

# THE PUBLIC'S JUDGMENT OF THEIR STATE'S PERFORMANCE DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

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**POLITICO**



**HARVARD**  
**T.H. CHAN**  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## PART I: TO OPEN OR NOT TO OPEN IN YOUR STATE

A new poll by POLITICO and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health finds Americans divided on the issue of opening businesses in their state in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. Nearly half (46%) believe that their state's governor should allow non-essential businesses to be open in their state in the next month to reduce financial difficulties for businesses and people. About half (51%) think non-essential businesses in their state should be closed until the spread of COVID-19 has been contained.

The poll was conducted after several state governors announced that they were allowing many businesses in their states to open and during the week after President Trump's nationally televised Lincoln Memorial town hall (May 3, 2020) in which he encouraged states to open.

What to date has been mostly a public health issue has taken on a partisan political dimension. The poll shows a sharp partisan division on the issue. As shown in Table 1, about six in ten Republicans (61%) believe their state's governor should allow non-essential businesses to be open, while more than two-thirds of Democrats (69%) think such businesses should be closed until the spread of the virus is contained.

Six in ten owners and managers of small- or medium-sized businesses (60%) favor non-essential businesses being open in their state. In addition, of those whose households have experienced forms of employment loss (lost their job or business, were furloughed, had their wages or hours cut, or took mandatory unpaid leave) since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, a majority (52%) favor businesses being open in the next month. In contrast, a majority (56%) of those whose households have not experienced employment loss favor non-essential businesses remaining closed.

**Table 1. The Public’s Views on Whether Non-Essential Businesses in Their State Should Be Allowed to Open or Be Closed, by Subgroups (in percent)**

	Should allow non-essential businesses in your state to be open	Should be closed until the spread of COVID-19 has been contained
Total	46	51
By party		
Republican	61	36
Democrat	29	69
Independent	52	44
By small-medium business owner-manager		
Yes	60	33
No	44	53
By employment loss in household*		
Yes	52	46
No	41	56
By perceived seriousness of COVID-19 outbreak in your state		
Not serious problem	78	21
Serious problem	37	60
By region:		
Northeast	44	54
Midwest	54	42
South	44	53
West	44	54

Note: \* = Those who said that since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak in their state, they or someone else in their household lost their job, their business, been furloughed, had wages or hours reduced, or taken mandatory unpaid leave.

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, The Public’s Judgment of Their State’s Performance During the COVID-19 Outbreak, May 5 – 10, 2020. Base: U.S. adults.

Americans’ position on this issue also reflects their perception of the seriousness of the COVID-19 outbreak in their own state. Overall, more than three-fourths (78%) of the public believes that the outbreak in their state is a serious problem, while 22% believe it is not a serious problem. Of those who do not consider the outbreak serious, more than three-fourths (78%) favor opening, while 60% of those who believe the outbreak is serious in their state want to remain closed.

One geographical region stands out in the poll’s findings on the issue. A majority (54%) of adults living in the Midwest favor opening, compared with 44% in other regions.

## PART II: ASSESSING THE RESPONSE OF YOUR STATE TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

The new poll by POLITICO and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health also finds that while a large majority of Americans approve of their state governor’s performance on the COVID-19 outbreak overall and on several specifics, at least one in four disapprove of their governor’s performance on seven specifics. These issues relate not only to the governor’s performance, but also to the overall state response.

As shown in Table 2, more than three in ten disapprove of their state governor’s performance on ensuring that there are enough diagnostic tests for COVID-19 (34%) and face masks for people in their state (31%) and helping small- and medium-sized businesses in their state that have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak (31%). In addition, at least one in four disapprove of their state governor’s performance helping individuals in their state who have been hurt financially by the outbreak (28%), providing health insurance or other financial assistance to people in their state who need medical care (27%), ensuring that there is enough protective clothing for health workers dealing with COVID-19 (27%), and keeping nursing homes safe during the COVID-19 outbreak in their state (25%).

**Table 2. The Public’s Rating of Their Own State Governor’s Performance  
During the COVID-19 Outbreak (in percent)**

	Approve	Disapprove
Overall handling of and response to the COVID outbreak in the state where you live	78	20
Providing useful information to the public in your state about how to deal with COVID-19	84	16
Helping hospitals deal with the number of COVID-19 cases in your state	82	16
Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in your state	78	21
Keeping nursing homes safe during the COVID-19 outbreak in your state	71	25
Ensuring that there is enough protective clothing for health workers dealing with COVID-19 in your state	69	27
Providing health insurance or other financial assistance to people in your state who need medical care	69	27
Helping individuals in your state who have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak.	69	28
Ensuring that there are enough face masks for people in your state	66	31
Helping small- and medium-sized businesses in your state that have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak	64	31
Ensuring that there are enough diagnostic tests for COVID-19 in your state	63	34

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, The Public’s Judgment of Their State’s Performance During the COVID-19 Outbreak, May 5 – 10, 2020. Base: U.S. adults.

