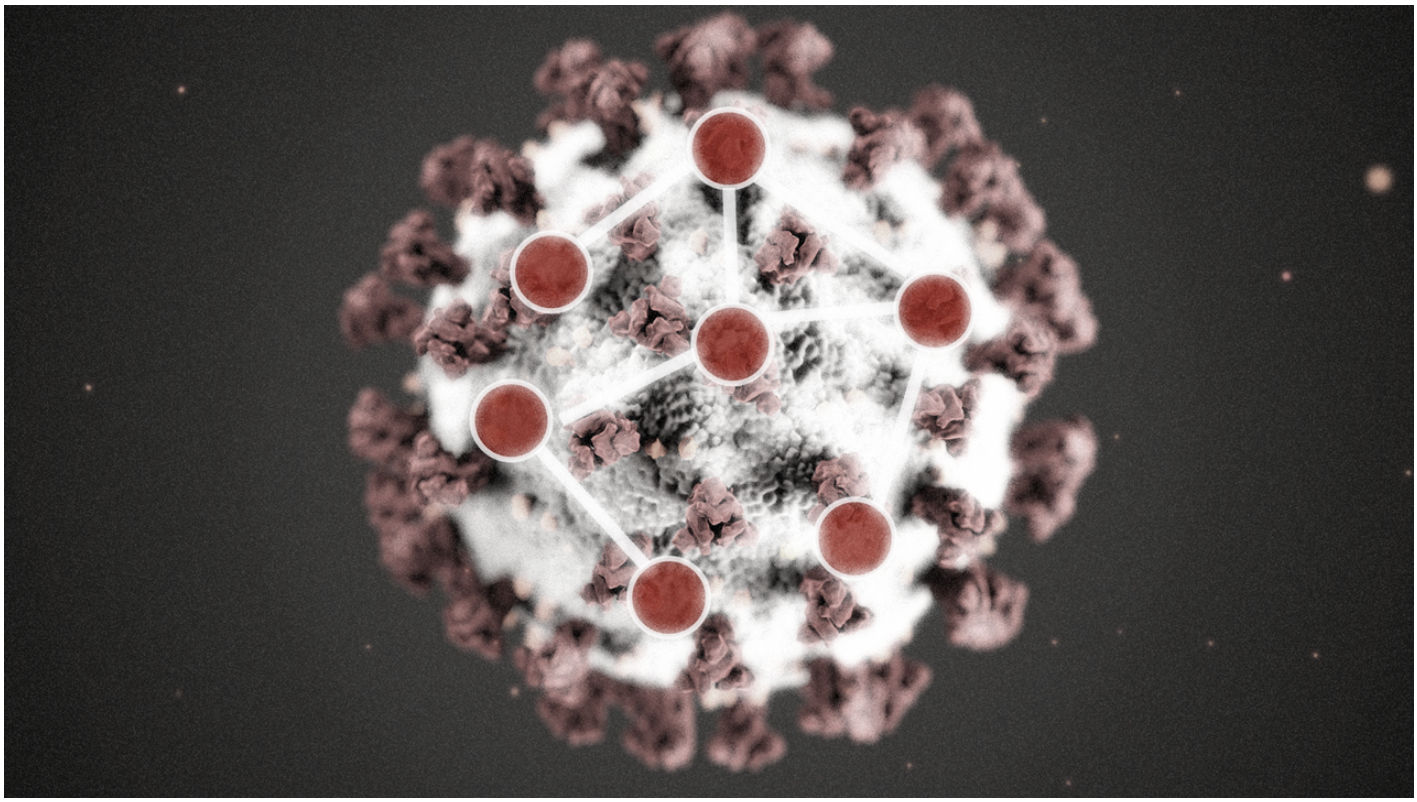

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THE COVID STATES PROJECT:
A 50-STATE COVID-19 SURVEY
REPORT #44: THE TRAJECTORY OF HEALTH-RELATED BEHAVIORS IN MASSACHUSETTS

