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**THE STATE OF THE NATION:
A 50-STATE COVID-19 SURVEY
REPORT #5: APPROVAL OF EXECUTIVE
PERFORMANCE DURING COVID-19**

USA, July 2020

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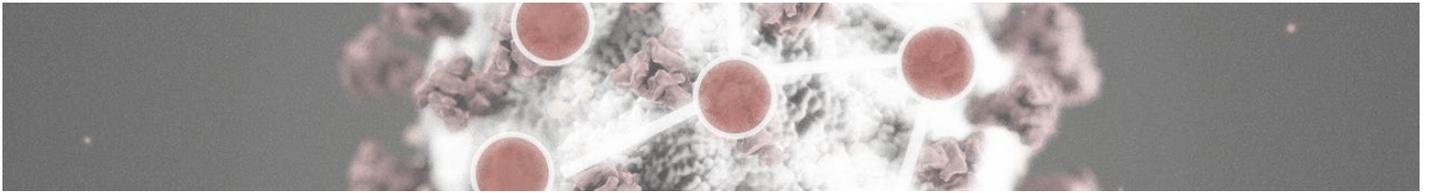
HARVARD
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Northwestern
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Report of July 7, 2020, v.1

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—July 7, 2020

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

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

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From June 12 to 28 we conducted the third wave of a large, 50-state survey, some results of which are presented in this report. This is the fifth report published by the consortium. You can find previous reports online at www.covidstates.org.

Note on methods:

We surveyed 22,501 individuals across all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The survey was conducted on 12-28 June 2020 by PureSpectrum via an online, nonprobability sample, with state-level representative quotas for race/ethnicity, age, and gender (for methodological details on the other waves, see covidstates.org). In addition to balancing on these dimensions, we reweighted our data using demographic characteristics to match the U.S. population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, gender, and education. This was the fifth in a series of surveys we have been conducting since April 2020, examining attitudes and behaviors regarding COVID-19 in the United States.

Note that Wyoming, Alaska, North Dakota and Vermont have relatively smaller sample sizes (under 250 respondents) and therefore larger margins of error. Results concerning those states are marked with an asterisk (*) throughout the report and should be interpreted with caution.

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Or visit us at www.covidstates.org.

1. Approval of the performance of executives in managing COVID-19 response

The initial response to a crisis typically depends on the executive branch of government, because they may act more rapidly than legislative and judicial branches. For COVID-19 in particular, the focal decision-makers have been the president and the governors of the 50 states. In the eyes of the public, how have the president and governors responded? Figure 1 plots the change in approval since April for presidential and gubernatorial responses to COVID-19 for all 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

We find a broad, nearly nationwide pattern of declining executive support. Figure 1 reveals several patterns¹. First, the average governor has experienced a 10-point decline in approval from late April to late June, and in only 5 states—Hawaii, Michigan, New Jersey, South Dakota and Vermont*—have governors’ approval ratings increased since late April. In the remaining states, approval has declined. Second, the President began (at the outset of our series in late April) with a relatively low approval rating, below that of the governor in all 50 states, and has declined further—by 8 points on average. Only one governor—Governor Doug Ducey of Arizona— now has an approval rating in their state lower than that of the president.

The governors in many of the states that were hard hit early in the pandemic in the Northeast, industrial Midwest, and West Coast, have retained consistently high approval ratings throughout the crisis. In these regions we also see large gaps between the generally high approval ratings for the governor—Democratic and Republican alike—and approval of the president. Approval of the president is fairly low across the states, hovering near 50% in Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Wyoming*, North Dakota*, West Virginia, and Kentucky, and lower everywhere else.

Approval for Republican governors is particularly polarized. There are four governors with approval ratings at 70% or above -- all Republicans in Democratic-leaning states (Massachusetts, Maryland, Vermont, and New Hampshire); and ten governors with approval ratings below 45%, where eight are Republicans in Republican-leaning states.

¹ We gratefully acknowledge Brennan Klein for his development of this graphic template and his assistance in adapting it for Figure 1.

