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# THE STATE OF THE NATION: A 50-STATE COVID-19 SURVEY REPORT #2

USA, May 2020

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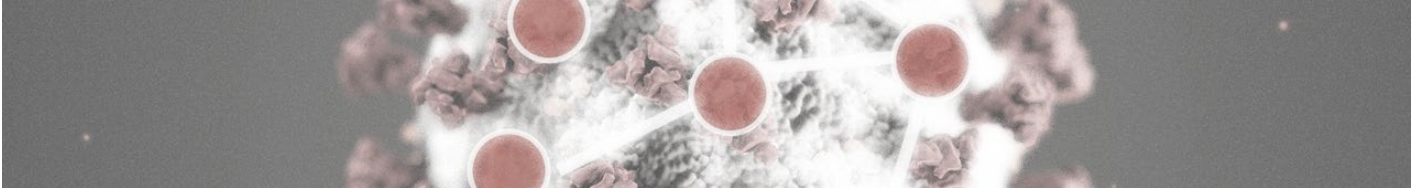
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THE STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF NEW JERSEY



## **Report of May 22, 2020, v.1.0**

**From:** The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States

*A joint project of:*

Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

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# COVER MEMO

## Summary Memo—May 21, 2020

### **The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States**

**Partners:** Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

**Authors:** Matthew A. Baum (Harvard University); Katherine Ognyanova (Rutgers University); David Lazer (Northeastern University); John Della Volpe (Harvard University); Roy H. Perlis (Harvard University); James Druckman (Northwestern University); and Mauricio Santillana (Harvard University)

**With:** Alexi Quintana and Hanyu Chwe (Northeastern University)

From May 2 to 15 we conducted a large, 50 state survey, the results of which are presented in this report. This is the second report published by the consortium. You can find the first report online at [www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org).

#### **Note on methods:**

We surveyed 20,333 individuals across all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The survey was conducted on 2-15 May 2020 by PureSpectrum via an online, nonprobability sample, with state-level representative quotas for race/ethnicity, age, and gender. In addition to balancing on these dimensions, we reweighted our data using demographic characteristics.

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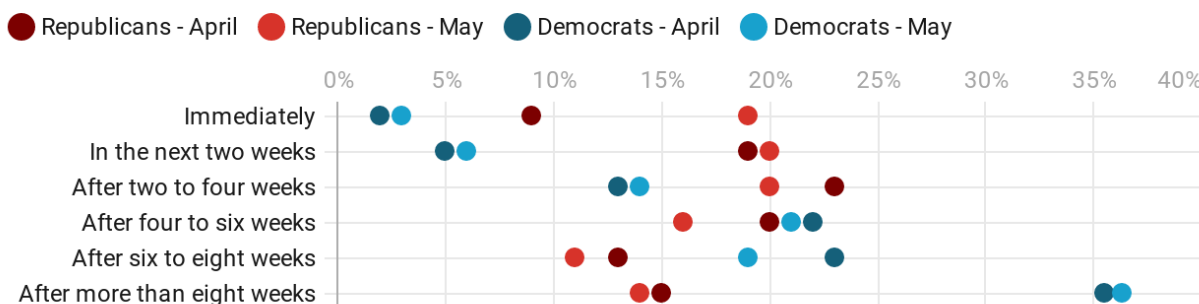
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# 1. Reopening

**Americans are in less of a hurry to reopen than their governors.** Despite the movement toward economic reopening in all 50 states, we see little evidence that Americans are clamoring to speed up the reopening process. Overall, we found only a five percentage point increase from our prior survey wave in late April in the percentage of Americans preferring that the economy reopen “immediately.” A sizable majority (60%) of Americans continue to prefer that the country wait at least four more weeks prior to reopening.

## Partisan differences emerge in respondent attitudes towards reopening the U.S. economy

When should the country reopen the economy and resume business activity?