USA, March 2021

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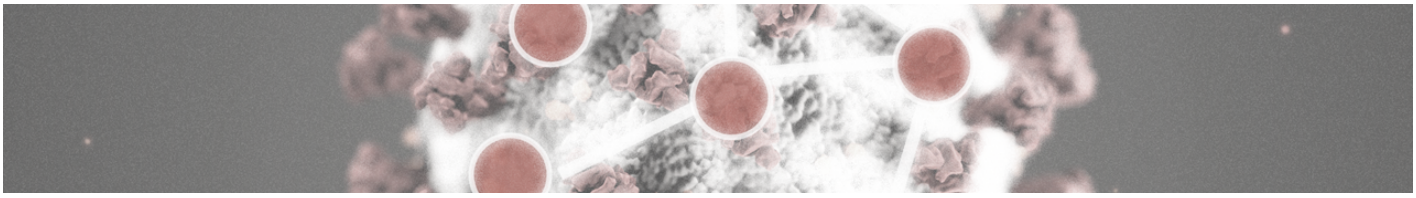

Report of March 12, 2021, v.1

The COVID States Project

***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

Authors: David Lazer (Northeastern University); Jennifer Lin (Northwestern University); Matthew A. Baum (Harvard University); Roy H. Perlis (Harvard Medical School); Mauricio Santillana (Harvard Medical School); James Druckman (Northwestern University); Katherine Ognyanova (Rutgers University); Jon Green (Northeastern University); Matthew Simonson (Northeastern University); Alexi Quintana (Northeastern University); Adina Gitomer (Northeastern University), and Ata A. Uslu (Northeastern University)

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COVER MEMO

Summary Memo — March 12, 2021

The COVID States Project

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

Partners: Northeastern University, Harvard University/Harvard Medical School, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

Authors: Jennifer Lin (Northwestern University); Katherine Ognyanova (Rutgers University); James Druckman (Northwestern University); Roy H. Perlis (Harvard Medical School); Mauricio Santillana (Harvard Medical School); David Lazer (Northeastern University); Kirsten Huh (Northwestern University); Louis Yang (Northwestern University); David Grow (Northwestern University); Samarth Arul, (Adlai E. Stevenson High School); Alexi Quintana (Northeastern University); Matthew A. Baum (Harvard University); Adina Gitomer (Northeastern University); Matthew Simonson (Northeastern University); Jon Green (Northeastern University), and Ata A. Uslu (Northeastern University)

From April 2020 through January 2021, we conducted multiple waves of a large, 50-state survey, some results of which are presented here. You can find previous reports online at covidstates.org.

Note on methods:

Over 16 survey waves, we polled 239,012 individuals across all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The data were collected between April and March 2021 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 to match the U.S. population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, gender, education, and living in urban, suburban, or rural areas.

The periods covered by each of the 9 survey waves used in this report are as follows: Late April Wave: 4/17/20-4/26/20, Early May Wave: 5/2/20-5/15/20, Late May Wave: 5/16/20-5/31/20, Late June Wave: 6/12/20-6/28/20, Late July Wave: 7/10/20-7/26/20, August Wave: 8/7/20-8/26/20, September Wave: 9/4/20-9/27/20, October Wave: 10/2/20-10/31/20, November Wave: 11/1/20-11/23/20, December/January Wave 12/16/20- 1/11/21, and February Wave: 2/5/21 - 3/1/21.

The trajectory of health-related behaviors in Massachusetts

In this report, we analyze the trajectory of the pandemic in Massachusetts, from late April 2020 to March 1, 2021, examining public health behaviors and approval of Governor Charlie Baker's handling of the crisis. For information on other states, please consult our interactive dashboard.

Health behaviors

For most social distancing behaviors, people in Massachusetts were at their strictest adherence in the spring, followed by a gradual relaxation until the early fall (see Figure 1). Perhaps because of the increase of cases through the fall, social distancing became stricter in late fall and carrying into winter. For example, the percentage of people reporting having been in a room with other individuals not from their household doubled from 23% in April to 46% in September, and has gradually declined to 34% in February. Interestingly, going to a cafe, bar, or restaurant saw an *increase* in the winter jumping from 10% in January to 17% in February, despite the cold weather making outdoor dining difficult. This uptick in eating out likely reflects the fact that restaurant capacity limits were raised from 25% to 40% in early February (these limits were removed altogether on March 1).