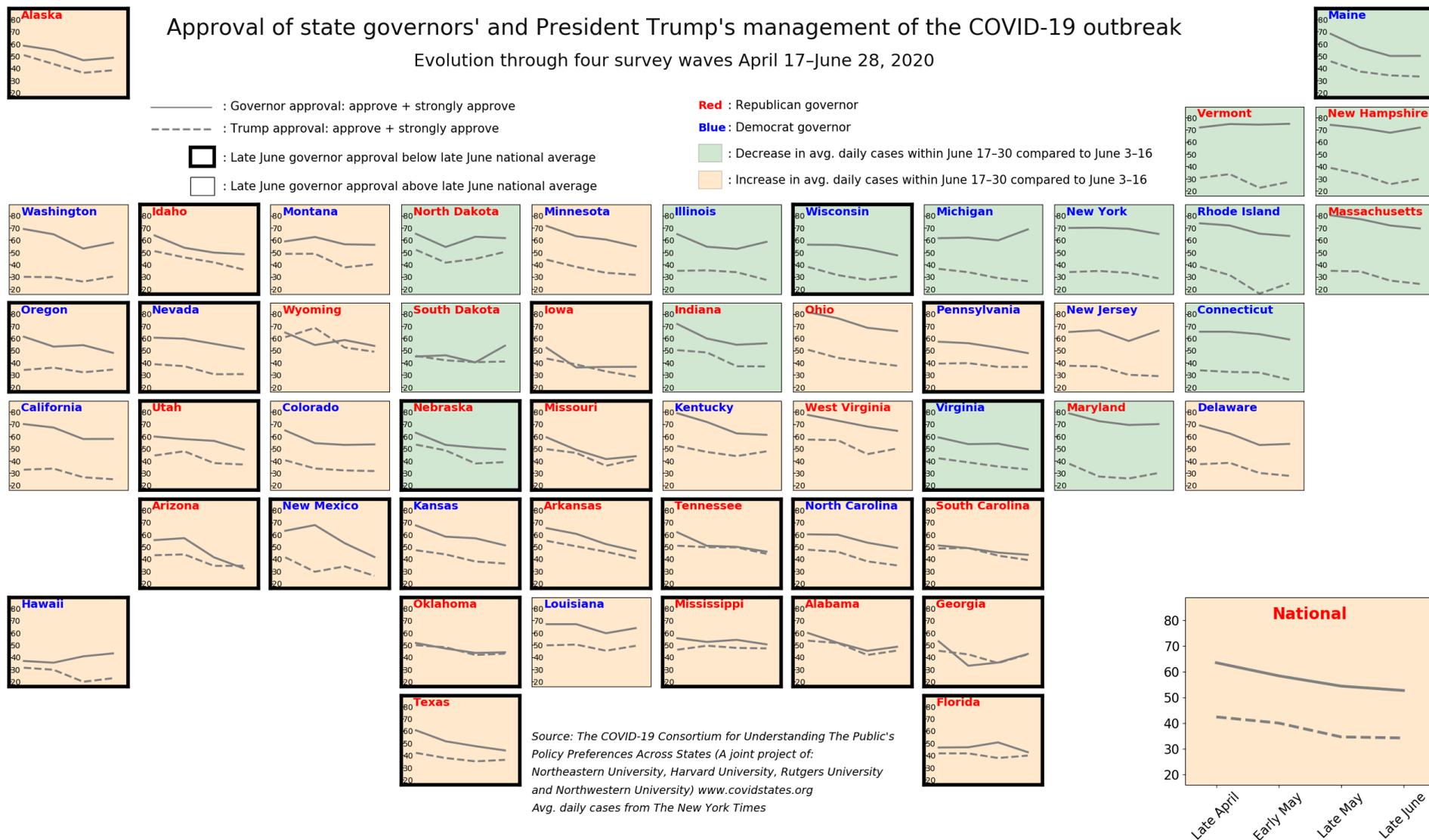


Figure 1: Approval of state governors and President Trump for every state (individual state results in the appendix)