National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/2020-4/30/2020), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/2020-5/15/2020)

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**Partisan cracks on reopening are emerging.** This general hesitation about reopening, however, masks an emerging partisan divide. Republicans jumped from 9% in support of immediate reopening to 19%, while Democrats barely moved, from 2% in late April to 3% in early May. The net effect of the Republican shift is that a majority of Republicans now prefer reopening in four weeks or less, compared with over four in five Democrats preferring to wait six or more weeks.

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**When should the country reopen the economy  
and resume business activity?**

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	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Republicans</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>Difference (Rep-Dem)</b>
<b>Late April</b>				
Immediately	6%	9%	2%	7%
In the next two weeks	11%	19%	5%	14%
After two to four weeks	18%	23%	13%	10%
After four to six weeks	21%	20%	22%	-2%
After six to eight weeks	18%	13%	23%	-10%
After more than eight weeks	26%	15%	36%	-21%
<b>Early May</b>				
Immediately	11%	19%	3%	16%
In the next two weeks	12%	20%	6%	14%
After two to four weeks	17%	20%	14%	6%
After four to six weeks	19%	16%	21%	-5%
After six to eight weeks	15%	11%	19%	-8%
After more than eight weeks	26%	14%	36%	-22%
<b>Change April to May</b>				
Immediately	5%	10%	1%	9%
In the next two weeks	1%	1%	1%	0%
After two to four weeks	-1%	-3%	1%	-4%
After four to six weeks	-2%	-4%	-1%	-3%
After six to eight weeks	-3%	-2%	-4%	2%
After more than eight weeks	0%	-1%	0%	-1%

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*National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/2020-4/30/2020), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/2020-5/15/2020)*

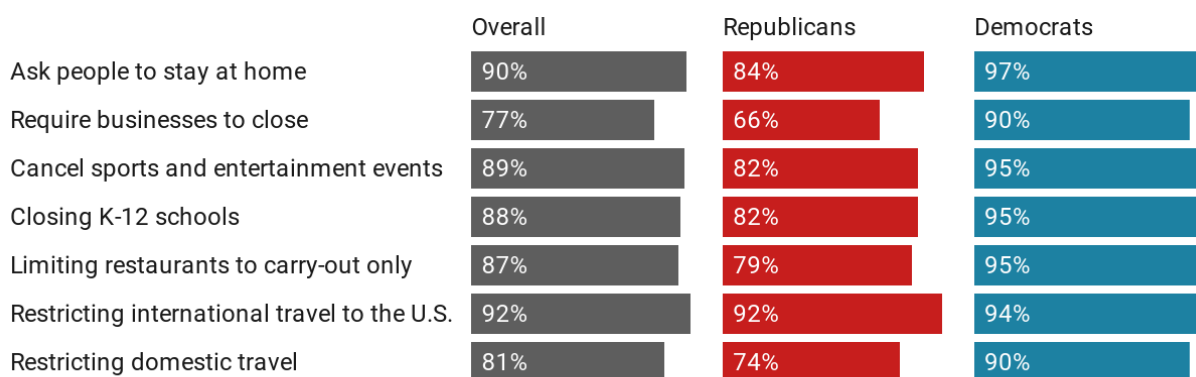
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## 2. COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies

**By overwhelming majorities, the public continues to support aggressive virus mitigation strategies.** Between three-quarters and nine-tenths of the public continue to support such policies as asking people to stay at home and avoid gathering in groups (90%), requiring most businesses other than grocery stores and pharmacies to close (77%), canceling major sports and entertainment events (89%), closing K-12 schools (88%), limiting restaurants to carry-out only (87%), and restricting domestic travel (81%) and international travel to the U.S. (92%). Most (58%) Americans indicated that they would “stick to staying home and keeping away from people” even with the lifting of federal social distancing guidelines.

### Broad support for policies across party lines

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days? [Percent respondents who say they “strongly approve” or “somewhat approve”]



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

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**However, here too the aggregate figures mask an emerging partisan divide, with Republicans consistently less supportive of almost every policy.** The partisan gap across these seven policies averaged 14 percentage points, much more than the average 8 point gap we found in late April. This support gap ranges from 2% for restricting international travel to the U.S. (94% support among Democrats; 92% among Republicans) to a high of 24 points for keeping non-essential businesses closed (supported by 90% of Democrats, compared to 66% of Republicans).