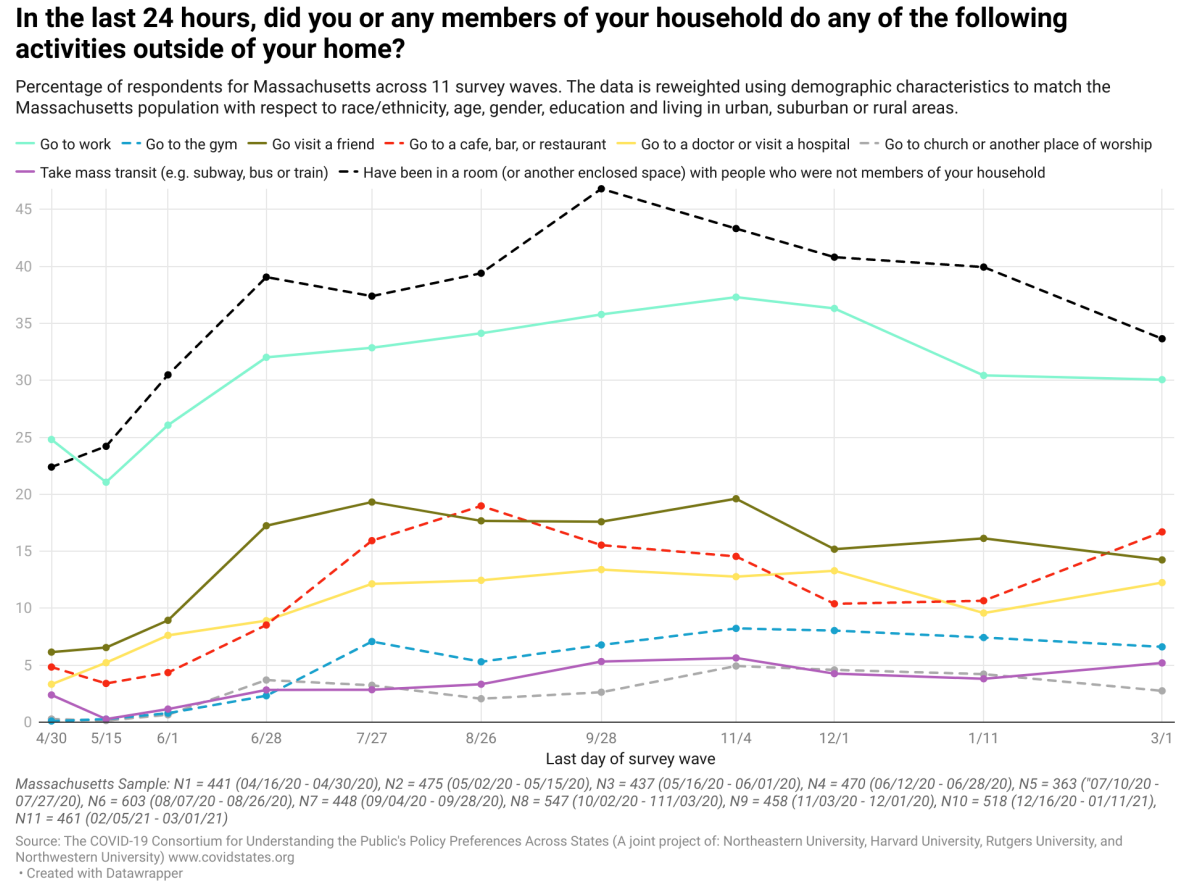


Figure 1.

Adherence to health recommendations varied, depending on the recommendation (see Figure 2). Avoiding crowded places and contact with other people were at their apex in the spring, generally declining through the late spring/summer, increasing in the late fall/early winter, and relaxing in February. Hand washing declined from the spring through late fall and has roughly held steady since. Mask wearing rapidly increased through the spring, declined a little in the late fall, and has increased since, hitting its apex in February.