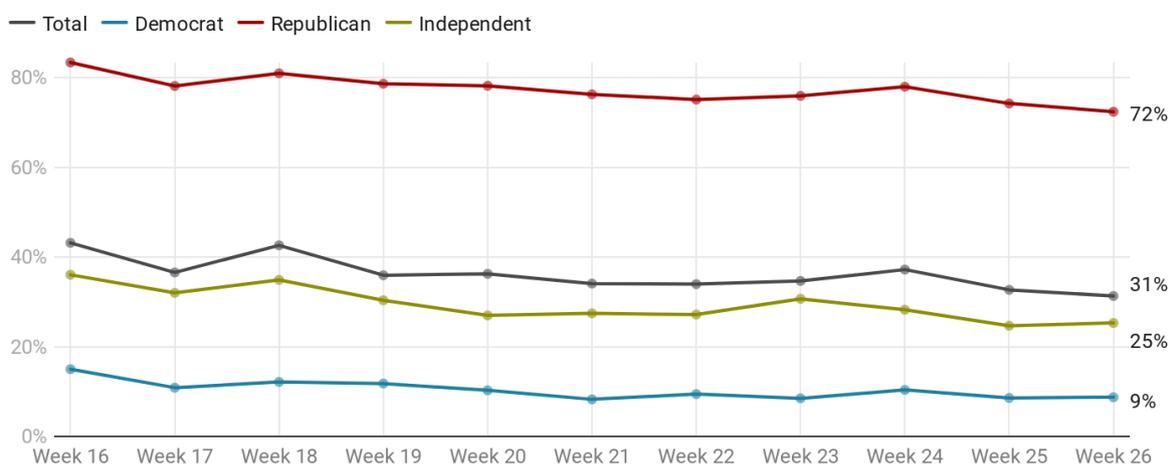
[\(Download high-resolution image\)](#)

2. Approval of President Trump's COVID-19 response

We find near-uniform declines across subgroups in assessments of the president's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Exploration of the erosion of support for the president suggests that this decline is fairly similar across parties (Figure 2), genders (Figure 3), racial and ethnic groups (Figure 4), age (Figure 5), education (Figure 6), and income (Figure 7). The education (Figure 6) breakdowns, however, do reveal some notable differences. All education groups substantially downgraded their assessments of the president's performance on the pandemic except for those with graduate degrees, whose approval rating differs from late-April by only two percentage points. When we compare across education and age groups, we also observe a particularly large drop of approval of Trump's response among respondents ages 65 and older with a high school education or less—from 56% to 44%.

Approval of President Trump's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Trump is handling the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? [Percent respondents who say they "approve" or "strongly approve"]



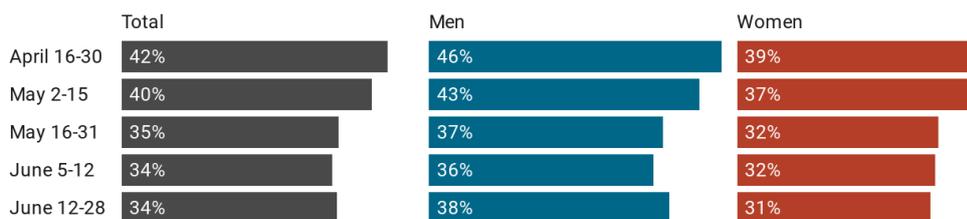
National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/20-4/30/20), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/20-5/15/20), N3 = 18,132 (5/16/20-5/31/20), N4 = 2,090 (6/5/20-6/12/20), N5 = 22,501 (6/12/20-6/28/20)

Source: 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) www.covidstates.org
• Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Approval of President Trump's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic

Gender and approval of the president's handling of COVID-19

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Trump is handling the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? [Percent respondents who say they "approve" or "strongly approve"]



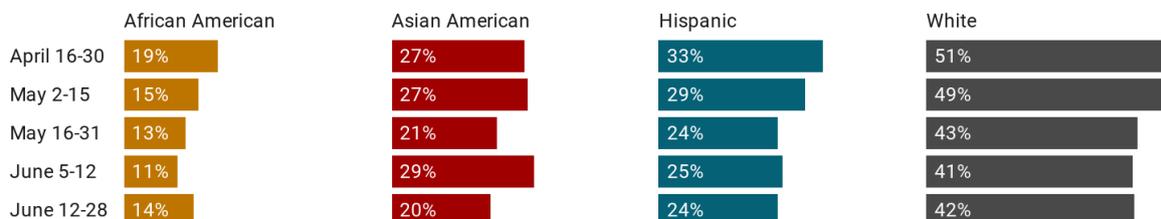
National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/20-4/30/20), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/20-5/15/20), N3 = 18,132 (5/16/20-5/31/20), N4 = 2,090 (6/5/20-6/12/20), N5 = 22,501 (6/12/20-6/28/20)

Source: 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) www.covidstates.org
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Figure 3: Approval of President Trump's handling of COVID-19 among men and women

Race and approval of the president's handling of COVID-19

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Trump is handling the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? [Percent respondents who say they "approve" or "strongly approve"]