## Approval of COVID-19 guidelines

*(Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve")*

COVID-19 guidelines	Overall	Republicans	Democrats	Difference (Rep-Dem)
Ask people to stay at home - late April	94%	91%	98%	-7%
Ask people to stay at home - early May	90%	84%	97%	-13%
<b><i>Ask people to stay at home - change</i></b>	<b>-4%</b>	<b>-7%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-6%</b>
Require businesses to close - late April	83%	75%	91%	-16%
Require businesses to close - early May	77%	66%	90%	-24%
<b><i>Require businesses to close - change</i></b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>-9%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-8%</b>
Cancel sports & entertainment events - late April	92%	88%	96%	-8%
Cancel sports & entertainment events - early May	89%	82%	95%	-13%
<b><i>Cancel sports &amp; entertainment events - change</i></b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-5%</b>
Closing K-12 schools - late April	92%	88%	95%	-7%
Closing K-12 schools - early May	88%	82%	95%	-13%
<b><i>Closing K-12 schools - change</i></b>	<b>-4%</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>-6%</b>
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only - late April	91%	87%	96%	-9%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only - early May	87%	79%	95%	-16%
<b><i>Limiting restaurants to carry-out only - change</i></b>	<b>-4%</b>	<b>-8%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-7%</b>
Restricting international travel - late April	95%	95%	95%	0%
Restricting international travel - early May	92%	92%	94%	-2%
<b><i>Restricting international travel - change</i></b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-2%</b>
Restricting domestic travel - late April	85%	81%	90%	-9%
Restricting domestic travel - early May	81%	74%	90%	-16%
<b><i>Restricting domestic travel - late April - change</i></b>	<b>-4%</b>	<b>-7%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>-7%</b>

*National Sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/2020-4/30/2020), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/2020-5/15/2020)*

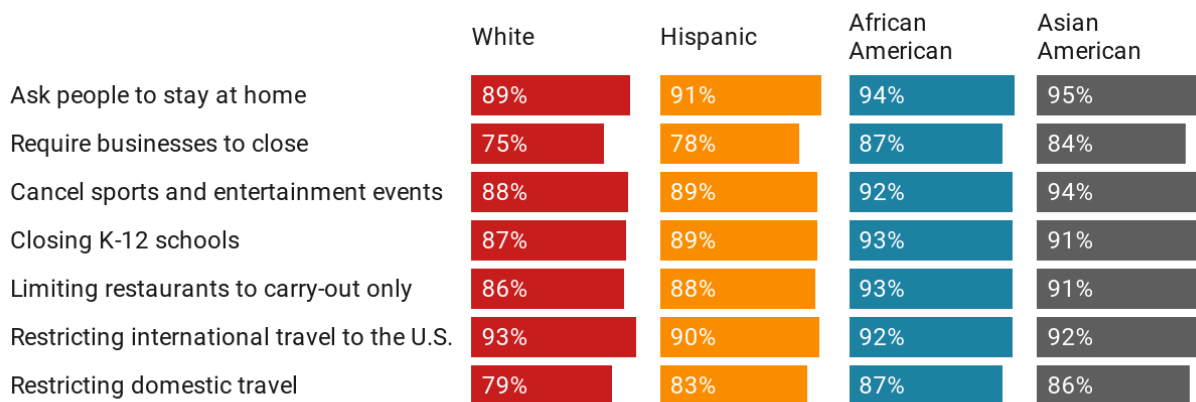


These results suggest that this last issue warrants attention in future survey waves, as it may emerge as a key partisan fault line. That said, it is notable that majorities of both Democrats and Republicans continue to support each of these policies.