## PART II: AFRICAN AMERICANS' CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR STATE'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

A substantial proportion of African Americans are critical of their state governor's performance on various specifics in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. As shown in Table 3, one-third or more African Americans disapprove of their governor's performance on ensuring that there are enough face masks for people (41%) and enough diagnostic tests for COVID-19 in their state (40%), helping small- and medium-sized businesses (39%) and individuals (38%) in their state who have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak, providing health insurance or other financial assistance to people in their state who need medical care (35%), ensuring that there is enough protective clothing for health workers dealing with COVID-19 in their state (33%).

**Table 3. Public Disapproval of Their Own State Governor's Performance During the COVID-19 Outbreak, Total and Among African Americans**

	<b>% disapprove</b>	
	Total public	African Americans
Ensuring that there are enough diagnostic tests for COVID-19 in your state	34	40
Helping small- and medium-sized businesses in your state that have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak	31	39
Ensuring that there are enough face masks for people in your state	31	41
Helping individuals in your state who have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak.	28	38
Providing health insurance or other financial assistance to people in your state who need medical care	27	35
Ensuring that there is enough protective clothing for health workers dealing with COVID-19 in your state	27	33
Keeping nursing homes safe during the COVID-19 outbreak in your state	25	28

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, The Public's Judgment of Their State's Performance During the COVID-19 Outbreak,, May 5 – 10, 2020. Base: U.S. adults

## METHODOLOGY

The results are based on polling conducted by *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Representatives of the two organizations worked closely to develop the survey questionnaires and analyze the results of the polls. *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health paid for the surveys and related expenses.

The project team was led by Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Joanne Kenen, Executive Editor, Health Care at *Politico/Politico Pro*. Harvard research team also included John M. Benson.

Interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,007 randomly selected adults, ages 18 and older, via telephone (including cell phones and landlines) by SSRS of Glen Mills, Pennsylvania. The interviewing period was May 5 – 10, 2020. The data were weighted to reflect the demographics of the national adult population as described by the U.S. Census.

When interpreting these findings, one should recognize that all surveys are subject to sampling error. Results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole U.S. adult population had been interviewed. The margin of error for the full sample is  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases and for variations in probability of selection within and across households, sample data are weighted by household size, cell phone/landline use and demographics (sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, and region) to reflect the true population. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

***Politico*/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Poll**

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This survey was conducted for *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health via telephone by SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone (cell phone and landline) **May 5 – 10, 2020**, among a nationally representative sample of **1,007 U.S. adults**.

The margin of error for total respondents is  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

More information about SSRS can be obtained by visiting [www.ssrs.com](http://www.ssrs.com).

POLQ1. Do you think the outbreak of COVID-19 in your state is a serious problem, or not a serious problem?

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Serious problem	78	88	63	77
Not a serious problem	22	11	37	22
Don't know/Refused	*	1	*	1

POLQ2. Do you approve or disapprove of your state governor’s overall handling of and response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the state where you live?

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	78	84	77	74
Disapprove	20	15	21	25
Don't know/Refused	2	1	2	1

POLQ3. Do you approve or disapprove of your state governor's handling of each of the following? How about...? (IF NECESSARY: Do you approve or disapprove of your state governor's handling of...?)

- a. Providing useful information to the public in your state about how to deal with COVID-19

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	84	87	87	79
Disapprove	16	13	12	20
Don't know/Refused	*	-	1	1

- b. Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in your state

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	78	79	82	75
Disapprove	21	21	17	24
Don't know/Refused	1	-	1	1

- c. Providing health insurance or other financial assistance to people in your state who need medical care

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	69	70	75	64
Disapprove	27	26	21	31
Don't know/Refused	4	4	4	5

- d. Ensuring that there are enough diagnostic tests for COVID-19 in your state

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	63	64	72	58
Disapprove	34	34	24	40
Don't know/Refused	3	2	4	2

- e. Ensuring that there is enough protective clothing for health workers dealing with COVID-19 in your state

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	69	74	69	64
Disapprove	27	24	26	32
Don't know/Refused	4	2	5	4