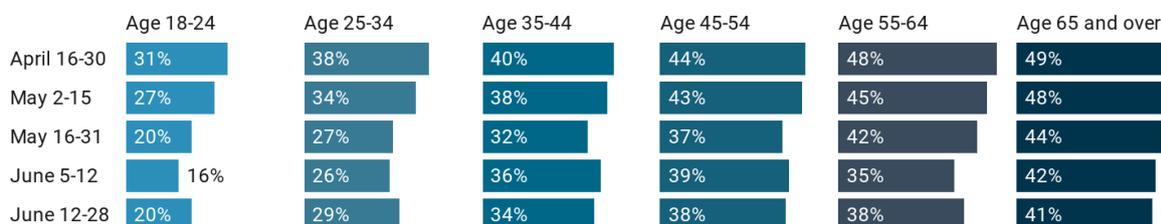
National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/20-4/30/20), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/20-5/15/20), N3 = 18,132 (5/16/20-5/31/20), N4 = 2,090 (6/5/20-6/12/20), N5 = 22,501 (6/12/20-6/28/20)

Source: 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) www.covidstates.org
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Figure 4: Approval of President Trump's handling of COVID-19 across racial and ethnic groups

Age and approval of the president's handling of COVID-19

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Trump is handling the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? [Percent respondents who say they "approve" or "strongly approve"]



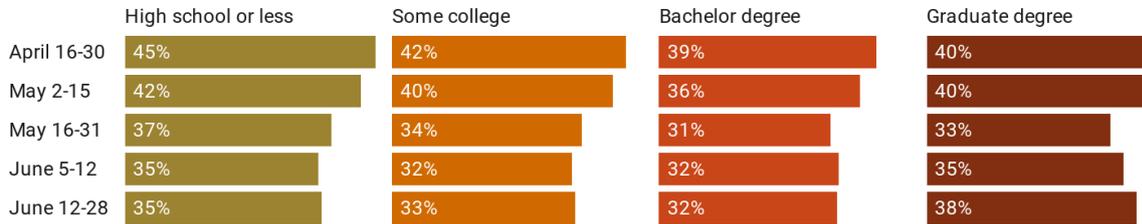
National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/20-4/30/20), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/20-5/15/20), N3 = 18,132 (5/16/20-5/31/20), N4 = 2,090 (6/5/20-6/12/20), N5 = 22,501 (6/12/20-6/28/20)

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Figure 5: Approval of President Trump's handling of COVID-19 across age groups

Education and approval of the president's handling of COVID-19

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Trump is handling the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? [Percent respondents who say they "approve" or "strongly approve"]



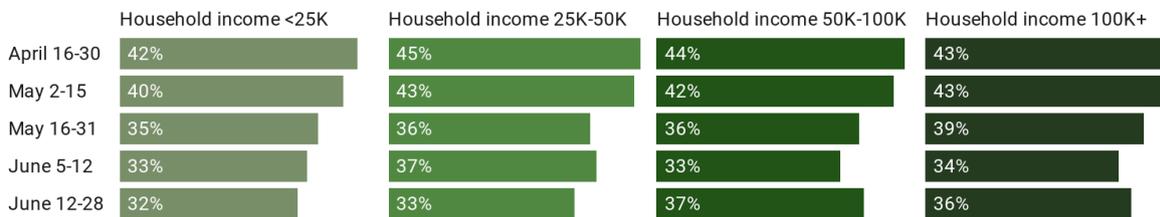
National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/20-4/30/20), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/20-5/15/20), N3 = 18,132 (5/16/20-5/31/20), N4 = 2,090 (6/5/20-6/12/20), N5 = 22,501 (6/12/20-6/28/20)

Source: 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) www.covidstates.org
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Figure 6: Approval of President Trump’s handling of COVID-19 across educational groups

Income and approval of the president's handling of COVID-19

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Trump is handling the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? [Percent respondents who say they "approve" or "strongly approve"]



National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/20-4/30/20), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/20-5/15/20), N3 = 18,132 (5/16/20-5/31/20), N4 = 2,090 (6/5/20-6/12/20), N5 = 22,501 (6/12/20-6/28/20)

Source: 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) www.covidstates.org
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Figure 7: Approval of President Trump’s handling of COVID-19 across household income groups

Focusing on subgroups of white respondents (Figure 8), and looking at the trends across these categories, we note a somewhat greater decline of 10-12 points among lower-income (50k of income or less) and less-educated (some college or less) white respondents, as well as a precipitous drop from 40% to 26% among white respondents ages 18-24.