Interestingly, while, as noted below, the economic effects of COVID-19 vary greatly across education and income groups, support for these policies is fairly consistent across education and income levels. This may reflect the fact that education and income are associated both with risk of exposure and adverse economic effects.

## Approval for stay-at-home policies across race and ethnicity

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?  
[Percent respondents who say they "strongly approve" or "somewhat approve"]



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

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There is general support across racial/ethnic groups for these policies, with slightly less support among white respondents compared to Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans.

### 3. Approval of Leadership

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**Governors still enjoy higher approval than the president.** But both the governors and the president are seeing some declines in public approval of their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, 58% of respondents approve of their governor's handling of the pandemic (somewhat or strongly), compared to 42% who approve of the president's pandemic response. This represents a six percentage point drop from mid-April for the governors, and a two point drop for President Trump. While it is difficult to offer strong conclusions regarding the reasons for this differential rate of decay, one plausible explanation is an inevitable "regression toward the mean" for governors, who, in our prior wave, were enjoying unprecedented spikes in their approval ratings in nearly every state. The president, in contrast, received only a modest bump in his approval ratings earlier in the crisis. So the governors may simply have had more room to fall back toward their "normal" levels of public support. Future survey waves will help clarify the underlying reasons for these patterns.

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#### Approval of handling the COVID-19 outbreak

*(Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve")*

	Overall	Republicans	Democrats
Donald Trump - late April	42%	83%	15%
Donald Trump - early May	40%	80%	12%
<b>Donald Trump - change</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-3%</b>
State Governor - late April	64%	68%	67%
State Governor - early May	58%	61%	63%
<b>State Governor - change</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>-7%</b>	<b>-4%</b>

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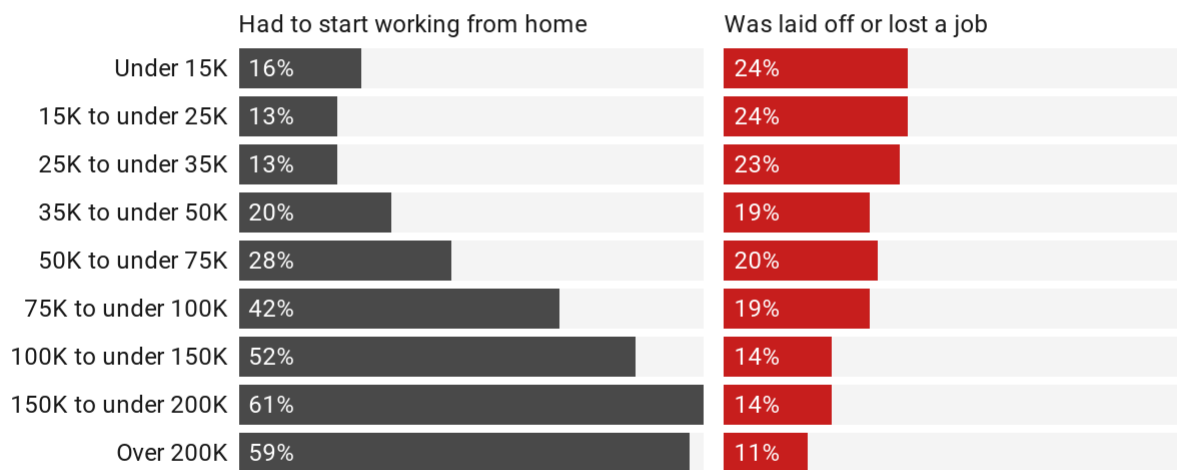
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## 4. Economic Consequences

**There are enormous class differences in the experience of the economic impact of COVID-19.** Lower-income and less-educated Americans are more likely to have lost their jobs. 24% of individuals who earn less than \$35,000 report losing their job; as compared to 13% of those who earn more than \$100,000. In contrast, the more educated and affluent are much more likely to report having had to start working from home. 14% of those earning less than \$35,000 report having had to start working from home; as compared to 56% of those earning more than \$100,000. The dominant pattern seems to be that the affluent and educated have been able to retain their jobs and insulate themselves from the pandemic by working from home. In contrast, the less affluent and educated have been much more likely to lose their jobs or, if still employed, having to continue working outside or their homes, with the associated increased risk of exposure to COVID-19.