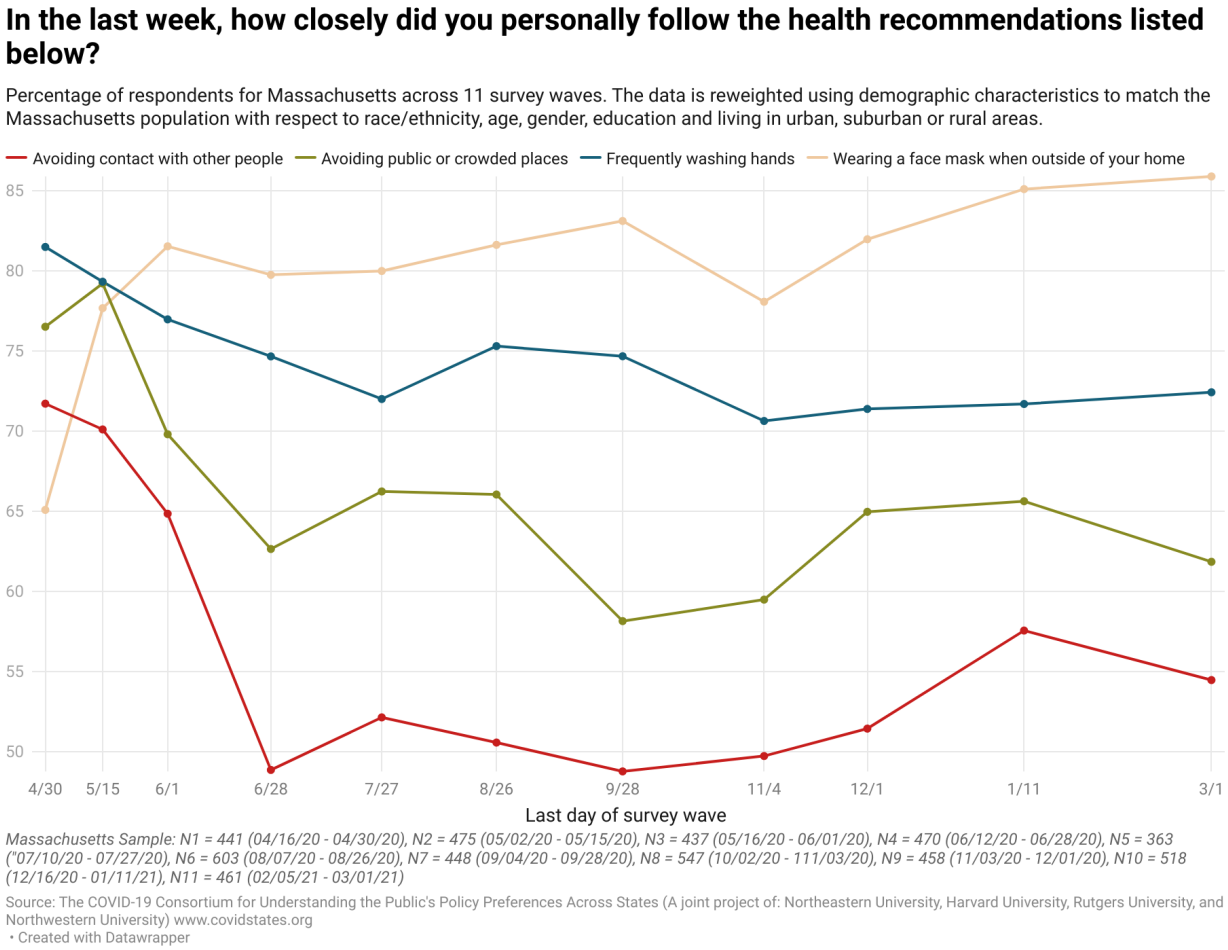


Figure 2.

