans' Sleep

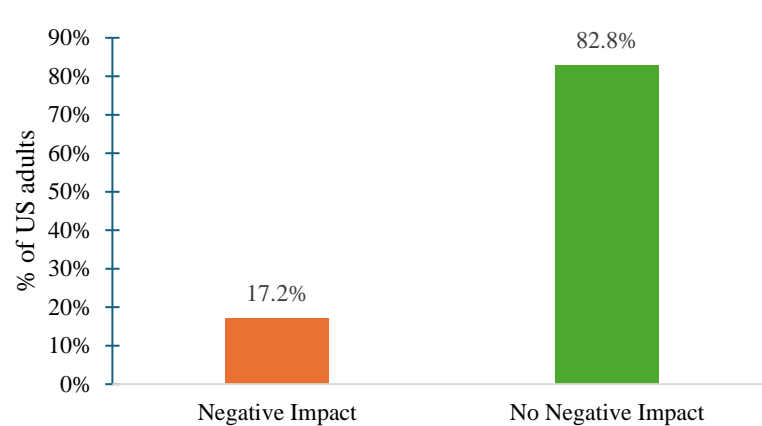


Figure 1. Percent of U.S. adults who reported a negative impact of the 2024 presidential election on their sleep.

In response to dynamics of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, 17% of all adults—estimated to represent a striking 45 million Americans—reported the election negatively impacted their sleep (Figure 1). Adults who reported a negative impact on their sleep due to the election had shorter weekend (or non-workday) sleep durations (Figure 2, left panel) and poorer self-reported sleep quality (Figure 2, right panel)

than adults who did not report a negative impact of the presidential election. The typical American adult reported a weekly sleep duration of just under seven hours ($M=6.90$ hours, $SD=1.48$), with the majority of adults sleeping less than the NSF-recommended 7-9 hours per night.⁵ Over a third of U.S. adults describe the quality of their sleep as fair or poor overall. Table 1 summarizes election-related sleep impact by demographic group. Of note, the impact of the 2024 presidential election was sweeping, observed across all groups, while there were some observed differences.

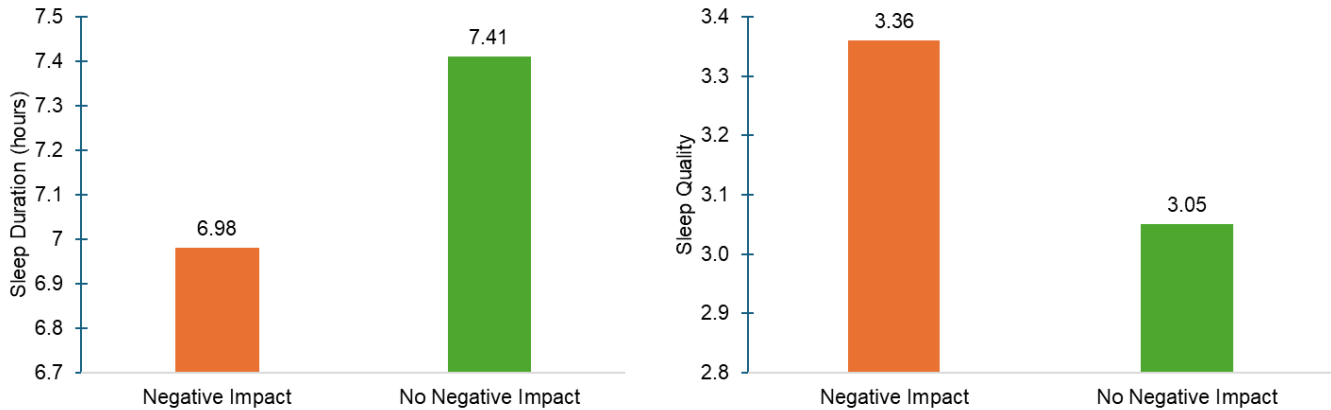


Figure 2. Sleep duration (left panel) and sleep quality (right panel) differences between adults who have and have not experienced a negative impact on sleep from the presidential election. Sleep quality was measured such that higher values represent worse sleep quality.

Conclusion

The 2024 U.S. presidential election had a strikingly negative impact on population-level sleep health, which reinforces the importance of addressing sleep health during broad U.S. societal events. We highlighted the negative sleep impact of presidential elections can precede the previously documented election night disturbances and suggest the sleep disturbances associated with presidential elections may be diffuse and extensive. The dynamics of stressful societal events that are extensive in scope and occur on a particular day (i.e., elections and election day) can adversely affect the ‘public mood’ and health and well-being, such as sleep health, long before the day of the event. Recognizing and practicing healthy sleep behaviors, such as those in National Sleep Foundation’s Best Slept Self® framework, may help buffer against the sleep disruptions reported by nearly one in five U.S. adults during the 2024 presidential election. Additionally, presidential candidates, campaign managers, and mass media journalists should consider the public health consequences when designing and executing campaign tactics or providing campaign coverage and analysis. For example, campaign strategies and reporting that exaggerate potential negative election outcomes and fuel strong emotional reactions from the public could have downstream negative effects on sleep health, with potential subsequent consequences for broader health, wellbeing, and safety outcomes.