### Americans with higher income more likely to start working from home during the pandemic

Have you or someone in your household experienced any of the following as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak?



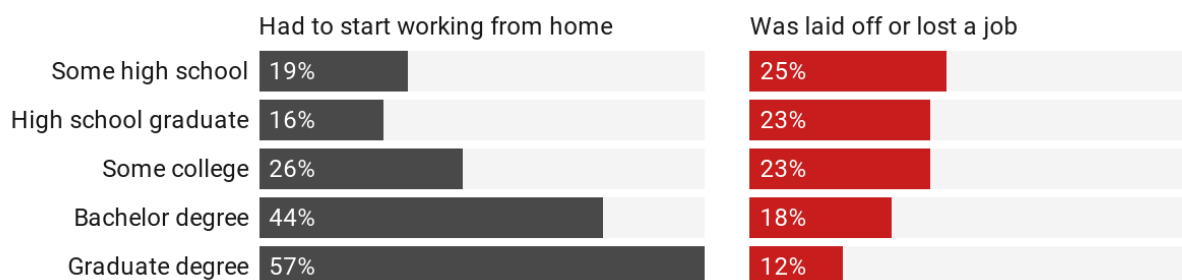
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## Educated Americans less likely to lose their jobs

Have you or someone in your household experienced any of the following as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak?



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

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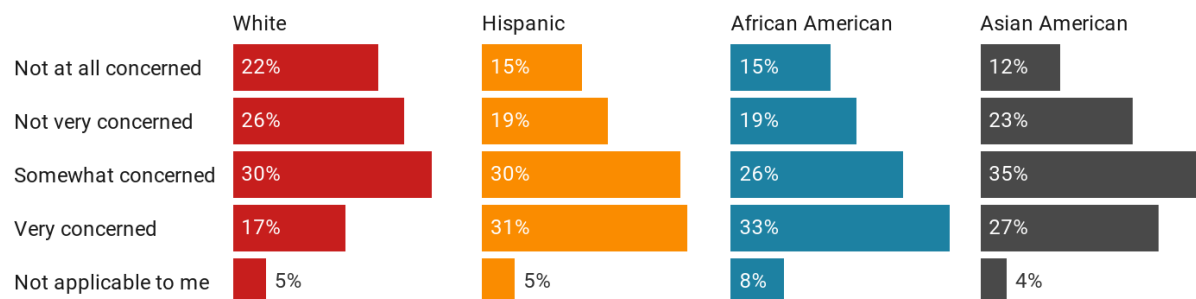
## 5. Health Concerns

**There are enormous racial/ethnic and partisan differences in being concerned about getting the novel coronavirus.** While 25% of white respondents indicate being very concerned about getting the coronavirus themselves, 40% of Hispanic, 42% of African American, and 36% of Asian American respondents indicate that they are very concerned. There are similarly large partisan gaps; 23% of Republicans indicate being very concerned, compared to 39% of Democrats. (This partisan gap is even larger for concern about family members, with 34% compared to 53% being very concerned.)

There are similar gaps in concern regarding being able to receive healthcare, with 17% of white respondents indicating that they are very concerned about being able to receive healthcare, compared to 31% of Hispanic, 33% of African American, and 27% of Asian American respondents. There is also a notable generational divide, with 25% of respondents under 65 indicating being very concerned about receiving health care, as compared to 12% of respondents over 65.