White Americans' approval of the president's handling of COVID-19

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Trump is handling the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? [Percent respondents who say they "approve" or "strongly approve"]



National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/20-4/30/20), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/20-5/15/20), N3 = 18,132 (5/16/20-5/31/20), N4 = 2,090 (6/5/20-6/12/20), N5 = 22,501 (6/12/20-6/28/20)

Source: 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) www.covidstates.org

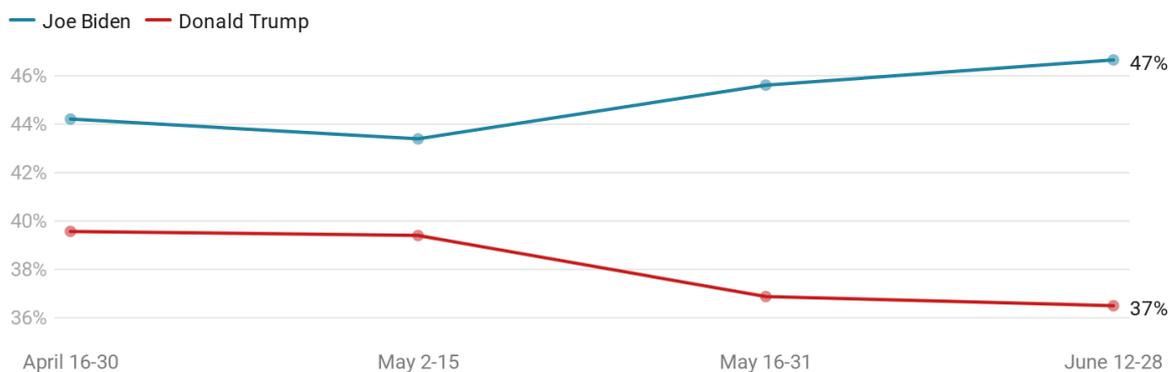
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Figure 8: Approval of President Trump's handling of COVID-19 across subgroups of white respondents

The decline in approval of President Trump’s response to COVID-19 is also associated with an erosion of his electoral position with respect to the November election (Figure 9). President Trump’s deficit in the polls of 5 points in April among voters who report planning on voting in 2020 only lagged slightly behind his margin in 2016. In the just-completed June wave, however, he lags by a much larger margin of 10 points.

2020 presidential candidate preference over time

If the 2020 U.S. presidential election were held today, which candidate would you vote for?
 [Percent of support among respondents who say they will definitely or possibly vote]



National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/20-4/30/20), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/20-5/15/20), N3 = 18,132 (5/16/20-5/31/20), N5 = 22,501 (6/12/20-6/28/20)

Source: 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) www.covidstates.org
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Figure 9: Trump versus Biden from late April to late June

3. Approval of Governor Ducey's COVID-19 response in Arizona

Arizona presents a particularly notable case with respect to approval of executive response to COVID-19. Governor Ducey has the lowest approval for his COVID-19 response of any governor in the country, dropping from a high of 57% in early May to 32% in late June. His case offers a cautionary tale of the rapid interplay of politics, policy, and outcomes in the COVID era. In the spring, Governor Ducey instituted a relatively aggressive timeline for reopening. Barber shops and hair salons opened on May 8th; restaurants on May 11th, the stay at home order lifted on May 15². Further, there was a prohibition of any more-aggressive measures by local governments, such as requirements for mask wearing.

The reopening occurred in the face of strong public opposition. In our late May survey, only 15% of Arizona respondents supported reopening "immediately", and 57% supported reopening between "4 to 6 weeks" or "more than 8 weeks" in the future. Even a majority of Republicans opposed immediate reopening during this entire period, although the increase in partisan polarization is striking (for immediate reopening, a gap between Democrats and Republicans of 7 points in late April, and 34 points in late June). It also took place despite expert guidance from the University of Arizona and Arizona State University indicating that reopening in May would lead to an exponential increase in COVID-19 cases in June³.

In the period since the reopening, the number of daily new cases in Arizona has increased almost tenfold, from 495 (on May 15) to 4877 (on July 1)⁴. On June 29th Governor Ducey ordered a partial re-closing of businesses, such as bars, movie theaters, and gyms⁵. This combination of reopening despite public and expert opposition, and the subsequent explosion of COVID-19 cases, may explain Governor Ducey's low approval.