- f. Ensuring that there are enough face masks for people in your state

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	66	68	72	61
Disapprove	31	31	26	36
Don't know/Refused	3	1	2	3

g. Helping hospitals deal with the number of COVID-19 cases in your state

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	82	83	85	78
Disapprove	16	16	13	17
Don't know/Refused	2	1	2	5

h. Keeping nursing homes safe during the COVID-19 outbreak in your state

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	71	72	74	68
Disapprove	25	25	23	28
Don't know/Refused	4	3	3	4

i. Helping individuals in your state who have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	69	70	74	62
Disapprove	28	26	23	35
Don't know/Refused	3	4	3	3

j. Helping small and medium-sized businesses in your state that have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	64	66	66	62
Disapprove	31	30	30	32
Don't know/Refused	5	4	4	6

**POLQ3 (a-j) Approve Summary Table  
Based on Total Respondents**

**% approve**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Providing useful information to the public in your state about how to deal with COVID-19	84	87	87	79
Helping hospitals deal with the number of COVID-19 cases in your state	82	83	85	78
Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in your state	78	79	82	75
Keeping nursing homes safe during the COVID-19 outbreak in your state	71	72	74	68
Providing health insurance or other financial assistance to people in your state who need medical care	69	70	75	64
Ensuring that there is enough protective clothing for health workers dealing with COVID-19 in your state	69	74	69	64
Helping individuals in your state who have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak	69	74	70	62
Ensuring that there are enough face masks for people in your state	66	68	72	61
Helping small and medium-sized businesses in your state that have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak	64	66	66	62
Ensuring that there are enough diagnostic tests for COVID-19 in your state	63	64	72	58

**POLQ3 (a-j) Disapprove Summary Table  
Based on Total Respondents**

**% disapprove**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Ensuring that there are enough diagnostic tests for COVID-19 in your state	34	34	24	40
Helping small and medium-sized businesses in your state that have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak	31	30	30	32
Ensuring that there are enough face masks for people in your state	31	31	26	36
Helping individuals in your state who have been hurt financially by the COVID-19 outbreak	28	23	26	35
Providing health insurance or other financial assistance to people in your state who need medical care	27	26	21	31
Ensuring that there is enough protective clothing for health workers dealing with COVID-19 in your state	27	24	26	32
Keeping nursing homes safe during the COVID-19 outbreak in your state	25	25	23	28
Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in your state	21	21	17	24
Helping hospitals deal with the number of COVID-19 cases in your state	16	16	13	17
Providing useful information to the public in your state about how to deal with COVID-19	16	13	12	20

POLQ4. Now thinking about your state's health department, do you approve or disapprove of its overall handling of and response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the state where you live?

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	79	82	81	77
Disapprove	19	17	18	21
Don't know/Refused	2	1	1	2

POLQ5. In the next month, do you think your state’s governor should allow non-essential businesses to be open in your state to reduce financial difficulties for businesses and people, or should non-essential businesses in your state be closed until the spread of COVID-19 has been contained?

*For balance, in half of the sample the options were read in the opposite order: “In the next month, do you think non-essential businesses in your state should be closed until the spread of COVID-19 has been contained, or should your state’s governor allow non-essential businesses to be open in your state to reduce financial difficulties for businesses and people?”*

POLQ5a. Do you feel this way strongly or not strongly?

**POLQ5/POLQ5a Combo Table  
Based on Total Respondents**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
<b>Should allow non-essential businesses in your state to be open</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>52</b>
Feel strongly	37	21	55	42
Do not feel strongly	9	8	6	10
<b>Should be closed until the spread of COVID-19 has been contained</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>
Feel strongly	40	55	29	33
Do not feel strongly	11	14	7	11
<b>Depends (vol)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Don’t know/Refused</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

POLQ6. Do you approve or disapprove of your state governor’s position on this issue?

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dems</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Approve	70	75	69	65
Disapprove	28	22	29	34
Don’t know/Refused	2	3	2	1

POLQ7. Have you or anyone else in your household received any financial assistance from the federal or state government having to do with the COVID-19 outbreak, or not?

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Yes	50	50	53	48
No	50	49	47	51
Don't know/Refused	*	1	*	1

POLQ8. Are you an owner or manager of a small or medium-sized business, or not?

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Yes	12	7	16	13
No	88	93	84	87
Don't know/Refused	-	-	-	-

**(Asked of owners/managers of small- or medium-sized businesses; n=128)**

POLQ9. Has your business received any special help from the federal or state government having to do with the COVID-19 outbreak, or not?

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Yes	26	<i>Not enough cases for analysis (n&lt;50)</i>		
No	73			
Don't know/Refused	1			

POLQ11. Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak in your state, have you or anyone else in your household lost their job, their business, been furloughed, had their wages or hours reduced, or taken mandatory unpaid leave, or not?

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Yes	46	42	42	52
No	54	58	58	47
Don't know/Refused	-	-	-	1