## Health care concerns differ across racial groups

How concerned, if at all, do you currently feel about the following: Being able to receive health care



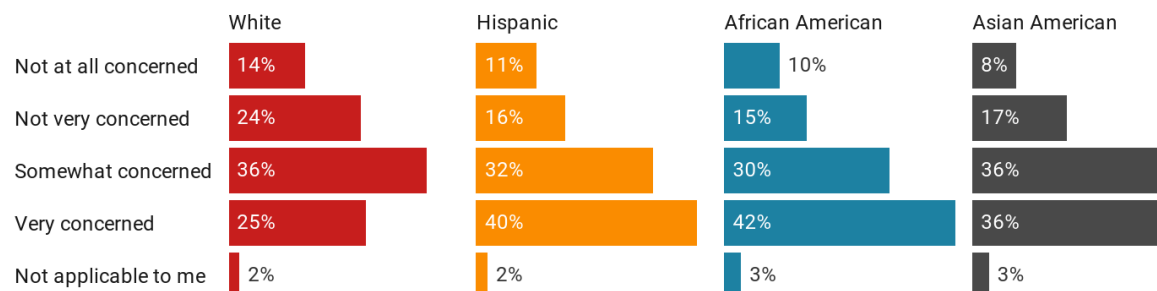
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## Non-White Americans more concerned about getting COVID-19

How concerned, if at all, do you currently feel about the following: Getting coronavirus yourself



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

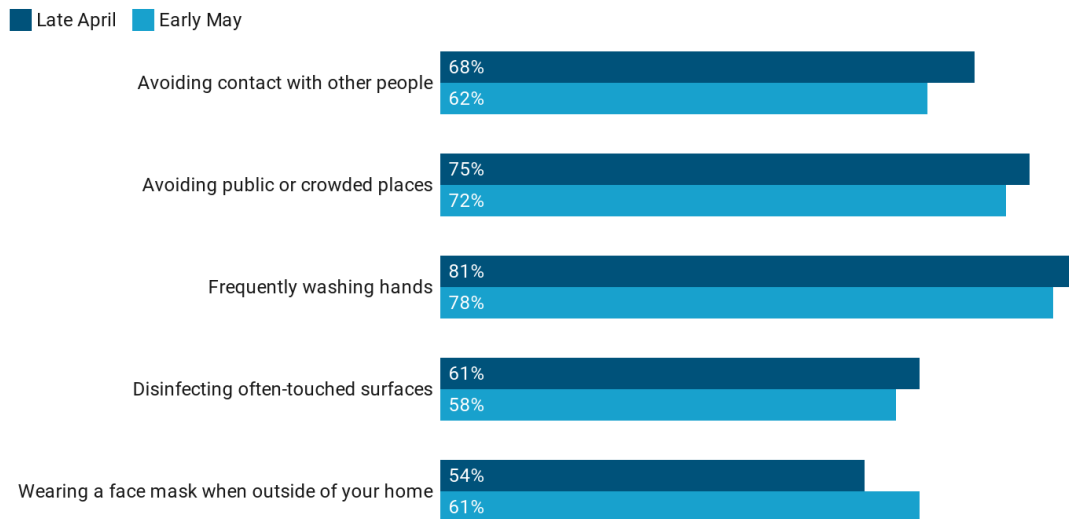
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With one important exception, reported self-compliance with five recommended behaviors has relaxed somewhat (3 to 6 percentage points) since the first wave of the survey. The one exception is mask wearing, where there was a 7% increase.

## Compliance with recommended behavior relaxes in recent weeks

In the last week, how closely did you personally follow the health recommendations listed below?  
[Percent respondents who said "very closely"]