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Appendix A. Methodology and Demographics

The National Sleep Foundation conducted an online, probability-based national survey in September 2024 asking American adults about their sleep duration, sleep quality, and the impact of the 2024 election on their sleep. Data were collected almost two months before election day and after several significant and unprecedented events of the 2024 election process, including the first presidential debate between party nominees, the withdrawal and replacement of the incumbent nominee, and a second presidential debate between the incumbent party’s new nominee and the opposing nominee. A total, representative random sample of 1,364 adults were included in the analytic dataset. The sample was weighted to ensure it reflected the general U.S. population in regard to sex by age categories, race/ethnicity, education, geographic region, household income, and language proficiency. Results have a margin of sampling error of 2.9 points for the full sample including design effects. Sampling and data collection were conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs via its online KnowledgePanel[®], which provides access to randomly recruited participants. To assess election-related sleep impact, adults were asked whether “the current U.S. presidential election had a negative impact on your sleep or not” (with response options including “very negative impact,” “negative impact,” and “no negative impact”). Sleep duration and quality were measured with questions from the validated Sleep Health Index[®].⁶

| Characteristic | Sample characteristics | Negative sleep impact of election | No negative sleep impact of election |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Total sample <i>n</i> (%) | 1364 (100%) | 235 (17.2%) | 1129 (82.8%) |
| Age <i>n</i> (%) | | | |
| Young (18-30) | 285 (20.9%) | 38 (13.3%) | 247 (86.7%) |
| Middle-Aged (31-64) | 765 (56.1%) | 128 (16.7%) | 637 (83.3%) |
| Older (65+) | 314 (23.0%) | 69 (22.0%) | 245 (78.0%) |
| Sex <i>n</i> (%) | | | |
| Male | 667 (48.9%) | 113 (16.9%) | 554 (83.1%) |
| Female | 697 (51.1%) | 122 (17.5%) | 575 (82.5%) |
| Race/Ethnicity <i>n</i> (%) | | | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 829 (60.8%) | 154 (18.6%) | 676 (81.4%) |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 165 (12.1%) | 22 (13.3%) | 144 (86.7%) |
| Hispanic | 242 (17.7%) | 30 (12.4%) | 212 (87.6%) |
| Other, non-Hispanic | 127 (9.3%) | 30 (23.6%) | 97 (76.4%) |
| Education <i>n</i> (%) | | | |
| High school or less | 515 (37.8%) | 83 (16.1%) | 432 (83.9%) |
| Some college | 359 (26.3%) | 64 (17.8%) | 295 (82.2%) |
| Bachelor’s or higher | 490 (35.9%) | 89 (18.2%) | 401 (81.8%) |
| Marital status <i>n</i> (%) | | | |
| Married | 712 (52.2%) | 127 (17.8%) | 585 (82.2%) |
| Never married | 420 (30.8%) | 65 (15.4%) | 356 (84.6%) |
| Political affiliation <i>n</i> (%) | | | |
| Republican | 495 (36.5%) | 86 (17.3%) | 410 (82.7%) |

| | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Independent/Undecided | 279 (20.6%) | 44 (15.8%) | 235 (84.2%) |
| Democrat | 582 (42.9%) | 105 (18.0%) | 477 (82.0%) |
| Employment status <i>n</i> (%) | | | |
| Full-time | 650 (47.6%) | 107 (16.5%) | 543 (83.5%) |
| Part-time | 194 (14.3%) | 17 (8.7%) | 178 (91.3%) |
| Unemployed | 520 (38.1%) | 111 (21.4%) | 408 (78.6%) |
| Household composition <i>n</i> (%) | | | |
| Children in household | 419 (30.7%) | 51 (12.2%) | 368 (87.8%) |
| No children in household | 945 (69.3%) | 184 (19.5%) | 761 (80.5%) |
| Sleep Duration <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) | | | |
| Weekday (hours) | 6.72 (1.57) | 6.61 (1.82) | 6.75 (1.52) |
| Weekend (hours) | 7.34 (1.67) | 6.98 (1.68) | 7.41 (.66) |
| Weekly average (hours) | 6.90 (1.48) | 6.72 (1.65) | 6.94 (1.44) |
| Sleep quality <i>M</i>, <i>SD</i> | 3.10 (1.02) | 3.36 (1.03) | 3.05 (1.01) |

Note: Sleep quality was measured on a scale with 1=excellent and 5=poor.

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