² <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-health/2020/05/04/arizona-salons-can-reopen-may-8-dine-restaurants-may-11/3080788001/>

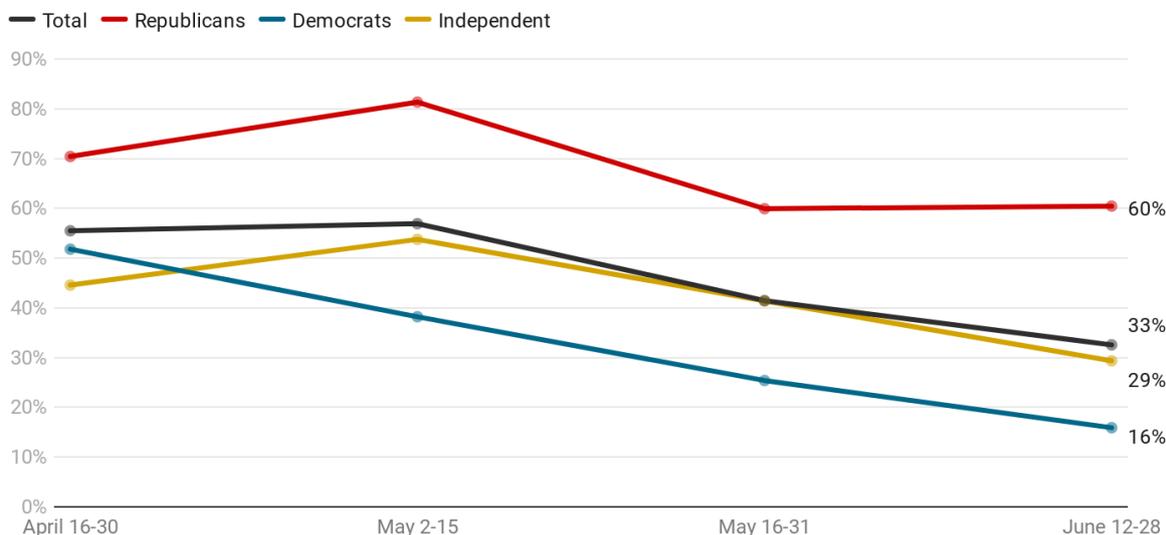
³ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-health/2020/05/05/coronavirus-officials-stop-arizona-state-university-covid-19-modeling-team/5173380002/>

⁴ <https://covidtracking.com/data/state/arizona>

⁵ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-health/2020/06/29/arizona-coronavirus-update-from-governor-doug-ducey-june-29/3280626001/>

Approval for Arizona Governor Ducey's handling of COVID-19

Do you approve or disapprove of the way your state governor is handling the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? [Percent respondents from Arizona who say they "approve" or "strongly approve"]



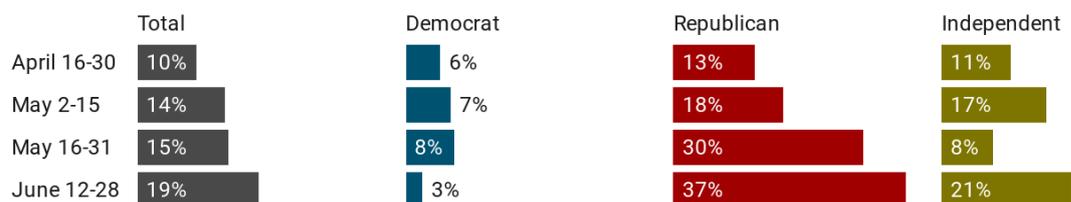
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Figure 10: Approval of Governor Ducey's handling of COVID-19 from April to June

Approval for immediate reopening of the economy in Arizona

When should the country reopen the economy and resume business activity? [Percent respondents from Arizona who say "immediately"]



National sample, N1 = 19,505 (4/16/20-4/30/20), N2 = 20,333 (5/2/20-5/15/20), N3 = 18,132 (5/16/20-5/31/20), N5 = 22,501 (6/12/20-6/28/20)

Source: 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) www.covidstates.org
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Figure 11: Approval for the immediate reopening of Arizona from April to June

4. Appendix: approval data by wave of every governor and President Trump in every state

Table 1 summarizes the approval/disapproval numbers of every governor with respect to COVID-19 from April to late June; and Table 2 the approval/disapproval numbers of President Trump with respect to COVID-19 in every state.