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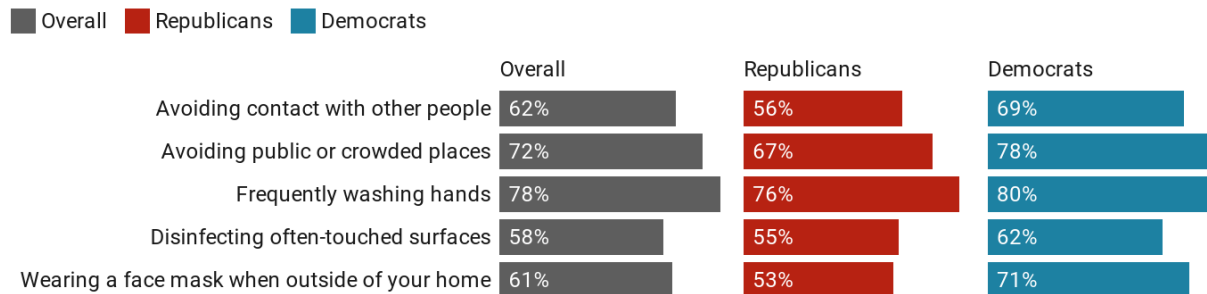
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While majorities of Democrats and Republicans indicate very close compliance with all six behaviors, partisan differences in behavior have also emerged, with Democrats more likely than Republicans to avoid contact with other people (69% versus 56%), to avoid public places (78% versus 67%) and to wear a mask outside the home (71% versus 53%).

## Partisan compliance with health guidelines

In the last week, how closely did you personally follow the health recommendations listed below?  
[Percent respondents who said "very closely"]



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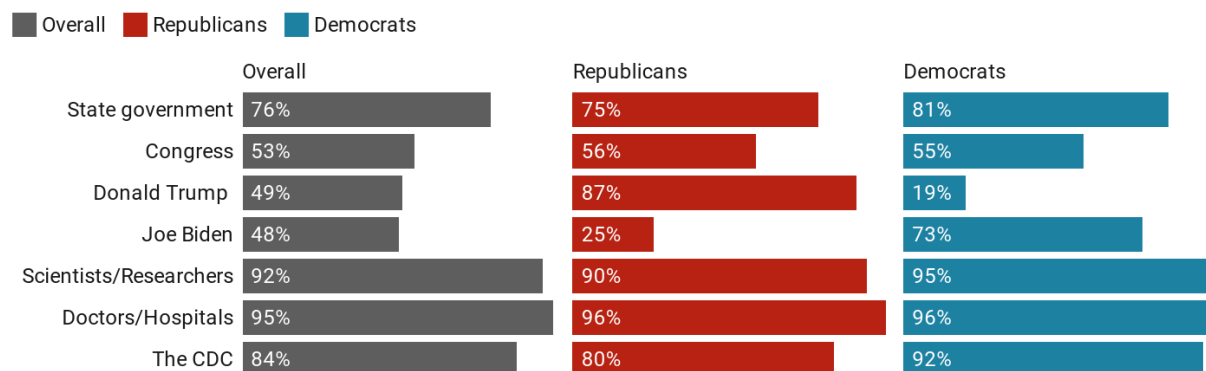
## 6. Trust in Institutions and Leaders

**Most Americans continue to trust scientists and institutions associated with science, at far higher levels than politicians**, with 92% expressing “some” or “a lot” of trust in scientists and researchers and 95% similarly trusting doctors and hospitals. Trust in the CDC is down about 3 points from mid-April, but still very high with 84% of Americans expressing some or a lot of trust in the institution. The contrast with politicians is stark: 53% trust Congress, 49% trust President Trump, and 48% trust presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden. All of these numbers are slightly down from mid-April. **State governments are the exception, with 76% of Americans expressing “some” or “a lot” of trust in their state government.**

**As was true in late April, we see little partisan gap in support for scientists and their institutions.** The largest such gap is 12 percentage points for the CDC (trusted by 92% of Democrats, but only 80% of Republicans). This gap is up from about seven points in late April, mostly due to a five point drop among Republicans. It will be important to monitor these trends going forward, to see if more substantial partisan divides emerge over time.

### Trust in individuals and institutions

How much do you trust the following people and organizations to do the right thing to best handle the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? [Percent respondents who said they had “some” or “a lot” of trust]



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

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We also see very small partisan gaps in support for Congress or respondents' state governments. **However, we predictably find vast partisan chasms in trust for President Trump (87% for Republicans, compared to only 19% for Democrats) and Joe Biden (25% for Republicans and 73% for Democrats).** These gaps have remained nearly constant since late April.