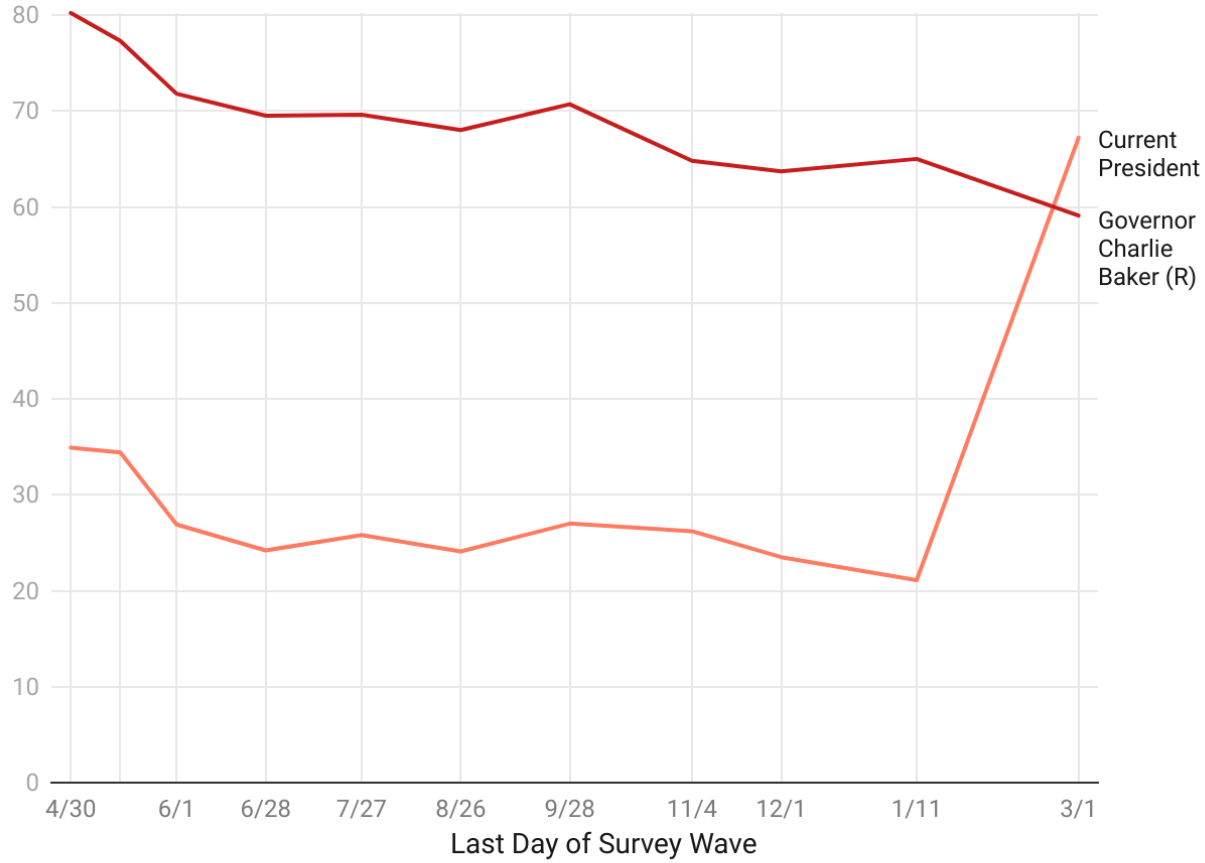
Executive approval for handling COVID outbreak

Governor Baker has seen a gradual decline in approval for his handling of the COVID-19 outbreak throughout the pandemic, starting at a remarkably high 80% approval in April (average governor approval at the time was 64%), and suffering a gradual decline to 59% since (see Figure 3). This trajectory roughly parallels the decline of other governors' approval, which decreased to an average of 46% by February.

Approval for President Trump's handling of the COVID-19 crisis in Massachusetts had also gradually declined through this period, from 35% (42% nationally) in April to 21% (32% nationally) in January. February marked our first survey with Biden as President, who has more than triple the approval level of Trump in January, at 68% (53% nationally).

Do you approve or disapprove of the way the President/the Governor is handling the COVID-19 outbreak?

Percentage of respondents for Massachusetts across 11 survey waves who say the approve or strongly approve of the executive official (on a 5-point scale). The data is reweighted using demographic characteristics to match the Massachusetts population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, gender, education and living in urban, suburban or rural areas.
January 20, 2021 marks the transition between Donald Trump (R) and Joe Biden (D) as President of the United States.



Massachusetts Sample: N1 = 441 (04/16/20 - 04/30/20), N2 = 475 (05/02/20 - 05/15/20), N3 = 437 (05/16/20 - 06/01/20), N4 = 470 (06/12/20 - 06/28/20), N5 = 363 ("07/10/20 - 07/27/20), N6 = 603 (08/07/20 - 08/26/20), N7 = 448 (09/04/20 - 09/28/20), N8 = 547 (10/02/20 - 111/03/20), N9 = 458 (11/03/20 - 12/01/20), N10 = 518 (12/16/20 - 01/11/21), N11 = 461 (02/05/21 - 03/01/21)

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 3.

Appendix: Report Data

The data for this report are available through an interactive web application. The online dashboard displays state-by-state information about behaviors and policy attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also includes data about public adherence to health guidelines like hand washing, mask wearing, and social distancing.

The application also provides access to data and charts showing public attitudes about federal, state, and local government policies aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, the dashboard offers access to metrics on approval of the way the president and state governors are handling the pandemic.

Users of the dashboard can select states to explore data and generate graphics that can be downloaded in PDF or PNG format. All the data that used in the dashboard can be found on the home page and downloaded in a comma separated values (CSV) format.

State behavior dashboard: lazerlab.shinyapps.io/Behaviors_During_COVID