Table 1: Do you approve or disapprove of the way your state governor is handling the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak?

(Approve + Strongly approve, margin of error is in parentheses)

| State | Late April | Early May | Late May | Late June |
|-------|------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| AK | 58 (13) | 55 (10) | 47 (12) | 49 (10) |
| AL | 60 (6) | 52 (6) | 45 (7) | 48 (6) |
| AR | 65 (6) | 61 (7) | 52 (7) | 47 (7) |
| AZ | 56 (6) | 57 (7) | 41 (5) | 32 (5) |
| CA | 70 (5) | 67 (4) | 58 (4) | 58 (4) |
| CO | 65 (5) | 54 (6) | 53 (6) | 54 (6) |
| CT | 65 (6) | 65 (6) | 63 (8) | 59 (6) |
| DE | 69 (7) | 62 (4) | 53 (5) | 54 (6) |
| FL | 46 (5) | 47 (5) | 51 (5) | 43 (4) |
| GA | 53 (5) | 33 (9) | 36 (8) | 43 (5) |
| HI | 37 (8) | 36 (6) | 41 (7) | 43 (6) |
| IA | 52 (6) | 36 (6) | 37 (6) | 37 (6) |
| ID | 64 (6) | 54 (5) | 50 (5) | 48 (6) |
| IL | 65 (5) | 55 (6) | 53 (6) | 59 (5) |
| IN | 72 (5) | 60 (6) | 55 (8) | 56 (6) |
| KS | 68 (6) | 58 (5) | 57 (7) | 51 (7) |
| KY | 79 (4) | 72 (6) | 62 (6) | 61 (6) |
| LA | 67 (6) | 67 (4) | 60 (5) | 64 (6) |
| MA | 80 (4) | 77 (5) | 72 (5) | 70 (5) |
| MD | 79 (5) | 72 (6) | 69 (6) | 70 (5) |
| ME | 68 (6) | 57 (5) | 50 (5) | 50 (6) |
| MI | 62 (5) | 62 (5) | 60 (6) | 69 (5) |

| | | | | |
|----|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| MN | 72 (5) | 63 (5) | 60 (6) | 55 (5) |
| MO | 59 (5) | 49 (7) | 42 (9) | 44 (6) |
| MS | 56 (7) | 52 (7) | 54 (11) | 50 (7) |
| MT | 59 (8) | 63 (5) | 57 (5) | 56 (7) |
| NC | 60 (5) | 60 (8) | 53 (9) | 49 (5) |
| ND | 65 (11) | 54 (8) | 63 (10) | 62 (9) |
| NE | 63 (7) | 53 (5) | 51 (6) | 49 (6) |
| NH | 74 (6) | 72 (5) | 68 (5) | 72 (5) |
| NJ | 65 (5) | 67 (10) | 58 (11) | 66 (5) |
| NM | 63 (13) | 68 (6) | 53 (8) | 42 (9) |
| NV | 60 (6) | 60 (4) | 56 (4) | 51 (6) |
| NY | 70 (4) | 70 (4) | 69 (5) | 65 (4) |
| OH | 81 (4) | 76 (7) | 69 (7) | 66 (4) |
| OK | 52 (6) | 47 (5) | 44 (5) | 44 (7) |
| OR | 61 (5) | 53 (4) | 54 (5) | 48 (6) |
| PA | 57 (5) | 56 (6) | 52 (9) | 48 (4) |
| RI | 74 (6) | 72 (6) | 65 (6) | 63 (6) |
| SC | 51 (6) | 49 (8) | 45 (9) | 44 (6) |
| SD | 45 (10) | 46 (6) | 40 (6) | 54 (7) |
| TN | 62 (5) | 51 (5) | 50 (5) | 46 (6) |
| TX | 60 (5) | 52 (7) | 48 (8) | 44 (4) |
| UT | 60 (6) | 58 (5) | 56 (5) | 49 (7) |
| VA | 59 (5) | 54 (7) | 54 (8) | 50 (5) |
| VT | 72 (8) | 75 (5) | 74 (5) | 75 (7) |
| WA | 69 (6) | 65 (5) | 53 (6) | 58 (6) |
| WI | 56 (5) | 56 (6) | 53 (8) | 48 (5) |
| WV | 78 (5) | 73 (13) | 68 (11) | 65 (7) |
| WY | 65 (10) | 54 (10) | 59 (12) | 54 (10) |

Table 2: Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Trump is handling the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak?