### Trust in individuals and institutions

(Percent respondents who say they have "some" or "a lot" of trust)

	Overall	Republicans	Democrats	Difference (Rep-Dem)
State government - late April	80%	80%	84%	-4%
State government - early May	76%	75%	81%	-6%
<b>State government - change</b>	<b>-4%</b>	<b>-5%</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-2%</b>
Congress - late April	55%	58%	57%	1%
Congress - early May	53%	56%	55%	1%
<b>Congress - change</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Donald Trump - late April	50%	88%	22%	66%
Donald Trump - early May	49%	87%	19%	68%
<b>Donald Trump - change</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Joe Biden - late April	51%	28%	75%	-47%
Joe Biden - early May	48%	25%	73%	-48%
<b>Joe Biden - change</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>1%</b>
Scientists/Researchers - late April	93%	93%	95%	-2%
Scientists/Researchers - early May	92%	90%	95%	-4%
<b>Scientists/Researchers - change</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>-3%</b>
Doctors/Hospitals - late April	96%	97%	97%	0%
Doctors/Hospitals - early May	95%	96%	96%	0%
<b>Doctors/Hospitals - change</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>0%</b>
The CDC - late April	87%	85%	92%	-7%
The CDC - early May	84%	80%	92%	-12%
<b>The CDC - change</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-5%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>-5%</b>

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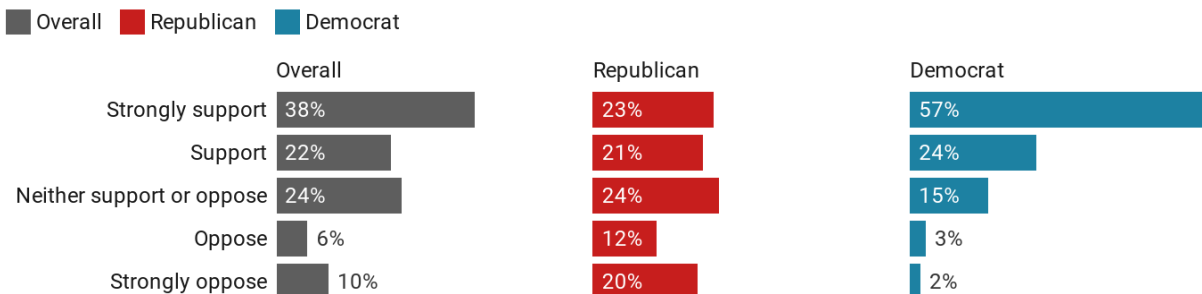
## 7. Voting by Mail

**A strong majority of Americans support making it easier to vote by mail.** Three-in-five (60%) of Americans support making it easier to vote this November by mail, while only 18% oppose (24% neither support or oppose). Overall, 80% of Democrats support making it easier to vote by mail, 5% oppose; for Republicans, 45% support and 32% oppose. Independents, by a large margin, also support greater access to mail balloting (56% support, 14% oppose).

**More Americans — especially Gen Z and Millennials — report being more likely to vote, if mail were an option.** Overall, 36% of adults surveyed indicated that they would be more likely to vote if they had the option to vote for president by mail. This attitude is most pronounced by younger Americans, compared to older ones. We also found significant differences by race, ethnicity, and party affiliation. African Americans (46%), Hispanics (42%) and Asian Americans (41%) report being more likely to vote if mail is an option, compared to 32% of Whites who say the same. Democrats, at 47%, are much more likely to say they would vote under this scenario compared to Republicans (28%) and independents (33%).

### Partisan differences in support for making voting by mail easier

Would you support making it easier to vote in November by mail?



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

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**Nearly half of young voters are not sure how to vote by mail.** Despite an interest in voting by mail, 44% of young voters under 25 and 40% of those between 25 and 44 report that they are not confident that they know how the process works. Less than one-fifth (18%) of those under 25 describe themselves as “very confident.”

We also found that Republicans (43% not confident) are far less confident in this process than Democrats (25% not confident) at this time.