(Approve + Strongly approve, margin of error is in parentheses)

| State | Late April | Early May | Late May | Late June |
|-------|------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| AK | 51 (13) | 44 (10) | 36 (12) | 38 (9) |
| AL | 54 (6) | 52 (6) | 42 (7) | 45 (6) |
| AR | 55 (6) | 50 (7) | 46 (7) | 40 (7) |
| AZ | 43 (6) | 44 (8) | 34 (5) | 34 (5) |
| CA | 33 (5) | 34 (4) | 27 (4) | 25 (4) |
| CO | 40 (5) | 34 (5) | 32 (5) | 32 (5) |
| CT | 34 (6) | 32 (6) | 32 (8) | 26 (5) |
| DE | 37 (11) | 38 (7) | 30 (10) | 28 (6) |
| FL | 42 (5) | 42 (4) | 38 (5) | 40 (4) |
| GA | 45 (5) | 42 (5) | 35 (5) | 42 (5) |
| HI | 31 (7) | 30 (8) | 20 (6) | 23 (5) |
| IA | 43 (6) | 39 (6) | 33 (7) | 29 (6) |
| ID | 51 (7) | 46 (6) | 42 (6) | 36 (6) |
| IL | 35 (5) | 35 (5) | 34 (4) | 28 (4) |
| IN | 50 (6) | 48 (6) | 37 (6) | 37 (5) |
| KS | 47 (6) | 44 (6) | 38 (8) | 36 (6) |
| KY | 52 (5) | 47 (6) | 44 (7) | 48 (6) |
| LA | 50 (6) | 50 (7) | 45 (6) | 49 (7) |
| MA | 35 (5) | 34 (5) | 27 (5) | 24 (5) |
| MD | 38 (6) | 27 (5) | 26 (5) | 30 (5) |
| ME | 46 (6) | 37 (6) | 34 (6) | 33 (6) |
| MI | 36 (5) | 34 (5) | 29 (5) | 26 (5) |
| MN | 44 (5) | 38 (6) | 33 (6) | 32 (5) |
| MO | 50 (5) | 46 (5) | 36 (5) | 41 (5) |
| MS | 46 (7) | 49 (7) | 48 (9) | 47 (7) |
| MT | 49 (8) | 49 (8) | 38 (11) | 40 (7) |
| NC | 48 (5) | 46 (5) | 38 (5) | 35 (5) |
| ND | 52 (11) | 42 (8) | 45 (9) | 50 (9) |
| NE | 53 (7) | 49 (8) | 38 (10) | 39 (6) |
| NH | 39 (6) | 34 (5) | 26 (5) | 30 (5) |

| | | | | |
|----|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| NJ | 38 (5) | 37 (5) | 30 (4) | 29 (5) |
| NM | 41 (13) | 30 (10) | 34 (10) | 26 (8) |
| NV | 39 (6) | 37 (6) | 31 (7) | 31 (6) |
| NY | 34 (5) | 35 (4) | 33 (4) | 29 (4) |
| OH | 51 (5) | 44 (5) | 41 (5) | 38 (4) |
| OK | 50 (6) | 48 (7) | 42 (7) | 43 (7) |
| OR | 34 (5) | 36 (5) | 32 (5) | 34 (5) |
| PA | 39 (5) | 40 (4) | 37 (4) | 37 (4) |
| RI | 38 (7) | 31 (6) | 16 (7) | 25 (6) |
| SC | 49 (6) | 49 (6) | 43 (6) | 39 (6) |
| SD | 46 (10) | 42 (8) | 40 (9) | 41 (7) |
| TN | 51 (6) | 50 (6) | 50 (6) | 44 (6) |
| TX | 42 (5) | 38 (5) | 35 (5) | 36 (4) |
| UT | 44 (6) | 48 (7) | 38 (8) | 37 (7) |
| VA | 42 (5) | 39 (5) | 35 (5) | 33 (5) |
| VT | 31 (8) | 34 (7) | 22 (7) | 27 (7) |
| WA | 30 (6) | 30 (5) | 26 (4) | 30 (5) |
| WI | 38 (5) | 31 (5) | 28 (5) | 30 (5) |
| WV | 57 (6) | 57 (7) | 46 (9) | 50 (7) |
| WY | 61 (11) | 69 (12) | 52 (11) | 49 (10) |